



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Lee County School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

July - September 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

October 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.

LEE COUNTY BACKGROUND

On March 25, 2019, the State Board of Education found that the Lee County School District and Lee High School to be in probationary violation of the Rules Governing the Standards for Accreditation (Sections 1-C.2.1 and 1-C.2.2 respectively). The DESE recommended to the State Board that the Board place the District and Lee High School on probationary status for these violations. The District appealed the Department's determination; however, the State Board of Education did not approve the appeal. Under Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-207(c), the superintendent and school board were removed and the district was placed under state authority.

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1905, on May 9, 2019, the Arkansas Department of Education identified the Lee County School District as a school district in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education made this identification because the Lee County School District met the following fiscal distress indicator(s) as set forth in Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1904. The school district requested continuation of level 5 support from the SBE on May 13, 2021.

Current DESE Quarterly Support

Submitted: Sheila Whitlow, Assistant State Superintendent

The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Coordinated Support and Service provides direct support to Lee County School District. Assistant State Superintendent Sheila Whitlow was on site approximately 2 days per week providing support to leadership, specifically focusing on a smooth transition during the change in superintendents and coordinating various services to maintain consistency in efforts. Julie Amstutz and Dr. Michael Watson are on site 1-2 days per week supporting the new support staff at both schools. Lee County has continued to implement the Professional Learning Communities model and is working closely with Solution Tree coaches. Ensuring capacity building supports are aligned with an end-goal of gradually releasing responsibility for effectiveness and efficiency in all systems to the district and school leadership and staff.

Student Support

A leadership position was added this school year with the responsibility of leading two collaborative teams: Response to Intervention Teams for Academics and Behavior. The teams are composed of support staff that include counselors, the school resource officer, instructional support staff, alternative learning leadership, school nurses, behavior specialists and interventionists. Each team meets bi-weekly to review SmartData and identify students that need additional support. Data reviewed include attendance data, achievement data, and office referrals. The teams use said data to develop plans of support for the most at-risk students. OCSS has observed both teams during the collaborative team meetings and has reported the teams have developed collective commitments and are holding each other accountable for check-ins with students identified as needing additional support. Parents are notified of the additional support provided to the students and are encouraged to stay in contact with the team member/s assigned to their scholar. Various members of the aforementioned collaborative teams are attending leadership training through the Arkansas Leadership Academy including the director of the alternative learning program. She has restructured the daily schedule to be more closely aligned with general education with a focus on transitioning students back into the general population as soon as possible with no gaps in the curriculum when the move is made.

A special education supervisor was hired following the resignation of the previous supervisor. To assist with the transition, OCSS is working closely with her to develop structures for supporting the district's special education program as well as preparing for the on-site monitoring in the fall by the DESE Office of Special Education.

DESE R.I.S.E. specialists have communicated to district leadership the expectation that dyslexia screeners have been administered in a timely manner, students requiring dyslexia interventions have been identified and that the intervention program, Barton Reading and Spelling System, is being implemented with integrity. Currently, administration of Level II dyslexia screeners are not complete, but plans are in place for completion when students

return from the fall break. In addition, both schools have newly assigned staff to the role of interventionist which warrants ongoing support throughout the school year. This support will be provided by the R.I.S.E. specialists and specialists from Great Rivers Cooperative. The result of leadership and staff turnover has created a challenge to have a strong dyslexia support program. It is imperative that the district develop and follow a plan for timely identification of student needs through screeners, providing consistent dyslexia interventions, and retaining the data to be used to track student progress over time. On occasion staff leaving the district did not share all of the District shared Google drives have been created to mitigate the chance of misplaced data

Human Capital

In response to the challenges of hiring highly qualified staff, the district has contracted with a consultant for recruitment, retention, support of novice teachers and assisting international teachers and teachers hired under a waiver to ensure they are making adequate progress on a path to licensure. There is also an effort to reach out to local universities to develop partnerships that could result in attracting certified teachers to the district. The high school principal began an Educator Rising program that is being taught by one of the school's instructional support specialists in an effort to improve and increase the applicant pool. There is limited housing available in Marianna; the superintendent is aware of this and is planning to explore possible solutions in hopes that adequate affordable housing could be used to recruit prospective teachers to the area. Currently there are 24 teachers working under a waiver or an additional licensure plan (ALP): 3 on an ALP; 3 MAT; 5 PPTL; 8 enrolled or planning to enroll in ARPEP and 5 not on a pathway. The superintendent is closely monitoring the status of teachers not certified and has communicated the expectation that all teachers will be in a program and making adequate progress or the jobs will be posted in early spring. Last year, the district employed two International teachers, but that number has increased to seven (7). In addition to the support provided from instructional support staff, DESE R.I.S.E. Specialists, and Great Rivers Cooperative Specialists, the district is compensating one of the veteran international teachers to serve as a mentor assisting with securing housing, becoming acclimated to the community as well as other needs as they arise. Teacher absenteeism is yet another concern that is being addressed by implementation of a plan for attendance incentive payments. The superintendent is hopeful that the incentive payment as well as the intermittent breaks provided in the school calendar, will result in teacher absenteeism improving during this school year. He will be tracking the data closely to assess effectiveness.

Academics

With the addition of instructional support at both schools there has been a coordinated effort to release the responsibilities for teacher support including coaching, planning and facilitating collaborative team meetings to the instructional support specialists, academic coaches and multi-classroom leaders. Clear roles and responsibilities for each of the support positions

have been shared with the instructional support staff, but continued meetings to ensure the expectations are being followed is needed.

The DESE R.I.S.E specialist has worked closely with the district and school leaders to analyze student data and create a plan for targeted intervention in the elementary; this year's mantra is Student-by-Student and Skill-by-Skill. At Lee High School, strategic and academic reading have been added to the master schedule as well as an afterschool program focused on providing students needed skills-based interventions. A robust plan for improving ACT scores of the school's juniors and seniors has been created. It includes ACT Boot Camps that will be held the week before the ACT during the school day and followed by a data dive when students receive their scores. The data will then be used to plan the content of the next ACT Boot Camp. Teachers at the high school are implementing the unit plans they created during the spring and summer; continued support is needed to ensure the integrity of the learning cycles as well as support for planning lessons that are grade level appropriate. The challenge both schools face is providing adequate support when there are so many novice teachers and teachers with little or no experience in a classroom setting.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

The DESE Fiscal Support and Services Unit in coordination with OCSS provides ongoing support to the district through onsite visits and remote assistance. In preparation for the 2022-2023 school year, The DESE Fiscal Support and Services Unit in coordination with OCSS met with the district staff to provide proactive support in the budgeting process. Items addressed included, but not limited to: historical balance trends in operating and building funds, enrollment, staffing, millage, tax collections, debt payments, revenue sources, revenue amounts, future enrollment projections district wide and by cohort, certified and classified staffing by position trends for the last 12 years, audit results, expenditure requirements, fund balance carryover amounts, detailed budgeting projections, and analysis for revenue and expenditure line items. The gradual release of fiscal transactions from Arkansas Public School Resource Center has begun as well as the implementation of the standard operation procedures developed during the previous fiscal year. The superintendent and APSRC have implemented an electronic requisition/purchase order system to improve efficiency. As with any new process or procedure, there are learning curves and unintended consequences that must be addressed. Continued support will be needed to create a system that is sustainable and effective.

Family and Community Engagement

Superintendent Stone has shared one of his focus points this year is to create a positive relationship with all outside stakeholders. He has hosted four Superintendent Town Hall meetings for parents of the district's scholars with good attendance at each meeting. Since there was an event that conflicted with the town hall planned for high school parents, he spent several hours at the high school during the Parent/Teacher Conferences, greeting

parents and discussing a variety of topics. He has joined both the local Rotary and NAACP. Most recently, the Rotary Club meeting was held at the district's professional learning center with instructional support specialists from the two schools sharing assessment data and plans for school improvement with the Rotarians. Moreover, a community forum facilitated by Forward Arkansas was held at the district with 20+ community members in attendance.