



## **AGENDA**

### **STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

January 7, 2015

Arkansas Department of Education

ADE Auditorium - Special Committee on Academic Distress

1:00 PM

☐ [Back](#) ☐ [Print](#)

### **Consent Agenda**

#### **C-1 Minutes - November 13, 2014**

*Presenter: Deborah Coffman*

### **Reports**

#### **Report-1 Little Rock School District Quarterly Report**

*Presenter: Dr. Dexter Suggs, LRSD Superintendent and Dr. Richard Wilde, School Improvement Director*

**Minutes**  
**State Board of Education Special Committee on Academic Distress Meeting**  
**Thursday, November 13, 2014**

The State Board of Education Special Committee on Academic Distress met Thursday, November 13, 2014, in the Auditorium of the Department of Education Building. Chairman Vicki Saviers called the meeting to order at 2:12 p.m.

Present: Vicki Saviers, Chair; Sam Ledbetter; Toyce Newton; Alice Mahony; Diane Zook; Joe Black; Mireya Reith; Kim Davis; Tony Wood, Commissioner; and Jonathan Crossley, Teacher of the Year

**Consent Agenda**

Ms. Saviers moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to approve the consent agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

Items included in the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes - September 15, 2014
- Minutes - October 14, 2014

**Work Session**

Chair Vicki Saviers asked the committee to consider next steps.

Assistant Commissioner Ms. Annette Barnes said the Department of Education is in the process of notifying districts and schools that may be identified in academic distress.

Public School Accountability Coordinator Mr. Elbert Harvey said the school improvement unit provided recommendations for each school in academic distress.

Ms. Barnes said reports would be made to the Board upon request. Mr. Ledbetter requested that Ms. Barnes review the reports and make recommendations to the special committee.

The Special Committee will meet Wednesday, January 7, 2015, at 1:00 p.m. in the ADE Auditorium to review the progress of the Little Rock School District's plan for schools in academic distress.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 2:33 p.m.

*Minutes recorded by Deborah Coffman.*

# Little Rock School District



Progress Report

Presented to SBE Subcommittee for  
Academically Distressed Schools

January 7, 2015

## **Progress Report for the Little Rock School District Schools on Academic Distress**

January 7, 2015

### **What has been accomplished as of 01/07/2015:**

- Training was provided to building administrators, instructional facilitators and teachers on rituals and routines, lesson planning, and classroom observation with feedback.
- Expectation was shared by the superintendent for all teachers to construct daily lesson plans with 8 required components.
- Expectation was shared by the superintendent for all principals to monitor daily lesson plans and to make observing instruction and giving quality feedback to teachers a high priority.
- Data on classroom observations and evidence-based feedback has been and continues to be collected. Senior district administrators who supervise the principals sent memos of concern/warning to principals who were not sufficiently implementing the observations with feedback.
- District assigned a curriculum staff member to serve as a school improvement specialist in each school on academic distress; the SISs send weekly reports to ADE that include barriers/concerns, progress made and next steps.
- Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) were purchased for all AD schools.
- Training (SREB module) was provided to building administrators on leadership team structure and function.
- Academically distressed schools restructured their leadership teams; training was and continues to be provided to the leadership team members.
- Scantron® was selected as a provider of CCSS test bank questions for grades 6-12; it is being used for interim assessments and is also an option for pre/post assessments at the secondary level.
- Data from pre/post tests and interim assessments are being used to plan Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (RtI) interventions.
- Board holds monthly work sessions to monitor activities and data related to academically distressed schools. Board asked for and received an update on how distressed schools are responding to barriers/concerns identified by SISs.
- District identified Curriculum Management Systems, Inc. to audit the alignment of the district's curriculum to CCSS.
- District SISs were trained on Indistar® and have helped schools to utilize the tool.
- AD Schools identified their plan for addressing ADE Evaluation Team recommendations; the schools also identified the 2-3 major research-based strategies/innovations that they will focus on this year. The IMO's are being realigned to address these strategies/innovations.
- Seventeen staff members from the district, including the principals at the AD schools, took a full-day visit to the Springdale School District to learn about their ESL program.
- The district is in the planning stages of reconstituting Hall High School to improve programming and outcomes for students. (The final plan will be presented to the LRSD Board for consideration.)

### **Next Steps:**

- Leadership team training will continue. Additional training will occur on Jan 15, Feb 17, Mar 17, April 7 and May 7.
- Curriculum alignment audit will start in January; curriculum maps will be revised once the recommendations are received.
- Training in Using Data/Getting Results will be provided to the leadership teams, who will provide training for the staff.
- Observation Tool data will continue to be monitored by senior administrators at the district level and used to improve leader performance in observing instruction and providing high quality feedback to teachers.
- Additional training and support will be provided to AD schools in using the Indistar® system as a tool to guide their work.
- LRSD Board will continue their monthly work sessions to monitor AD school activities and progress.
- Pre/post unit tests will be used by all math and literacy teachers at the AD schools.
- The second interim assessment developed by TLI (elementary) and from Scantron® (secondary) will be given.
- Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) will continue to be used to track student growth on the continuum toward college and career readiness (initial assessments have already been given).
- LRSD Board will consider the plan to reconstitute Hall High School.

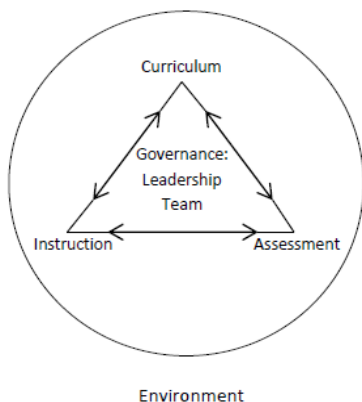
## Progress Report for the Little Rock School District Schools on Academic Distress

January 7, 2015

### Introduction

The Little Rock School District (District) presented an improvement plan for schools in academic distress (AD) to the State Board of Education (SBE) in advance of a meeting before the SBE subcommittee on academically distressed schools that was held on October 14. In that plan the District identified five goals and related objectives that incorporated feedback from the ADE Evaluation Teams. The district plan addresses the key components of the familiar curriculum, instruction, and assessment triangle (Figure 1). In order for an aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment program to work, a governance structure for decision making and action taking in the school is essential. This structure is the school leadership team. In addition students must have a safe and orderly environment within which learning can occur.

Major district initiatives related to each component of the triangle:



**Figure 1: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Triangle**

- Curriculum – External curriculum audit will be conducted beginning in January, 2015 (Goal 4)
- Instruction – Lesson plan requirement and classroom observations with feedback (Goal 2)
- Assessment – Interim assessments and Pre/Post unit assessments
- Leadership Team – Restructuring and training for leadership teams (Goal 3)
- Environment – Establishment and enforcement of school-wide rituals and routines (Goal 5)

### Progress Report

Progress toward each of the five goals and associated objectives is listed below in abbreviated form. Goal 1, an overarching goal, is for the six academically distressed schools to meet the criteria to be removed from that designation within three years. The other goals are listed as headings for the progress report.

Goal 2: The principal at each school on academic distress will become the instructional leader of a faculty that plans and implements quality, rigorous lessons that engage students and lead to improved student achievement.

Objectives (paraphrased) for this goal are for all teachers to develop lesson plans that are aligned with the district's curriculum, for the lesson plans to include eight required components, for principals to hold teachers accountable for producing and implementing the lesson plans, and for principals to observe instruction and give teachers multiple levels of high quality feedback. Principals are expected to place teachers who do not meet expectations for lesson planning and quality instruction on an improvement plan.

Progress toward goal 2: Administrators at the academically distressed schools conducted classroom observations for the purpose of giving teachers high quality feedback on their instruction (Figure 2). Although all schools had the same training, the academically distressed school administrators made drop-in observations in classrooms and gave feedback at a higher rate than six comparison schools (King, Dunbar, Mann, Pulaski Heights Middle, Central and Parkview).

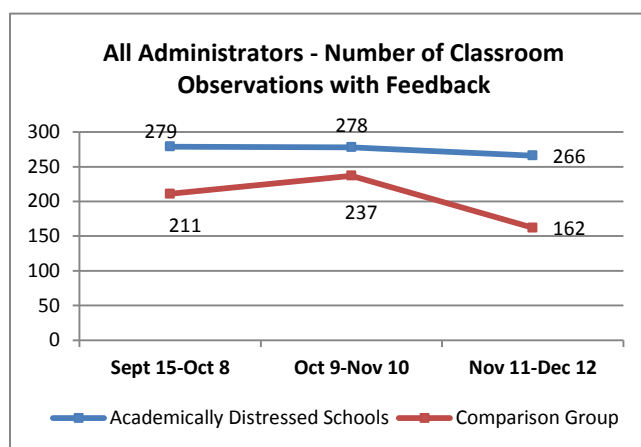
The decreasing number of observations over the three time intervals was expected because the time per observation went up (Figure 3). The academically distressed school administrators, as a group, were in classrooms giving feedback to teachers 153 minutes/day more than the administrators at the comparison schools.

The third variable in the improvement initiative concerning classroom observations with feedback is the quality of the feedback. The district's Curriculum and Instruction department scored randomly selected feedback provided to teachers at the academically distressed schools during three time periods during the fall semester. The scorers used a rubric with three scales: basic, proficient and distinguished. Each set of feedback was scored by two raters, and a third rater was used if the first two didn't agree on a score. The results for the quality of the feedback are displayed in Table 1.

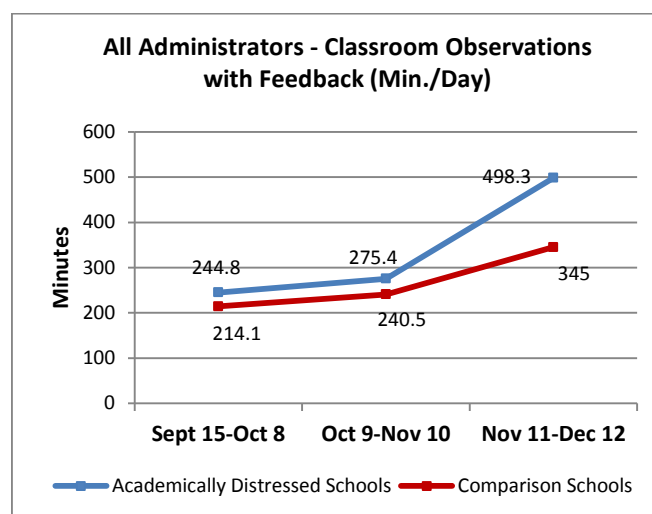
**Table 1: Assessing Quality of Leader Feedback\***

	August 20 - September 31				October 1 - November 4				November 5 - December 12				
	# of Tchrs	Basic	Prof	Dist	# of Tchrs	Basic	Prof	Dist	# of Tchrs (# Scored)	Basic	Prof	Dist	No current observation
Baseline	5	60%	40%		5	60%	40%		10	70%	30%		
Cloverdale	10	100%			9	89%	11%		21 (13)	46%	54%		8
Henderson	9	89%	11%		8	50%	50%		18 (14)	57%	43%		4
Hall	19	84%	16%		18	78%	17%	6%	20 (13)	38%	31%	31%	7
J. A. Fair	15	80%	13%	7%	15	73%	20%	7%	21	29%	24%	48%	
McClellan	12	83%	17%		9	100%			19 (17)	77%	24%		2

\*Feedback was scored using a three point rubric with possible ratings of basic, proficient, and distinguished.



**Figure 2: Classroom observations with feedback completed by administrators in academically distressed schools with an equal number of comparison schools.**



**Figure 3: Average time spent per day observing instruction and giving feedback (includes an equal size group of comparison schools.)**

Goal 3: The schools on academic distress will establish and/or maintain a team structure that includes effective leadership teams that share in decisions of real substance pertaining to school improvement and professional development needs. (Note – this was a key recommendation from ADE Evaluation Teams.)

Objectives (paraphrased) for this goal are for schools on academic distress to have a leadership team that consists of the principal, teachers that are reflective of the various grades and/or subject areas, and other key professional personnel; that meets at least twice monthly for an hour or more; and that uses school performance data and aggregated classroom observation data to develop innovations/strategies to improve teaching and learning.

Progress toward Goal 3: Training was provided to the principals and assistant principals at the AD schools on October 28 and November 6 for a total of 6 hours on “Building Effective Leadership Teams that Make a Difference”, an SREB training module that was led by district leaders, Dr. Lloyd Sain and Ms. Shoutell Richardson. Following that, the principals restructured their leadership teams to conform to the models provided by SREB and *Wise Ways* from Indistar®. The newly formed leadership teams were trained on December 2 for 3 hours with additional training dates scheduled for January 15, February 17, March 17, April 7 and May 7.

The principals in the schools on academic distress have taken or will take advantage of Leadership Training provided by the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA) (Table 2). Frank Williams, principal at Henderson, and Larry Schleicher, principal at Hall, have registered for the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA) Master Principals Program that will begin summer, 2015. Jeremy Owoh, principal at Fair, Katina Ray, principal at Baseline, and Wanda Ruffins, principal at Cloverdale, all completed phase I during summer, 2014. Henry Anderson, principal at McClellan, has completed phases I and II of the Master Principals Program and has an assistant principal who attended the ALA Assistant Principals Institute.

**Table 2: Participation of Principals of Academically Distressed Schools in ALA Master Principal Program**

Building Leader	Phase of Arkansas Leadership Academy’s Master Principal Program Completed
Katina Ray, Principal at Baseline Elementary	Completed phase I
Wanda Ruffins, Principal at Cloverdale Middle	Completed phase I
*Frank Williams, Principal at Henderson Middle	Has registered for training during summer, 2015
*Larry Schleicher, Principal at Hall High	Has registered for training during summer, 2015
Jeremy Owoh, Principal at J. A. Fair High	Completed phase I
Henry Anderson, Principal at McClellan High	Completed phases I and II

\*Mr. Williams is new to Henderson this year and Mr. Schleicher became principal at Hall too late last year to enroll in the Program

Goal 4: The district-approved curricula (literacy and math) for grades K-12 will be fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards both in content and rigor.

Objectives (paraphrased) for this goal are to contract with an external provider to conduct an alignment audit of our grades K-12 math curriculum and 6-12 literacy curricula. Note—The Council of Great City Schools conducted an audit of our K-5 literacy curriculum a few years ago. Recommendations from the audit will be used to revise the curricula during the summer of 2015. The District’s Testing and Evaluation Department will develop a tool for checking instructional alignment and assessment alignment with the revised curricula during the 2015-16 school year.



Progress toward Goal 4: Nine providers of curriculum alignment audits responded to the District's Request for Qualifications: American Institute for Research, McREL, CORE, Houghton-Mifflin, Curriculum Management Systems, Pearson, Evans Newton, Educational Policy Improvement Center, and Barnes Technologies. Their responses were scored using a rubric. Three providers, American Institute for Research, McREL, and Curriculum Management Systems, were finalists. The finalists were asked to provide more detailed information and to submit their best and final offer. The provider that was ranked first by the review committee was Curriculum Management Systems. Approval by the board is pending.

Work on the audit will begin in January and will be finished in May, 2015, if not before. The mathematics and literacy staff members, working with teams of teachers, will use the recommendations from the auditors to revise the written curriculum over the summer to be ready for the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. Training will be provided to building administrators and teachers on the revised curriculum during the pre-school conference.

Goal 5: A safe, orderly and academically productive environment will exist in each classroom and the school as a whole through establishing and enforcing rituals and routines throughout the school.

Objectives (paraphrased) for Goal 5 are that the district-assigned school improvement specialists and the principals at the AD schools will report that all classrooms have established and enforced rituals and routines.

Progress toward Goal 5: District central office staff had an extensive oral interview with the principals about their school. One question was about rituals and routines (Table 3).

**Table 3: Principals Comments about Development and Implementation of Rituals and Routines\***

School	Response to Question: How has the school implemented school-wide and classroom-level rituals and routines?
Baseline	The rituals and routines were established by our school climate committee. The school climate committee created the school climate handbook which outlines our school-wide rituals and routines. The school climate team included various stakeholders (i.e. classroom teachers, specialists, mental health providers, etc). Teachers have the autonomy to address their own individual classroom rituals and routines. This includes class meetings, student behavior plans, incentives and rewards.
Cloverdale	Some teachers have implemented rituals and routines with complete fidelity; this has been observed by administrators during classroom observations and campus walks. High implementation is evidenced by teachers who are standing at their doors during transitions, are visible in the hallways, have do-nows and objectives posted and students adhere to expectations. Universal rituals and routines were established by grade-level teams, as an off-shoot of classroom rules. Professional development regarding rituals and routines is on-going. Beginning with the first teachers PD day and every discipline conversation. Teachers have latitude to develop classroom rituals and routines, as long as they are in alignment with Cloverdale's Universal Rituals and Routines.
Henderson	The focus of whole school at beginning of school was ritual and routines. Administrators visited and focused on inspecting these. The administrative staff worked out the basics, and the staff contributed to the school wide rules. Then teachers developed their own classroom rituals and routines. Students seem more aware of expectations in halls with behavior and dress code and tardies. Most teachers are visible in halls during transitions. Administrative team is always present and visible and focused on rules.
Fair	Each teacher created and posted their rituals and routines. The 9th grade academy developed rituals and routines they all will follow. We have school-wide rituals and routines for being in the halls, cafeteria, and outside at lunch.
Hall	The school-wide rituals and routines are related to a school-wide tardy policy (and scanning technique) that has reduced the number of tardies for the year. Teachers develop rituals and routines for their own classrooms. For the most part, the use of rituals and routines has been very good.
McClellan	Teachers have not been implementing rituals and routines consistently at McClellan? The school leadership team met on October 28, 2014 and addressed this issue. New rituals and routines have been established with input from all departments for the entire school.

\*Rituals and routines was one of several questions on an oral interview with the principal during the first semester.

Also, the district-assigned school improvement specialists have provided information on the school-wide and classroom level rituals and routines for the school to which they are assigned. Generally, the SISs report that school-wide rituals and routines are in place and are working well. Orderliness in common parts of the building are in place the vast majority of the time. Most classrooms have good management and instructional rituals and routines; however, there are exceptions. The exceptions are areas where the building administrators must provide training and support for teachers to maintain good classroom-level rituals and routines.

#### Student Outcomes:

##### Unit Pre/Post Assessments

One of the key recommendations from the ADE Evaluation Teams was for teachers to jointly plan instructional units that last 2-4 weeks and develop pre/post tests to determine if students are making adequate progress. If progress is not sufficient, teachers can use the pre/post test data to differentiate instruction to reteach components that students did not master. The pre/post test data can also inform certified staff that provide tier 2 and tier 3 interventions.

Progress toward unit development with pre/post-tests: All the schools on academic distress are using unit pre/post-tests. The implementation of this recommendation has been recent enough that the district has not collected pre/post results from individual teachers on a large scale at this time. By the end of January data on pre/post test results will have been collected at the district level and can be shared.

##### Interim Assessments

The district is using The Learning Institute (TLI) as the interim assessment provider for math and literacy at the elementary level. A new platform for interim assessments was adopted for grades 6-12. After evaluating various providers, Scantron® was selected to provide a test bank for our use and to provide many levels of data disaggregation and display. Scantron® assessment results will not be available in literacy until mid-January.

Progress measured using TLI interim assessment given in grades 2-5 math and 3-5 literacy and the Scantron® assessment for secondary mathematics are provided below (Table 4). The scores of traditionally high performing schools are included for comparison purposes. The scores reported are raw percent scores. Since the PARCC Assessment has not been given yet, the district doesn't have a valid method of determining what raw percentage score would represent proficiency.

**Table 4: Module 1 Interim Assessment Results (average percent correct)**

School	Assessment			For Comparison— High Performing School:	For Comparison— High Performing School:
		School Avg.	District Avg.		
Cloverdale Middle School	6th Grade Math	46.5	52.6	52.7 (Mann)	61.0 (PHMS)
	7th Grade Math	38.3	38.4	35.0 (Mann)	43.6 (PHMS)
	8th Grade Math	39.0	37.2	38.7 (Mann)	37.5 (PHMS)
Henderson Middle School	6th Grade Math	46.6	52.6	52.7 (Mann)	61.0 (PHMS)
	7th Grade Math	37.7	38.4	35.0 (Mann)	43.6 (PHMS)
	8th Grade Math	31.5	37.2	38.7 (Mann)	37.5 (PHMS)

	7th Accel	51.9	55.4	51.4 (Mann)	67.6 (PHMS)
	8th Alg 1	46.9	60.0	60.6 (Mann)	64.1 (PHMS)
Hall High School	Algebra I	28.6	40.8	49.9 (Parkview)	47.1 (Central)
	Algebra II	42.5	47.9	53.9 (Parkview)	51.6 (Central)
	Geometry	32.6	42.0	46.0 (Parkview)	47.6 (Central)
J. A. Fair High School	Algebra I	39.6	40.8	49.9 (Parkview)	47.1 (Central)
	Algebra II	33.0	47.9	53.9 (Parkview)	51.6 (Central)
	Geometry	39.7	42.0	46.0 (Parkview)	47.6 (Central)
McClellan High School	Algebra I	36.5	40.8	49.9 (Parkview)	47.1 (Central)
	Algebra II	39.0	47.9	53.9 (Parkview)	51.6 (Central)
	Geometry	34.1	42.0	46.0 (Parkview)	47.6 (Central)
Baseline Elementary	Grade 2 Math	70.3	74.8	81.0 (Terry)	79.9 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 3 Math	61.1	65.3	68.0 (Terry)	88.5 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 3 Reading	38.7	45.5	43.9 (Terry)	65.4 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 4 Math	50.2	49.7	52.7 (Terry)	67.2 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 4 Reading	36.5	52.8	53.5 (Terry)	65.6 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 5 Math	45.2	49.0	54.3 (Terry)	65.2 (Forest Pk.)
	Grade 5 Reading	38.8	51.4	55.2 (Terry)	64.8 (Forest Pk.)

Baseline Elementary also administered the Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) two times during the fall semester to grades K-5. The results show that students are making progress in mathematics (Table 5), especially at the early grades.

Table 5: Growth in Math Proficiency from SMI for Baseline Elementary (in percent of students at each level)

Grade	Below Basic - 1 <sup>st</sup> Time Period	Below Basic - 2nd Time Period	Basic – 1 <sup>st</sup> Time Period	Basic – 2nd Time Period	Proficient – 1 <sup>st</sup> Time Period	Proficient – 2nd Time Period	Advanced – 1 <sup>st</sup> Time Period	Advanced – 2nd Time Period
Kindergarten	76	29	18	40	4	29	2	2
First	93	51	5	40	2	9	0	0
Second	70	33	30	65	0	3	0	0
Third	95	73	5	27	0	0	0	0
Fourth	98	89	2	9	0	2	0	0
Fifth	89	82	11	18	0	0	0	0

## Conclusions

Progress has been made toward all five goals that the district set for improving the schools on academic distress. The most effort to date from the district has gone into supporting the AD schools on goals 2 and 3 related to lesson planning, classroom observations with quality feedback, and leadership team development. Substantial progress has been made toward these goals. Building administrators are in the

classrooms observing instruction more than ever before. High standards exist for the feedback that they give to teachers, and the administrators are making the adjustment to giving meaningful, evidence-based feedback. Much training and guidance has been provided to AD schools related to leadership team structure and function. Support from the Arkansas Leadership Academy has been used and will continue to be a valuable resource for leadership training. The school leadership teams have been restructured recently at the AD schools, and additional support from the district will be needed to help the principals change them into decision-making bodies that lead the school improvement effort.

Training for goal 5 on rituals and routines was provided by the district, but implementation of this is essentially a building-level obligation. Feedback from district observers in the schools is that rituals and routines have been established and have improved the learning environment in the AD schools. We will continue to monitor implementation of school-level rituals and routines.

A curriculum auditor (goal 4) will be approved by the board in early January and work on the audit will begin immediately thereafter. Much of the focus on district central office administrators in the spring and summer will concentrate on the curriculum audit process. Ensuring a fully aligned curriculum that is available to all students is a key factor in improving student outcomes. The district believes that an aligned curriculum will help produce test scores that will help the AD schools make sufficient progress to be removed from the academic distress list in just a few years.

The district got a late start on pre/post unit testing and was delayed on interim testing at the secondary level while providers were evaluated. Scantron® was selected as a provider, and the district will use the Scantron® test item bank to produce interim assessments. Teachers at the secondary level can also use a separate item bank for the creation of short pre/post assessments or they can create their own pre/post assessments. These resources will support the AD distressed schools in getting “close to real-time” data for use in making instructional decisions.

Although much progress has been made, the district is fully aware that our role in supporting the AD schools is a top priority. We will continue to work with the administrators and teachers in these schools to get the improvement that must happen.

Date: January 2, 2015

To: Sub-committee for Academic Distress  
State Board of Education

From: Roxie Browning, Lead SIS for LRSD  
ADE School Improvement Unit

Chante'le Williams, SIS  
ADE School Improvement Unit

Kyron Jones, SIG Program Director/Specialist  
ADE Learning Services

Richard W. Wilde, Program Manager  
ADE School Improvement Unit

Through: Annette Barnes, Assistant Commissioner of Education,  
ADE School Accountability

RE: Little Rock School District Progress Report Related to Schools in  
Academic Distress

### **Introduction**

In the spring of 2014 the State Board classified the following Little Rock Schools in Academic Distress: Hall High School, J. A. Fair High School, McClellan High School, Henderson Middle School, Cloverdale Middle School and Baseline Elementary. Academic Distress status was based on combined math and literacy three year trend data from school years 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Each Academic Distress school had previously been identified through the ESEA No Child Left Behind Act as in "Corrective Action"; and then under the ESEA Flexibility Waiver as a "Needs Improvement: Priority School". The Flexibility Waiver initially required each priority school to have support through an external provider contract. The ADE School Improvement Unit was tasked with providing technical assistance to the provider and school. Based upon district evaluation and general lack of progress towards improvement, general support from an external provider was discontinued at the start of school year 2014-15. External support was replaced with internal support from locally hired School Improvement Specialists. External provider services were

maintained for more targeted professional development related to data utilization and leadership.

Given that the locally hired School Improvement Specialists were not specifically trained in the science of school improvement, this effort is more of a capacity development effort than an immediate support for school turnaround. Individuals selected for the locally hired SIS role were content specialists with experience in curriculum development. In actuality, given the number of schools in Needs Improvement status, there is probably not an adequate number of School Improvement Specialists available for hire within the state of Arkansas. Thus, development of local improvement specialists is probably the most economical and practical method available to the district. The LRSD Office of Accountability, in collaboration with the ADE School Improvement Unit, has sought to fast-track the professional development of the locally hired School Improvement Specialists.

In October of 2014, the Little Rock School District Board of Directors and key administrators from the district and school sites met with a subcommittee of the Arkansas State Board of Education. A plan of improvement for school year 2014-15 was presented to the State Board subcommittee by LRSD leadership, and comments were provided by individual LRSD Board Members. Through interactive discussion in the meeting, the LRSD Board of Directors was notified that the sub-committee for Academic Distress would make recommendations to the whole of the State Board of Education. The action(s) to be recommended by the sub-committee, and the date of the recommendations was to be determined following a January progress report. Further, it was clear to the casual observer that both substantial progress in the implementation of the plan presented by LRSD administrators (inclusive of ADE recommendations), as well as substantial improvement in “teammanship” within and between district administrators and the local school board was expected. Improvement of the common focus was to be evidenced by school board meetings, agenda items, and perceptual information from the community at-large.

In November of 2014 the validated state assessment from school year 2013-14 was used to calculate a new three year trend. District trend data identified an overall student advanced and proficient rate at approximately 67 percent in Literacy, and approximately 60 percent in Math. Using the new calculation, little to no improvement was reported in the overall trend data of the schools previously classified in Academic Distress and all three year trend data proficient and advanced averages remained below 49.5 percent. It is noteworthy to point out that the Office for Education Policy (OEP) at the University of Arkansas praised J.A. Fair and McClellan for outstanding educational performance,

highlighting them as high-performing schools in Arkansas based on the Benchmark and End-of-Course exams in poverty communities.

### **Summary of the ADE Review Team Findings September 2014**

Initial findings by the ADE review teams assigned to the LRSD schools following their classification as Academic Distress can be distilled to six main issues. These were:

1. Despite multiple years of identification as “Corrective Action” and then as “Priority School”, school leadership and faculty had little understanding of targeted school improvement processes. This was compounded by lack of clarity in the purpose for External Providers, high turnover in school staff, lack of flexibility in district policy and practice to staff high need schools first, and minimal incentive to evaluate or retain highly effective teachers.
2. Despite leadership teams being provided training and support in the collection and utilization of formative assessment data to drive professional development, district initiatives or educational trends were the primary drivers of professional development. This was further compounded by limited principal authority to direct individual professional development plans, limited ability of the principal to direct staff work, and the disconnect between student outcomes and teacher self-evaluations.
3. Despite adequate funding available to the schools over time, improvement efforts were not focused, sustained, evaluated, or selected based on a meaningful analysis of student data. Indeed, having funds without depth of knowledge of turnaround processes may have contributed to the selection of multiple “supplemental” innovations that lacked targeted intent and clear evaluation procedures. The lack of focus was further compounded by turnover in staff and the desire by new faculty to recreate practices based on personal preferences and/or prior experiences rather than deep analyses of the current situation. Most improvement efforts focused on supplemental programs and efforts rather than seeking to systematically improve core classroom instruction and initial student learnings.
4. Despite knowledge of the ESEA Waiver and the Waiver’s intent for a district to make struggling schools THE PRIORITY for support, specific changes to district policy or practice to support priority schools were not evident. As a result, recruitment, retention, and school autonomy were basically the same regardless of school status, with a number of positions still vacant after the start of school.
5. Despite good intentions and high effort on the part of staff, a pervasive attitude of helplessness to improve student outcomes existed within the building leadership and staff. Staff reported feelings of unfair treatment and that students were permitted to transfer out of the service area to other schools. They had difficulty

accepting that students in schools classified in Restructuring, Priority and Academic Distress were permitted to easily transfer based on parent choice.

6. Despite knowledge of the importance of student-teacher relationships to motivate and influence students, no systemic or school efforts focused on improving the bond between students and teachers. Indeed, from the student perspective with each change in administration a new emphasis was placed on disciplining them (the students) for misbehavior. The culture appeared to be based in “make the students behave” rather than a culture of respect, relationship, and mutual support.

With only a few of the findings unique to a school, the ADE review teams produced recommendations that seem to reflect generic solutions rather than addressing issues specific to a school. However, the commonness of the findings only reflects the systemic nature of the challenges faced by the LRSD schools in Academic Distress.

### **Summary of ADE Review Team Recommendations September 2014**

Given the systemic nature of the review teams’ findings, it would be expected that the recommendations would have common themes. Indeed, the recommendations can be consolidated into four primary themes and two secondary themes regardless of the school reviewed. The primary themes reflect the need of the schools to understand and utilize the research related to turnaround schools. In essence the primary recommendations were:

1. Refine and empower school leadership teams to address site specific issues and to expand the knowledge of the science of turnaround beyond school administration.
2. Refine and coordinate the work of instructional teams to improve initial delivery of instruction utilizing common units or pacing guides, common unit pre and post-tests, and teach the Arkansas State Standards across the curricula.
3. Use classroom level data related to short-term learning outcomes to drive professional development and supports to individual teachers.
4. Identify the specific innovations being implemented by a specific school to improve the outcomes with TAGG component populations and evaluate the fidelity of implementation and to evaluate the impact of the innovation.

Primary Recommendation 1 reflects the need for schools seeking to turnaround performance to embrace distributed responsibility and a distributed sense of urgency. To accomplish a distributed sense of urgency, faculty must have a structure for understanding the problem at the school level (beyond the classroom). To have shared



responsibility for addressing the problem, faculty must have “voice” in identifying changes needed and meaningful input in the solutions chosen.

Primary Recommendation 2 reflects the need for teachers to have a sense of the entire course being taught, to break that course into units of instruction, and for student progress to be monitored on a frequent and incremental basis. The joint planning, frequent progress monitoring, and subsequent differentiation based on assessment is key in the science of school improvement.

Primary Recommendation 3 reflects the need for staff in a low performing school to be provided support directly related to progress or lack of progress being made by their assigned students in real time. Instructional teams are responsible for monitoring their own level of effectiveness, identifying who is most effective within the team, and embedding professional development into the work being performed. Each instructional team is represented on the school leadership team to create systemic communication. Data on student progress is collected and analyzed on a frequent basis and this information is provided to the School Leadership Team for discussion related to targeting resources.

Primary Recommendation 4 reflects the concept of cost-benefit analysis. Each additional effort or innovation employed by a school to improve student outcomes has a cost in terms of a resource. Thus, when a school selects an improvement strategy there should be an anticipated amount of improvement, a clear identification of the population to be served by the innovation, and a known cost in terms of resources needed. Without this systemic planning, efforts and innovations are subject only to testimonial evaluation. In addition to knowing how the innovation will be measured the leadership must clearly know how they will monitor and support fidelity of the implementation.

The two secondary recommendations were:

1. Prioritize recruitment and stabilize/retain effective teachers and leaders in the priority school(s). District and school practices related to the staffing of priority schools need immediate improvement.
2. Increase student voice in the process of school improvement. Students in the secondary schools reported a “feeling tone” of punishment for non-compliance of expectations rather than a collaborative development of the overall culture. Interestingly, this same “feeling tone” was reported by teachers when discussing the district initiatives. In general, each level of the education community interviewed expressed feelings of things being done to, or decisions made for, rather than with them.

Secondary Recommendation 1 reflects on the need for the district to review their practice of one size fits all. In truth, Secondary Recommendation 1 is evident in the LRSD plan for improvement of schools in Academic Distress. The actions in the plan are required in all the schools regardless of status or situation. The concept of individualization and individualized support is not easily embraced by the district leaders. This may be due to a long history of equity being defined as “every school getting the same thing”.

Secondary Recommendation 2 reflects the need at both the school and district level to expand “voice” to other groups, but in particular to the group most directly impacted by the lack of effectiveness of the school. Indeed, if students are engaged in the decisions, parents will be better informed and more supportive of the school. More importantly, if a structure can be developed that facilitates all students feeling connected to the school and having “voice” in the management of the school, the culture should become more collaborative.

### **The Progress Report**

The ADE School Improvement Unit is tasked with the progress monitoring of the recommendations made by the ADE review teams. While the Unit is not tasked with monitoring of the LRSD Improvement Plan, nor is it tasked with the monitoring of the development of a common focus on the part of leadership of the district, it is clear that these efforts are all linked together.

What has been accomplished to date?

1. LRSD district administration has directed the principals to include the recommendations in their ACSIP Needs Assessments. This is pending given that the ACSIP is under review by ADE and principals do not have edit access at this time.
2. LRSD district administration has directed the locally hired School Improvement Specialist to assist in the communication of the recommendations and support the school administration in implementation of the recommendations.
  - a. The Chief Academic Officer for LRSD in collaboration with the ADE assigned School Improvement Specialists have provided multiple sessions of professional development for the locally hired SISs specific to the research related to the recommendations.
3. The ADE assigned School Improvement Specialist has met with the principal and the locally hired SIS to review the recommendations and clarify any site specific questions.

4. The recommendations have been shared with school leadership teams.
  - a. It should be noted that the district is employing the Southern Region Education Board's High Schools/Middle Schools That Work Model. This process is a long standing, researched-based, national model for improving outcomes in schools with high numbers of low income and underachieving minority students. There is significant overlap between the Turnaround Model and HSTW model. Nonetheless, several of the schools reconstituted their leadership teams in November adding additional change and additional professional development needs.
5. ADE SIS and the locally hired SIS for each school have coordinated their schedules to maximize support for the school while minimizing distraction and or competition for the principal's time.
6. Initial technical assistance on the purpose of a Leadership Team has been provided to the principals through an external provider.
7. The schools are beginning to transform the work of the instructional teams from primarily lesson planning and professional development to the recommended work of developing standards aligned units of instruction with pre-post units.
  - a. It should be noted that instructional teams are key in the improvement of outcomes, but to implement the practice with fidelity requires deep understanding of the standards, the development of cross curricular pacing guides, and the refinement of the formative assessments to be actual measures of the standards. This is at least a three year process, and despite this being encouraged through the ESEA Waiver, very little progress has been made in Little Rock on this essential component to date.
  - b. It should also be noted that until the system is developed to collect classroom level student progress data on a frequent basis, and for that data to be analyzed and response systems and professional development linked to that level of data, then the School Leadership Team and the Instruction Teams have minimal real time instructional data to analyze. This results in the continuation of the Instructional Teams and the Leadership Teams performing more managerial or mechanical tasks.
8. There has been little progress in the schools identifying the two to three innovations that are key to their acceleration of student performance.
  - a. It should be noted that this is in part due to all the changes being asked of the school staff with no clear prioritization. To principals and staff, the number of changes being requested all seem to have the same level of demand, and thus, there is no clear plan of action. Indeed, it would appear that the focus for the principals is based on who is coming or what

report is due. The LRSD is attempting to address this through 45 day action plans, asking principals to define and target their efforts.

- b. The perception of the ADE School Improvement Specialists is that the LRSD School Board and Central Administration have acquired a sense of urgency. This sense of urgency has resulted in the rapid implementation of several innovations in an attempt to demonstrate that sense of urgency. The district plan is on top of the buildings efforts, not in place of. These new district required efforts result in lots of implementation prior to the building of capacity for the new innovations. Thus, we observe considerable activity without a clear understanding of the desired outcomes. When this is combined with the ADE recommendations, it becomes overwhelming and beyond the capacity of a school staff to meaningfully implement any innovation or recommendation with fidelity. The process is in contrast of the ADE Recommendation to focus on two to three research-based strategies. Without fidelity in implementation, the impact of the innovation cannot be evaluated.

## Memorandum

To: Academic Distress Committee, ADE Board  
From: Little Rock School Board  
Date: January 2, 2015  
Re: Statement of Commitment and Intent

We, the members of the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District, are appreciative of the opportunity provided by the Academic Distress Committee to state the district efforts to improve services to meet the needs of students in our declared academic distress schools and for the LRSD Board to express its commitment to do fulfill our governing role in support of these efforts.

In the Board's view, there is no priority of greater importance than making significant progress to improve the education of students in our academic distress schools. To this end, the Board has been fully supportive of the administration's plan. A copy of that plan has been provided to you by separate cover. It is the Board's expectation that implementation of the plan will result in measureable outcomes in student achievement. Our commitment to this plan is further demonstrated in the following ways:

- Monthly Board work sessions concerning plans to improve the culture, leadership, curriculum and instruction.
- Monthly reports and discussion in Board meetings regarding plan implementation results in the academic distress schools.
- Public expressions of support and expectation for improved performance and accountability regarding progress for academic distress schools at every level from classroom to the Board.
- Approved the planning process to develop a reconfiguration plan for one of the academic distress schools (Hall High School). This plan will be presented to the Board for consideration for approval and possible implementation for 2016-17.

For the district to make sustainable progress for students in our academic distress schools, we realize that we must meet each of the major governance challenges facing the district at this time. For each challenge, we have a process in place to address the challenge:

- Academic distress schools: Plan for improving achievement as presented by the administration.

- Financial concerns with anticipated loss of desegregation funds: Initiated and approved Budget Efficiency Advisory Committee with the expectation of recommendations to the Board beginning in the spring of 2015.
- Facilities concerns: A district-wide facilities plan has been completed and the Board is in process of developing a priority list of facilities improvements and a corresponding funding plan.
- Governance concerns: Awareness of both the history and the perception of a lack of stability and effective collaboration among Board members and between the Board and Superintendent. A work session is being planned for early 2015 to focus on improving teamwork at the Board and Board-Superintendent relationship levels.

The conditions leading to the six LRSD schools being declared in academic distress developed, and in some cases, persisted over a period of many years. We believe it is reasonable to note that our present governance team—Board members and Superintendent—is fairly new. Our Superintendent is in his second year. Five of our seven Board members are in their first term, one is in a second term and only one is in a third term. We, however, understand the need for accountability at all levels. Our present governance team would like the opportunity to meet these challenges and show responsible progress in all challenge areas in the coming year.

Clearly, our students and community have waited long enough for significant progress to be made in these schools. We are committed to working with each other and the administration to make the changes needed to meet our obligations to the students in these schools. We believe the needed improvements are possible if we work together at all levels, and we are determined to fulfill our part in this effort.

Thank you for your consideration and we are open to discussion, as requested.