

Dollarway School District Exit Criteria Review

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The Dollarway School District was placed under state authority on December 10, 2015, after being classified in academic distress. The State Board of Education, at that time, placed the Dollarway School District under the direction of the Commissioner of Education. As a result of the legislative change to the state's accountability system in 2017 to AESAA, Dollarway was classified as in need of Level 5 Intensive Support. The 2015 action to place the district under state authority was the third instance in which this district reached the criteria to warrant state intervention. The most recent intervention in 2015 initially centered around academic distress; however, many factors throughout the district created financial instability and led to a fiscal distress classification in April 2016.

Fiscal instability continues to be a concern for the district with declining enrollment as the primary reason for loss of revenue and continued declining legal ending balance. Fourth quarter average enrollment in 2015 was 1280 students compared to 936 students in 2019. The district fiscal team has worked to adjust budgets as well as a reduction in force that took place in year three in response to declining enrollment. The district continues to show a declining fund balance; additional cuts will need to be made for the district to remain solvent and avoid future deficit spending. It is noted that audit findings have decreased significantly in recent years. While the business office and district leadership are to be commended for progress over the past five years, weekly direct support from the state is still necessary and being provided to further build capacity.

While the initial focus was to improve the overall academics and fiscal stability of the district, the district was in a multi-system failure that exacerbated the need for intensive support in climate and culture, facilities, human capital, stakeholder engagement, etc. Efforts to create a better culture and climate in the district that would combat declining enrollment and teacher turnover was undertaken in the early years of state authority. While interviewing staff, the OCSS team frequently heard comments pertaining to improved student and adult behavior within the district. Early on, Ms. Warren established a clear expectation to improve the climate and culture of the district with efforts supported by data. During the first two years, Ms. Warren addressed critical areas: restructured leadership, reorganized campuses, reduced staff, improved facilities and addressed school culture. This was imperative in laying the foundation upon which the district could begin building a collaborative environment. Ms. Warren stated, "We had to set the expectation of how adults would conduct themselves with children" and address behavior through corrective action, data, and celebration.

The 2020-2021 school year marked the third year for the district to partner with Solution Tree to facilitate the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model throughout the district. PLC coaches provide monthly onsite support to build collaborative capacity within the schools and district. In each building there is a schedule for grade and/or subject level teams to meet multiple times per week to collaborate regarding instruction and review student data. Moreover, documents exist to guide the work of staff as they complete work such as unpacking standards, designing common formative assessments, and analyzing student data. Moving forward, building level staff need to have more ownership regarding documentation and processes; however, the work surrounding collaboration and instructional planning has been a high mark in recent years.

As part of the process of review, the Dollarway School District provided evidence of exit criteria materials and documentation to the Office of Coordinated Support and Service. Stacy Smith, Director of OCSS, Sheila Whitlow, Assistant State Superintendent, and Brent Miller, Leadership Development Coach, conducted a three-day monitoring visit to verify artifacts, view implementation, visit classrooms, and interview staff and administration. Cynthia Smith, ADE Fiscal Distress Office, along with OCSS staff, reviewed the exit criteria for fiscal distress. The following summary sets forth the findings of the OCSS and ADE staff pertaining to the exit criteria established for Dollarway School District.

Dollarway School District Exit Criteria Summary and Final Rating	
Rating Scale: Artifacts and evidence including data collected during site visits will be used to identify a rating on a scale of 1 - 4: (1) Minimal Progress (2) Partially Met w/ Direct Support (3) Met w/ Direct Support (4) Met- Independent	
Overall Exit Criteria Rating	2.64
<p><u>Exit Criteria Indicator 1</u> Collaborative teams regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students.</p> <p>Evidence exists that collaborative teams are scheduled to meet regularly in all buildings; however, consistency of all teams meeting at each school is not evident. These meetings are scheduled during the contractual day and a clear process to guide the work of teams is documented. Teams have norms and data available to guide discussions. While there is clear evidence of expected processes and guarded time related to collaborative teams some teams are functioning at higher levels than others. Continued work centered around fidelity of processes and utilizing said processes to guide instructional decisions and interventions will strengthen the work moving forward. Common</p>	

<p>language and knowledge of the professional learning community process are evident, thus moving from implementation and mixed fidelity to predominant, universal practice is now essential. Each school will work closely with a Solution Tree coach throughout the 20-21 school year.</p>		
Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 1 Score:		3.00
Objective 1.1	Collaborative Teams meet weekly and spend 90% of their meeting time discussing and working on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.	2.66
Objective 1.2	School and district leaders regularly examine PLC collaborative teams' progress toward their goals. This is evident from a written plan to monitor and any artifacts of the monitorings.	2.66
Objective 1.3	The schools have schedules that allow for collaborative team meetings within the contractual day. This is evident from a review of schedules.	4.00
Objective 1.4	The school has outlined a specific collaborative process to guide teams in their work. This is evident from written norms, use of data and copies of common assessments.	2.66
<p><u>Exit Criteria Indicator 2</u> The school is aware of and monitors predominant instructional practices.</p> <p>Documentation is present that demonstrates school leaders possess knowledge of predominant practices within their assigned school. Moreover, instructional expectations are articulated from district to some school level staff. There is some evidence of collaboration between school-based interventionists, school support specialists, and lead teachers. Continued feedback and growth must be present that assists leaders in disseminating clear and concise instructional expectations to teachers and allows teachers the opportunity for input concerning expectations. As demonstrated through documentation, an abundance of work has been done regarding instructional expectations, but consistent implementation at the classroom level has not been observed. Generally, classroom direct instruction is present, but lacks an intensity to meet the needs of students at various academic levels. Evidence exists that school leaders are providing feedback in a timely manner. Ensuring that feedback is robust and correlates with predominant instructional practices must be the focus.</p>		
Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 2 Score:		2.25
Objective 2.1	Schools in consultation with the district have established expectations of predominant instructional practices. This is evident from a written outline of predominant instructional practices and artifacts of how this information shared with teachers and staff.	2.00
Objective 2.2	Data from classroom observations are aggregated at the school level to show the predominant instructional practices are being implemented.	2.00
Objective 2.3	School leaders provide forthright feedback on an individual's teaching practices as evident in the TESS Software.	3.00

Objective 2.4	School and district leaders are able to clearly identify the predominant practices across the entire school and district and the instructional practices they do not want to see used predominantly.	2.00
<p><u>Exit Criteria Indicator 3</u> The school provides teachers with clear, ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with student achievement data.</p> <p>School leaders are regularly observing teachers and providing feedback regarding practice. In some instances, data on past practice is being used to determine frequency of observations and nature of feedback. Feedback and growth conversations generally use observations and data sources to inform decisions regarding follow-up and next steps. A focus on centering feedback and observations around more targeted objectives should be a focus moving forward. The increased observations and feedback to teachers is notable. Now, school leaders must take these positive steps and ensure they evolve into improved instructional practice. While simply providing feedback and conducting observations is a best practice, those interactions must consistently result in better instructional practices in all classrooms across the district.</p>		
Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 3 Score:		2.89
Objective 3.1	The school leaders have a schedule indicating frequent observations and feedback to teachers. This schedule and feedback is monitored at the district level as evidenced by the TESS/LEADS Software.	2.66
Objective 3.2	School Leaders base teacher feedback on multiple sources of information including the use of highly specific rubrics for observation, self-reflections and other data.	3.00
Objective 3.3	Each teacher's Professional Growth Plan is personalized and is created based on feedback from school leaders. The PGP provides opportunities for career development or addresses areas of deficiency, but is targeted to meet the needs of the teacher's career development.	3.00
<p><u>Exit Criteria Indicator 4</u> The school curriculum and accompanying assessments adhere to state and district standards.</p> <p>Curriculum documents (e.g. maps, models) are prevalent. Extensive work at both the building and district level has been conducted to identify ideal practices across the school setting. Collaborative meetings are scheduled in all buildings, but some pockets of inconsistency were observed. A gap in the implementation of the work has been observed as an area of needed attention. A disconnect is present between the development, access, and usage of documents. A more concerted effort is needed to ensure a collaborative process that includes a variety of stakeholders from the various buildings. The wealth of documentation and general curricular documents is evident. What is not</p>		

clear is that the documents are transferring into the classroom setting on a regular basis and positively impacting instruction. While the curriculum documents are present, the impact on teaching is not as discernable. The fact that a vast amount of work has been completed regarding curriculum planning and mapping is commendable. Moving forward, that work must focus on institutional change in regards to instruction and planning districtwide.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 4 Score:		2.53
Objective 4.1	The school has curriculum documents in place that correlate the written curriculum with the state standards and expectations of the district.	3.00
Objective 4.2	The school has documentation that examines the extent to which assessments accurately measure the written and taught curriculum and student progress as evidenced by ongoing assessment results.	2.33
Objective 4.3	Curriculum Maps are in place referencing the specific standards addressed during specific time frames in the school year.	3.00
Objective 4.4	Collaborative teams meet regularly to analyze the essential content, written and taught curriculum and assessments.	2.33
Objective 4.5	The district has a plan to monitor that this work is being completed.	2.00

Exit Criteria Indicator 5

The school manages its fiscal, operational, and technological resources in a way that directly supports teachers to provide a safe, supportive and collaborative culture and increase student achievement.

Evidence of positive school climate and culture is present throughout the district. The school has provided sufficient materials and supplies to address the needs of students; however, academic programming lacks fidelity in some areas. Digital content and one-to-one technology has been provided for the 2020-2021 school year. Concerns are present surrounding the school day schedule and balancing the schedule with the academic needs of students within the digital platform. On some campuses, the schedule maximizes opportunities for teaching and learning. Evidence of schedules at other campuses demonstrates a need to ensure optimal attention is given to academic instruction during the scheduled day. District level personnel are tasked with multiple responsibilities; therefore, a more prudent effort to collaborate as well as streamline communication and expectations to building leadership would be helpful so that a clear vision is executed districtwide.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 5 Score:		2.53
Objective 5.1	All teachers have the resources they need to effectively teach.	2.66
Objective 5.2	The school leader accesses and leverages multiple resources and funds to support the work of the teachers.	3.00

Objective 5.3	The school-level budgets are developed and protocols are in place to maximize teacher access to resources for teaching and learning.	3.00
Objective 5.4	The school schedule is designed to maximize opportunities for teaching and learning.	2.00
Objective 5.5	The district has a plan to assist schools in a streamlined and effective manner that helps to maximize opportunities for teaching and learning.	2.00

Dollarway School District Fiscal Distress Exit Criteria		
Rating Scale: Artifacts and evidence including data collected during site visits will be used to identify a rating on a scale of 1 - 4: (1) Minimal Progress (2) Partially Met w/ Direct Support (3) Met w/ Direct Support (4) Met- Independently		
Overall Fiscal Exit Rating		2.69
Objectives	Plan Objective	Rating
Objective 1	Review all employee contracts. Verify contracts tie to approved salary/stipend schedules and that employees are performing jobs listed on contracts. Verify contracts to eFinance.	3
Objective 2	Review staffing in relation to ADM. Determine what positions can be eliminated through retirement, resignation or RIF if necessary.	2
Objective 3	Review all vendor contracts and determine necessity and value/cost.	3
Objective 4	Review use and condition of all buildings to determine need and if rent or sale is an option.	2
Objective 5	Review the condition of buses and transportation cost and implement a plan for future purchase or lease.	3
Objective 6	Review all utilities and maintenance expenses to determine if cost savings are available.	3
Objective 7	Review audits and correct findings, put in place safeguards to prevent repeat findings. Provide training to staff to ensure compliance	3
Objective 8	RIF Certified Positions	2
Objective 9	RIF Classified Positions	2

Objective 10	Analyze Legal expenditures and develop a plan to reduce costs	4
Objective 11	Supervision and Monitoring of Compliance with the Arkansas Financial Accounting Manual	4
Objective 12	Supervision and Monitoring of timely payment of accounts payables	3
Objective 13	Reverse the declining balance identified by ADE to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the school district and build a legal balance equal to 10-20% of annual expenditures	1

Dollarway School District was placed in fiscal distress classification due to two indicators. The first being a declining balance determined to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the school district and the second being excessive material audit exceptions or violations. The district must correct both indicators to be considered as meeting exit criteria for fiscal classification. Significant progress has been made to reduce material audit findings: nineteen findings in FY15 to zero in FY19 and one in FY20. Direct support to build capacity has been provided to organize the business office in a manner that promotes efficiency and proper fiscal operations. However, the ending balance continues to decline due to loss of enrollment and expenditures. While reductions have been made through attrition, the district would have to make drastic changes in staffing and facilities to resolve the declining balance. Some of those changes that would need to be considered are perceived to have a negative impact on the gains made in other areas of the district.

As the Dollarway School District completes the fifth year under state authority, it is evident much work has been done and should be acknowledged. Greater fiscal awareness and instructional shifts are highlights of the progress the district has made. District leadership has put forth much effort to improve the quality of instruction for students, retain high quality teachers, and become more knowledgeable regarding school finance. However, despite these efforts, the district continues to combat many issues that are often beyond their control. These issues include, but are not limited to, declining enrollment, lack of economic development, and teacher turnover. The district has made significant strides regarding climate and culture; however, fiscal challenges, as well as recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, continue to plague the district.

Overall Exit Criteria Score for Level 5: **2.64**

Overall Fiscal Distress Score: **2.69** : **District did not meet Indicator 2** (declining ending balance)

Overall Exit Criteria shows steady progress for the district with direct support, but does not rise to the level of returning to local control without continuous direct support.