

Minutes
State Board of Education Meeting of the
Special Committee on Academic Distress
Tuesday, October 14, 2014

The State Board of Education Special Committee on Academic Distress met Tuesday, October 14, 2014, in the Auditorium of the Department of Education Building. Chair Vicki Saviers called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Present: Vicki Saviers, Chair; Sam Ledbetter; Toyce Newton; and Diane Zook

Absent: None

Work Session

Review Data and Information Pertaining to the Academic Distress Schools in the Little Rock School District

Ms. Saviers said on March 28, 2014 at the Special Board Meeting, Chair Gullett appointed a special committee to study chronically underperforming school districts. Chair Gullett requested Ms. Saviers, Ms. Newton, and Mr. Ledbetter serve on the special committee, with Ms. Saviers serving as chair of the committee.

Ms. Saviers said the State Board of Education classified Schools in Academic Distress on July 10, 2014. She said the Special Committee on Academic Distress would review the schools classified as Academic Distress Schools in the Little Rock School District.

Little Rock School District Representatives:

- Dr. Dexter Suggs, Superintendent
- Dennis Glasgow, Associate Superintendent of Accountability
- Marvin Burton, Deputy Superintendent
- Henry Anderson, Principal of McClellan High School
- Larry Schleischer, Principal of Hall High School
- Wanda Ruffins, Principal of Cloverdale Aerospace Technology Charter School
- Katina Ray, Principal of Baseline Elementary School
- Greg Adams, President LRSD School Board
- Frank Williams, Principal of Henderson Middle School
- Jeremy Owoh, Principal of J. A. Fair High School

Additional Little Rock School District representatives were in attendance.

External Provider: none

ADE Staff:

Elbert Harvey, Coordinator for Public School Accountability
Dr. Richard Wilde, Director of School Improvement
Dr. Robert Toney, School Improvement Specialist
Lisa Knoedl, School Improvement Specialist
Chantel'e Williams, School Improvement Specialist
Kyron Jones, School Improvement Specialist
Roxey Browning, School Improvement Specialist
Dr. Debbie Jones, Assistant Commissioner of Learning Services
Additional ADE staff members were in attendance.

Ms. Saviers said this was an informal meeting to determine barriers and solutions to the success of these schools. She said the purpose of the meeting was to examine data, talk to people in the schools and identify next steps.

The following schools have been classified as academic distress:

Baseline Elementary School
Cloverdale Aerospace Technology Center
Hall High School
Henderson Middle School
J.A. Fair High School
McClellan Magnet High School

Superintendent Suggs said he was hired to improve student learning. He focused on the restructuring of the curriculum and instruction division.

Mr. Glasgow explained that historical classroom walk-through data showed mostly whole group instruction with low levels of instruction and compliant engagement of students. He said the district wanted a plan in which the central office could pay attention to the implementation. He highlighted the focus points of the improvement plan to include teachers designing lesson plans with eight essential components and principals monitoring the lesson plans for these components. He said schools would utilize leadership teams to examine data and make shared decisions. He said the central office had let the schools down because they did not follow through with support.

Dr. Wilde said an ADE team reviewed the information available regarding the schools. He said the use of data and the science of school improvement is not applied uniformly across schools. He said this year the LRSD has embraced the ADE team. Dr. Wilde said constant change in leadership has brought no cumulative benefit to the district. He recommended a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a principal about the expectations and commitment between district and principal. He recommended spreading literacy across the school. He also recommended stabilizing the superintendent's position.

Dr. Suggs said he has had an opportunity to listen and learn about the district over the past year. He said the LRSD has silos of excellence and distress. He

said the district needed to put students first and monitor it. He said this plan was more conducive to what the district needed to do, not relying on programs or vendors. He said he was concerned about the sense of urgency needed and the stamina to stay with it to see it through for results. He said he was concerned about the grit to make hard decisions. Dr. Suggs said the district had become an employment agency and has failed generation after generation of students. He said the district would have to ensure that they are willing to do something different - be bold, courageous, and intentional in the work.

Ms. Newton said it was egregious to allow this lack of progress to continue. She said the district needed to have an attitude to do what works for students. She said the district does not need a system feeding poor performance.

The committee members asked questions of the group regarding the current status of the work and the outcomes or expected outcomes of the work in the schools classified in academic distress in the Little Rock School District.

Mr. Adams said the enrollment in the distress schools have declined while the percentage of high-poverty students has increased. He said parents have more choices and this increases the urgency to do something. He said Dr. Suggs' comments about the history of change in leadership were a concern. He said the public perception of the past twenty years overshadows the current school board's attempt to work together. He said the school board members know they need to have these hard conversations and set the bar higher.

Mr. Ledbetter said that he heard commitment to this plan but would need to see success.

LRSD Board Members expressed their commitment to working together to assist schools in academic distress and other schools on needs improvement list. The following LRSD Board Members addressed the State Board:

Joy Springer
Tara Shephard
Diane Curry
Jim Ross
Leslie Fiskien

Ms. Saviers called upon each building principal to provide a few words about their school. Each principal highlighted the work being done to implement progress.

Ms. Newton said this meeting was an opportunity to memorialize the LRSD commitment. She said the young people should come back and demand an accounting because the district was on the record to do the right thing.

Ms. Saviers said she would make a recommendation that LRSD come back in three (3) months with a progress report of the plan. Ms. Zook outlined questions that should be answered in the progress report.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Deborah Coffman.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Vicki Saivers".

Vicki Saivers, Chair