



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Legislative Update for Pine Bluff School District

State Authority

July - September 2021

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

October 15, 2021

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

The Pine Bluff School District (PBSD) was placed under the direction of the Commissioner of Education on September 13, 2018. At that time PBSD was classified as in Fiscal Distress. State statute related to schools classified in Fiscal Distress has given the State Board of Education the authority to administer a wide range of actions when schools or districts are classified in Fiscal Distress. These actions are inclusive of removal of the local school board and assignment of the overall district administration to the Commissioner of Education. The SBE voted to remove the school board and superintendent. Commissioner Key then appointed a new superintendent to oversee the district operations.

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. PBSD has 5 of 6 schools that have a letter grade of F. The district also has 4 schools identified in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). These CSI schools are Broadmoor Elementary, Thirty-Fourth Street Elementary, Jack Robey Middle School and Pine Bluff High School.

The Dollarway School District officially annexed on July 1, 2021 into the Pine Bluff School District. All schools within the Dollarway School District remained open and now operate under one Central Office staff and Pine Bluff policies.

Current DESE Quarterly Support of Level 5 Support

July - September 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. Student engagement and safety at Pine Bluff High School and Jack Roby Junior High continue to be a high-priority.

Student Support

At the beginning of the school year there were approximately 500 students that were unaccounted for. The district banded together to engage social workers, attendance clerks, counselors, teachers, juvenile courts truancy support team to reach out to families to determine the whereabouts of students and families. Staff made home visits, phone calls, emailed, and connected through partnering agencies to determine the whereabouts of approximately 240 students. Bad contact information has been a major barrier for the child-find efforts.

- PBSD's current enrollment is 3,490. The preliminary combined district enrollment on August 23, 2021 was 3,750 which represents a net decrease of 260 students. These enrollment numbers include 169 kindergarten through sixth grade students and 141 seventh through twelfth grade students (310 total enrollment) in the PBSD Virtual Academy.
- Specific Data Points regarding the student enrollment decrease:
 - 158 students left the district to attend other schools through school choice and regular withdrawals due to moving
 - 49 families chose to homeschool or attend another virtual school option

The district continues to implement recommendations to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by supporting a layered approach of masking, distancing, cleaning and sanitizing. As a result of the diligent efforts to mitigate the spread of the Covid virus, the district has experienced minor disruptions due to positive cases within the schools at this time.

Student safety and re-engagement at Pine Bluff High School has been a priority. Violence within the Pine Bluff community has been a struggle over the past year and an obstacle for

the beginning of school. The high school has had to restructure duty schedules, classrooms, dismissal routines and enforce policy of a closed campus. The Pine Bluff School District is working closely with the juvenile courts and takes actions that jeopardize student safety seriously. Safety protocols recently put in place seem to be working at school. However, the staff, students, and community will need to continue to improve conditions and address the root cause. The district has provided an enhanced safety and support plan. Pine Bluff High School administrators, educators, staff, OCSS team, and various agencies throughout the community to include law enforcement have worked together diligently to assess, address, and enhance the safety protocols.

Human Capital

The district continues to struggle with recruiting and retaining certified teachers, but has plans for ensuring staff receive continuous support in the form of professional development, coaching, modeling and resources. Educators that were previously hired on an Alternative Licensure Plan or ACT 1240 were reevaluated prior to renewal of contracts for 21-22 school years. All educators are expected to be working towards licensure. Several were non-renewed due to lack of progress towards a license. The district has hired a Retention and Recruitment Director, specifically aimed at supporting new educators. A mentoring and tracking plan is being implemented to address licensure shortages. The district is still addressing staffing needs and identifying shortages and overstaffing.

Academics

Building level administrators are consistently meeting with Solution Tree Coaches. Most buildings' master schedules include a collaborative team meeting block every day. During these meetings teachers are working with the building level school improvement specialist and Solution Tree coaches to review student data and create ten day cycle lesson plans. Dollarway specifically made strides in this area last year and it continues to be a priority for the district moving forward.

The district has purchased a curriculum that is aligned to the science of reading. All four elementary schools (kindergarten through fifth grade), will utilize 95% Group Core Phonics and 95% Group Phonics Intervention along with Benchmark Readers and Writers Workshop to address core reading instruction and interventions. Middle schools and high schools will utilize My Perspectives as a resource for ELA core instruction, along with 95% Group interventions: Multisyllable Routine Cards, Vocabulary Surge, and Comprehension. The district is working to get all curriculum program materials to teachers and scheduling professional learning for each program

Each campus has a dyslexia interventionist that is trained in the Take Flight Intervention program and is providing services to students who have been identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. Providing instruction with fidelity and maintaining consistency in delivery to identified students is a priority. The district has struggled in the past delivering services early in the school year.

Master schedules have been created. Through observation, a need for a few adjustments to the master schedule are being discussed. District and building level administration are collaborating to create master schedules that include intentional intervention times, collaborative team meeting times, and that are scheduled to enhance the times of day that are the most conducive to student learning.

Family and Community Engagement

Pine Bluff School District is partnering with WestEd to receive additional support for a strategic plan that includes key community partners. The strategic plan should include short and long-term goals, as well as several community feedback forums. Ms. Warren has met with several community partners and identified groups throughout the community that will be invited to participate. This process will take place in the 2021-2022 school year in four phases. The process will include capturing and documenting the aspirations of the school district and its supporting community, establishing concrete strategies to realize a long-term vision, and developing an action plan to be implemented over multiple years. The outcome of this support will be a community-designed strategic plan with implementation maps.

Facilities and Transportation

HVAC upgrades to improve air quality are part of the district's ESSER Plan that was submitted on September 1. Ms. Warren is working closely with district facilities staff to clearly define the expectations for grounds and facility cleanliness and maintenance.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

Throughout the months of July and August the District worked closely with the DESE finance department to close both Dollarway School District and Pine Bluff School District 20-21 fiscal year. Due to the annexation, the district is working towards a comprehensive budget for Pine Bluff School District. District administration has a primary focus to implement protocols and systems for the financial department. 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 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