

Clay County Schools Special Circumstance Review Update

May 2023



Background

- » The WVDE Office of Accountability conducted a Special Circumstance Review of Clay County Schools beginning November 30, 2022, at the request of the State Superintendent, to investigate Clay County Board of Education actions, official complaints submitted to the WVDE, and student performance as indicated by the West Virginia Balanced Scorecard.
- » Areas reviewed during the visit included instructional leadership, executive leadership, school improvement processes, financial indicators and purchasing procedures, and the operation of federal programs in the district.
- » At the time of the review, three members of the local board were recently elected, first time board members. The local excess levy had failed, leading to concerns about the financial stability of the district and possible school closures. Additionally, the former superintendent had been removed from that position abruptly during the November 2, 2022, meeting of the local board. The interim superintendent, Joan Haynie, had been in her position for approximately three weeks.
- » The review team interviewed members of the central office staff, county board of education members, all principals, and the majority of teachers in each school building in the district. Additionally, a team visited each school in the district to observe instruction and make recommendations to support school improvement.
- » A report of the findings and recommendations was prepared and presented to the WVBE at the January 11, 2023, meeting.

May 2023 Update

Focus Area 1: Central Office and Local Board of Education Leadership

NONCOMPLIANCE 1.1: *The evaluation process of central office staff did not occur per WVBE Policy 5310: Performance Evaluation of School Personnel, and W. Va. Code §18A-2-12.*

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.1: Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Leadership Support to provide technical assistance and support for conducting performance evaluations per WVBE Policy and W. Va. Code. Establish and monitor protocols to ensure employees do not supervise or evaluate family members.

PROGRESS FOR CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.1: An evaluation refresher training was provided to principals and central office staff by personnel from the Offices of Leadership Development and Support and School Improvement.

FINDING 1.1: *The current central office structure tasks one staff member with providing support for curriculum and instruction for grades PK-12, in addition to other central office responsibilities. While it is not uncommon for central office personnel to have responsibilities spanning multiple areas, the current configuration may not represent the most effective use of the expertise available at the central office.*

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: Consider the roles of all central office staff; taking into consideration the school improvement and leadership experience of each individual and determine if all staff members are being utilized to full capacity regarding school improvement overall and specific leadership and instructional support for each programmatic level.

PROGRESS FOR RECOMMENDATION 1.1: At the present time, roles and responsibilities have not yet been fully revised to reflect this recommendation. The interim superintendent formerly served as the assistant superintendent, and the responsibilities of that position were absorbed by other members of the central office staff.

NONCOMPLIANCE 1.2: *Through observations and interviews it was evident to the Team that central office staff did not ensure schools were providing instruction to the rigor and depth the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards require. WVBE Policy 2510, Section 2.4*

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.2: Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning to provide professional development designed to increase teacher and principal knowledge of the WVCCRS. Ensure an understanding of the vertical design of the standards in addition to the content and actionable requirement of individual standards. The principal and School Leadership Team also create a process to monitor the implementation of standards-based instruction.

PROGRESS FOR NONCOMPLIANCE 1.2: Approximately half of Clay County Schools' teachers and principals attended an all-day professional learning program presented by the WVDE Offices of PK-12 Academic Support and Career Technical Education (CTE) on April 7, 2023. The program included presentations for all programmatic levels to address standards-based instruction, the science of reading, and best practices and requirements for CTE. The follow-up extension for this training is scheduled for early June 2023.

FINDING 1.2: *The Team determined the current professional learning and collaboration offered to principals limited opportunities to build capacity and refine professional practice.*

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: Revise the professional learning opportunities to provide high-quality, collaborative learning experiences to support instructional leadership and continuous improvement. Align professional learning goals to principal evaluation goals and the district-wide instructional program. Provide opportunities for principals to network.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 1.2: Principal meetings have been restructured to reflect a Professional Learning Community format. Principals have met more frequently and are completing a book study on supporting research-based instruction.

FINDING 1.3: *Evidence did not support a clear, district-wide instructional focus. While general goals such as "increasing instructional leadership" and "making gains in reading and math" were articulated during interviews, the stated goals are not supported by specific action steps, strategies, and targets to present a unified approach.*

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Support and Accountability to adopt a comprehensive, district-wide school improvement approach based on the WV Standards for Effective Schools. Once this is established, communicate the process with all building-level administrators to directly align the improvement efforts at each schools' specific needs. Utilize instructional walkthrough forms, collecting data to inform instructional feedback and support specific school and district-wide goals.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 1.3: WVDE Office of Accountability personnel met with central office staff on January 23, 2023 to outline five key focus areas for the district based on the WV Standards for Effective Schools and research-based strategies for effective district leadership. These focus areas included ensuring collaborative goal setting; establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction; creating

board alignment with a support of district goals; monitoring achievement and instructional goals; and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. Currently, six members of the central office staff conduct weekly walkthroughs of school buildings. Information from these observations is debriefed with the building principal and has been recorded using paper forms. The interim superintendent articulated plans to begin using a digital walkthrough form to collect data surrounding instruction; however, a comprehensive district-wide improvement approach has not yet been established.

FINDING 1.4: *Effective protocols for board member communication and a clear understanding of local board of education authority were not consistently evident to the Team based on information collected during the Review. Due to a majority of the board being recently elected, further consideration of the impact of decision making may be necessary.*

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: Collaborate with the West Virginia School Board Association to receive training clarifying the role and authority of board members when conducting executive sessions and decision making. Additionally, work with the association to establish effective board communication aligning with the West Virginia Open Governmental Proceedings Act. Additionally, ensure participation from all board members and the interim superintendent.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 1.4: Mr. Jim Brown of the WV School Board Association has worked with the county board of education members to develop the job posting for the superintendent position, provide training, and develop communication protocols. A template was provided to ensure board agendas and minutes are created in a clear and accurate manner. Based on observation of recent local board meetings, additional consideration may be necessary to ensure progress for this finding.

FINDING 1.5: *The Clay County Board of Education policy manual available online is not sufficiently updated to determine its accuracy and compliance with current state and federal laws and policies. The policy manual consists of a webpage with hyperlinks to policy documents; however, there are policies listed that do not have documents linked to them. Additionally, the dates on the policies range from the 1970s to the 2000s which would suggest that the policy manual has not been reviewed and updated to align with WVBE Policy, W. Va. Code, and current educational best practices.*

RECOMMENDATION 1.5: Clay County Schools conduct a comprehensive review and revision to ensure all board policies align with WVBE Policy, W. Va. Code, and current educational best practices. Ensuring board policies are communicated with the public in a comprehensive and user-friendly format may support increased transparency and build public trust.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 1.5: Although it was reported some conversation has occurred regarding the use of a third-party educational consulting firm to facilitate this process, this recommendation has not yet been addressed at the present time.

Focus Area 2: Principal Leadership

FINDING 2.1: *While the team observed a focus on improving attendance in schools, most school leaders did not articulate specific instructional focus areas for their schools. Additionally, most teachers interviewed did not discuss the goals or action steps within the strategic plan for their school.*

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Leadership Support to enhance instructional leadership capabilities by assisting principals and School Leadership Teams to develop school-level strategic plans which include prioritized instructional needs for their schools. Additionally, guide principals in developing classroom walk-through criteria aligned to the specific needs of their respective schools. Apprise staff of the progress toward goal completion regularly and adjust focus areas as goals are met.

PROGRESS FOR RECOMMENDATION 2.1: The district’s principals participated in a professional learning session on February 21, 2023, to review the focus areas outlined in the report, to discuss the collective vision for effective instructional practices, and assess the current practices and documentation for instructional walkthrough observations. The principals were tasked with revising the current walkthrough form to reflect an emphasis on standards-based instruction and formative assessment. The interim superintendent reported elementary administrators found value in the current walkthrough tool, while secondary administrators chose to draft a new form to collect data. Although the process of collecting walkthrough data has been initiated, additional work will be necessary to verify this data is used to inform schoolwide instructional goals and action steps.

NONCOMPLIANCE 2.1: *The team did not observe standards-based instruction in most classrooms. Furthermore, when asked about instructional focus areas for their schools, school leaders did not discuss the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards (WVCCRS) but instead referenced supplemental curricula and programs. WVBE Policy 2510, Section 2.4*

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2.1: Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning to provide professional development designed to increase teacher and principal knowledge of the WVCCRS. Ensure an understanding of the vertical design of the standards in addition to the content and actionable requirement of individual standards. The principal and School Leadership Team also create a process to monitor the implementation of standards-based instruction.

PROGRESS FOR CORRECTIVE ACTION 2.1: With collaboration from WVDE, professional learning has been to address standards-based instruction. Follow-up professional learning opportunities in this area will be provided. However, a process to monitor the implementation of standards-based instruction has not yet been fully developed and implemented.

FINDING 2.2: *While the Team observed strong instructional leadership within individual schools, providing feedback designed to support instructional improvement was not evident as a district-wide practice.*

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Create a principal leadership professional learning community (PLC) to provide principals opportunities to collaborate and build district-wide leadership capacity. Task stronger instructional leaders with guiding the development and expansion of this work.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 2.2: The planned agendas for upcoming principal meetings include topics relevant to instructional leadership such as strategic planning and creating a master schedule. Additional implementation will be necessary to satisfy the intent of the recommendation.

Focus Area 3: School Improvement Processes and Instruction

FINDING 3.1: *A lack of support for the instructional program in recent school years was evident to the Team. This was determined through multiple interview responses regarding minimal support for instruction from the central office and a downward trajectory in student academic achievement during recent years.*

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: With assistance from the WVDE Office of Accountability, the county and school level leadership identify and prioritize the instructional needs of their schools. Utilize data sources including, but not limited to student academic achievement, personnel evaluations, classroom walkthroughs, benchmark assessments, etc. to inform a comprehensive instructional focus districtwide.

PROGRESS FOR RECOMMENDATION 3.1: Documentation provided by central office staff showed a mid-year review of program data occurred. Central office documentation also listed other forms of data used to identify instructional needs. Continued implementation in this area will be necessary in order to strengthen and support the instructional program of the district.

FINDING 3.2: *Rigorous curriculum delivery requiring problem-solving and higher-order thinking on behalf of students was not observed. Additionally, high-yield instructional strategies were not observed in most classrooms.*

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: The WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning provides professional learning to address rigorous, grade-level curriculum delivery. Additional topics may include activities to promote higher-order thinking, distributed summarizing, collaborative pairs, vocabulary instruction, and writing across content areas. Central office staff monitor and provide additional implementation support regularly.

PROGRESS FOR FINDING 3.2: The WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning provided the first of a series of professional learning opportunities to address rigorous, grade-level curriculum delivery. Curriculum coaches are also working in schools to support quality instruction. Ongoing implementation and monitoring of instructional practices will be necessary to ensure high-yield instructional strategies are a pervasive practice.

Focus Area 4: Financial Indicators and Purchasing Procedures

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Due to the failure of the excess school levy, conduct a comprehensive review of Clay County finances with a focus on student needs while being fiscally responsible. CSBO continue the effective conservative practices described above and continues to monitor the fund balance. The WVDE Office of School Finance is available to provide additional technical assistance as requested.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: The district is currently funding sixteen positions with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that is set to expire on September 30, 2024. These funded positions annually cost \$716,985.00. The Team recommended the district begin planning immediately to sustain these positions after the ESSER funding is liquidated or to address a Reduction in Force (RIF) within the required timeframes.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3: Avoid the practice of including regular expenses, such as utilities in future excess levy calls.

PROGRESS FOR FOCUS AREA 4: Seven ESSER positions will be funded next year through local funds. Other positions have been eliminated through terminations and transfers. A financial workshop was provided to local board of education members to inform them of the financial outlook for the district. Central office staff have collaborated with WVDE to ensure fiscally responsible decisions are made.

Focus Area 5: Operation of Federal Programs

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: The county has an approved infrastructure project included in their American Relief Plan (ARP) ESSER budget that includes HVAC and window replacement at H.E. White Elementary. Since the county has discussed the possibility of closing H.E. White in the near future, the Team recommended the ARP ESSER budget be revised and that amount allocated to another permissible project if the local board decides to move forward with closure hearings.

PROGRESS FOR RECOMMENDATION 5.1: No decision has been made at the present time regarding the closure of H.E. White Elementary, therefore this recommendation has not been addressed.

Next Steps

- » The Office of Teaching and Learning will provide follow-up professional learning sessions to build instructional capacity. The next training session will take place in June.
- » Continue review and revision of Clay County Schools Board of Education policies, and ensure all policies are published in an easily accessible format.
- » Continue working with WVDE Office of Accountability to identify and prioritize a comprehensive instructional focus throughout the district.
- » The Special Circumstance Review will be extended to include two additional focus areas: Personnel and County Board of Education Member Effectiveness. As an additional measure of quality assurance, the Office of Accountability will work to verify all recent personnel and staffing decisions, including Reduction in Force (RIF) and transfers, have occurred in accordance with policy and code. Additionally, the review team will revisit local board policy and communication findings to further evaluate progress made in those areas.