ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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ADE releases DC from distressed list (Advance-Monticellonian)

The Arkansas Board of Education voted unanimously to remove the Drew Central School District from fiscal distress Monday during their regular monthly board meeting.

The vote to remove the District from fiscal distress comes less than a year after initially being placed on the list.

“Our district was placed on fiscal distress effective July 1, 2012,” said Rena McCone, business office manager for the district. “We were officially taken off fiscal distress effective Monday so it’s been less than a year.”

McCone, School Board President Rene Knowles, and Superintendent Mike Johnston traveled to Little Rock to attend the Arkansas Board of Education meeting, where Johnston recapped the District’s efforts to save money over the course of the last year.

Those efforts included eliminating positions through reduction in force and attrition, discontinuing the District’s long term disability coverage for the faculty and staff members – saving $17,000 each year, discontinuing the District’s participation in the boot camp – saving $25,000 each year, increasing school lunches, refinancing the bond issue, raising the property taxes by 4.9 mills, and eliminated one bus route.

Johnston told the board that the District is projecting to end the current school year with just over a $1.4 million positive balance.

Hazel Burnett, coordinator for the fiscal and administrative services at the Arkansas Department of Education, said Drew Central has completed all criteria for having the classification of Fiscal Distress removed and has complied with all department recommendations and requirements for removal from that list.

The District’s ending balances were $494,857 in Fiscal Year 2012, and $407,837 in Fiscal Year 2011. The District’s budget reflects an ending balance of $1,493,137 for Fiscal Year 2013.

“Each school district is unique and there is not a predetermined time, or length, of being classified as in fiscal distress,” Burnett said. “The Fiscal Distress Unit has not completed a study on the average length of time districts remain in the program and on the list.”

Johnston said the District is happy to be out of fiscal distress so that they can now focus more on educating the students.

“Of course everyone here is delighted (to be out of fiscal distress),” he said. “It’s been a stressful year, especially here in this office. Now we can concentrate on the matters that make our school truly outstanding.”

Johnston said the goal was to work together to get out of fiscal distress as soon as possible.

Burnette said prior to Act 600 of 2013, no school district was allowed to remain in fiscal distress status for more than two consecutive years. Under the new law, schools can remain on fiscal distress for up to five years.

Literacy scores up 27 percent at DC ((Advance-Monticellonian)

Literacy scores are up 27 percent at Drew Central over last year’s test results.

In fact, 61 percent of Drew Central’s juniors tested proficient or advanced on the 11th grade literacy exam given in March by the Arkansas Department of Education. The scores are up from last year’s results where only 48 percent of the students tested proficient or advanced.

Patti Smith, who was hired by the District in August as the literacy coach, promised the school board that she would help raise the test scores in District.

“I sure did! I vowed to bring those scores up,” Smith said. “But I certainly didn’t do it alone.”

Smith said the improvement, a total of 13 points, or a 27.1 percent increase in scores over last year, was a collaborative effort between the school’s teachers and the students.

“It’s important to recognize that at the beginning of the year, Drew Central decided to included a mandatory 20 minutes of reading each day at 1 p.m.,” she said. “The reading time is called sustained silent reading (SSR). This made math teachers, art teachers, science teachers, business teachers, all teachers become reading teachers. I know at first it was tough but it’s beginning to pay off.”

Smith said no students scored below basic on the March test.

Eulea Kiraly, English teacher, said she was surprised that no one tested very low.

“That’s what threw me for a loop,” Kiraly said. “You expect to have one or two to not do as well for whatever reason, but that didn’t happen.”

Smith said that credit should also go to the school resource literacy teacher, Elaine Tipton, who worked with students with special needs.

Smith said she and Kiraly “tag teamed” the junior class during the last three weeks before the exam was administered.

“We took the T.L.I. (The Learning Institute) tests to see what their weaknesses were, and we worked on those weaknesses with the students,” Smith said. “She helped some students while I helped others. We really worked well together. I credit her for embracing this approach and allowing someone to come into her classroom to work on different areas.”

Kiraly added that she and Smith were the “dynamic duo” of literacy this year.

“I’d work them until they couldn’t take anymore, and then, they had Mrs. Smith to be their cheerleader,” Kiraly said.

Smith said it was the teachers’ efforts combined with the reading time that made all the difference this year.

“The reading (SSR) got them used to reading every day,” Smith said. “It built up their endurance so they test wasn’t so overwhelming for them.”

Smith, Cindy Sass and Kim Greer made a presentation to the school board in December about how sustained silent reading was expected to increase test scores and how it had begun to change the culture of the high school.

Smith said the culture of the school continues to change as reading is embraced by more students.

“We are offering two reading classes next year as electives,” Smith said. “The class for the juniors and seniors is full as of today (Friday morning). It says something about our school that we are able to offer reading classes as electives and students still sign up.”

Helen Banks will teach the junior and senior reading class. She said she will teach four different units next year.

“We are going to do a unit on monsters,” Banks said. “I’ve got plans to get into makeup and costumes to have a monsters Christmas party in December to conclude the monsters unit. When you offer reading as an elective, you have to think of ways to make it interesting for the students so they will want to take it.”

The other reading course, which will be offered to freshman and sophomores, will be taught by 9th grade English teacher Latanza Atkins.

“Ms. Atkins is an amazing teacher,” Smith said. “I know she is going to make it fun and exciting for the students as well.”

Smith said the lower level class has numerous students signed up for it as well, but no numbers for the class have been released.

“This is just the beginning for Drew Central,” Smith said.

Kiraly agreed.

“I expect to make at least 70 percent proficient or advanced next year,” Kiraly said. “I don’t know it’s not as big as a leap as we made this year, but we are going to continue our work with the students so we will continue to see improvement.”

Kiraly and Smith said they haven’t had time to look at the scores to see where the weaknesses lie.

“We are all about working the weakness,” Kiraly said. “It seems to be working.”

Smith said as she glanced at the scores she noticed the students really have a good understanding of literature, but their reading of informational text needs improvement.

“We are going to have to get them to understand the difference in an editorial and a news story,” Kiraly said. “We will focus a little more on that.”

Kiraly said she will bring newspapers into the classroom next year to give the students more experience with reading informational text.

“Some students read the newspaper, but we need to spend more time reading the paper and showing them the value and how to process informational text,” Kiraly said.

Smith said she is planning a celebration for the juniors on May 23.

“We area going to have lunch with them,” she said. “I’ve asked them all to wear their (Literacy) boot camp shirts that day. They worked so hard. I’m so proud of each and every one of them.”

Monticello School Board accepts bids for new doors, locks for schools (Advance-Monticellonian)

District facilities monopolized the Monticello School Board meeting Tuesday night. The board voted to accept bids on several projects related to school safety.

Since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in December, Superintendent Bobby Harper has been discussing several projects to make the District’s campuses safer for the employees and the students.

Harper began to research how to make the schools safer. He brought in officers from the Monticello Police Department to make recommendations to the district on where they need to improve to provide a safer environment for the students.

Some of the items suggested were new doors for the City Park campus because the doors they have at the school are from the 1960s and some do not close properly.

Another issue brought to the attention of the board in December, just after the shooting occurred in Pennsylvania was the interior locks for the classrooms.

In an effort to make the campuses more safe for students, faculty and staff, the board voted to accept a bid from Arkansas Glass for the door replacements at City Park and at the high school gym. The bid is for $69,637. Clearview Glass placed a bid for $63,800 but Harper told the board the bid from Clearview wasn't anything close to the doors they've been getting from Arkansas Glass.

"If they can get it up to the specifications, I'd like to see the local guy get the bid," Michael Fakouri, school board member, said

Harper said he felt the same way, but Clearview cannot get the doors they need for this project. He said Clearview cannot get the doors their school has requested.

The board voted to go with Arkansas Glass.

However, Clearview Glass was awarded the bid for the interior doors and locks for all the buildings except the middle school for $28,000.

The board voted to approve the Maglock system with keypads for the other schools except the elementary school, which already has the system in place.

The board approved the bid from Arkansas State Security for $31,836.73, which was the lowest bid. The other two bids, from Rustel and Advanced Cabling, were closer to $40,000 for the exact same system and installation.

Harper said the next item on the agenda for the District's facilities include the Partnership Projects, where the school is reimbursed a percentage of the cost, for the 2013-2015 partnership funding cycle.

"We are looking at two projects for the partnership funding," Harper told the board. "We are looking at re-doing the middle school roof and getting air conditioning in the high school gym."

Harper said the middle school's roof needs insulation put on the it with a "skin" over the top of it. He said a recent estimate from a reputable company shows the cost of the project near $350,000. The building is 88,000 square feet.

"We have a $1.3 million cap on this project," Harper said. "I hope it doesn't cost that much, but we have a little cushion there."

He said the air conditioning for the high school gym cannot exceed $145,000 for the partnership funding.

"That's the most we can get from the partnership funding for this project," Harper said. "Of course, that doesn't include our 40 percent match on this project."

The 40 percent match on the air conditioning will be $58,000 if the District receives all $145,000 from the partnership funding for the project.

Harper said the board needs to start thinking about additional facilities projects for the future as well.

“There’s several things we need to get done,” Harper said. “I know we’ve got some money in the building fund. We also have some second lien bonds that are about to pay off. We could refinance them to generate income to do some of these projects without depleting our building fund.”

Harper encouraged the board to start thinking about projects to improve and update the school’s facilities.

In other business, the board voted to:

• Purchase errors and omissions liability insurance from the Arkansas School Board Association for $5,916 per year. The district will pay $3,970 for coverage from now through Feb. 1, 2014. Then, the annual amount will go to the quoted $5,916.

• Purchase student accident insurance fro $9,960 for the next year.

• Table the school choice resolution where the guidelines for accepting and denying non-resident students would be spelled out. The board decided to wait until the Arkansas Department of Education has the policies in place before the board approves the policy. Harper said each application is stamped with the date and time it was received. He reminded everyone that the deadline to apply for school choice is June 1, which is one month earlier than the deadline in the past.

The board also looked at several personnel polices for licensed and classified staff. One of the policies reviewed was a weapons policy, where staff could carry either mace or a small knife for protection.

Assistant Superintendent Carol Santucci said it’s up to the board whether they will allow teachers and staff to have these items on campus for protection after a new law was passed the legislature.

However, the board did not accept any of the policies since it was the first reading for the board.

Jacksonville effort to flee PCSSD keeps going on (Jacksonville Patriot)

Signatures are being collected for a petition to detach Jacksonville and northern Pulaski County from the Pulaski County Special School District and form a separate district, the state Board of Education was told Monday.

Attorney Patrick Wilson and state Rep. Mark Perry D-Jacksonville, gave the board an update on the long-running detachment effort, which they said is moving ahead with support from both residents of the area seeking to detach and the Pulaski County district.

Under legislation by Perry that was enacted this year, the process requires collecting signatures from a number of voters in the area seeking to detach equal to 10 percent of the number of voters in the area who voted in the last general election, which for the Jacksonville area is 1,270.

Perry told the board that supporters of detachment have already collected close to 1,500 signatures and hope to present close to 2,000 signatures to the state Board of Education at its June meeting.

Wilson told the board, "We've done very well with that. The fact that we've done very well with that is a direct result of the fact that the Jacksonville people want this. They are actively working for this."

If the board determines that the petition is valid, it then will request an attorney general's opinion on whether the detachment would negatively impact desegregation, Wilson said. He presented the board with a feasibility study that he said shows there would be no negative impact on desegregation and that the area to be detached can support its own district.

If the attorney general agrees that there would be no negative impact, the board will order an election on detachment at the time of the next school or general election, Wilson said.

State Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said the state Board of Education also would need to seek a ruling from the U.S. District Court in Little Rock that detachment would not violate the 1989 desegregation settlement to which the Pulaski County district is a party.

Wilson said that obtaining approval from the federal court is "the biggest unknown" in the process.

State now at helm of a record 4 districts (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell on Thursday took control of the financially troubled Mineral Springs School District in Howard County, immediately dissolving the elected School Board but retaining acting Superintendent Bill Blackwood until a successor gets on board.

The action was taken after state officials concluded that the 482-student district that serves the Mineral Springs and Saratoga communities faced the possibility of having insufficient cash flow to finish the school year.

"This action was necessary to keep the Mineral Springs public schools operating and serving students despite the district's extreme financial difficulties," Kimbrell said in a prepared statement.

"For the future of the district, students and the staff, state action had to be taken now," he said.

The Omnibus Quality Education Act of 2003 authorizes the state's education commissioner to take over districts classified by the state Board of Education as being in "fiscal distress" if the districts fail to make progress toward correcting their financial problems.

With the takeover of the Mineral Springs system, Kimbrell and the state are simultaneously controlling four of the state's 239 districts, a new high number of state-controlled districts. The others are the Pulaski County Special, Helena-West Helena and Dollarway school districts.

After his visit to Mineral Springs on Thursday, Kimbrell said he hopes to announce his appointment of a new Mineral Springs superintendent as soon as today. But that person may not be able to take on the job until late June or early July.

Efforts to talk to some local representatives of the district about the financial problems and the state takeover were mostly unsuccessful Thursday.

William Dixon, one of the removed School Board members, was reached at his home by phone. "I have no comment," he said when asked about the state action, and he hung up.

Kimbrell attributed the district's financial problems to over staffing and the use of multiple campuses - two high schools and two elementaries - in a small system that has declining student enrollment.

In addition, the district appears to have paid "a lot of people" with funds restricted for other uses, Kimbrell said. Some of those problems were revealed in a recent audit of the district, he said.

Asked if laws were broken, Kimbrell said that would be up to the Division of Legislative Audit and a prosecuting attorney to decide.

"I don't know if anything was illegally done, but there were things in violation of our rules in regards to allowable expenditures," he said.

Kimbrell said the district's bookkeeping made it difficult for state officials to immediately and accurately determine the district's financial situation.

Initially, state officials believed Thursday that expenditures in the district with a $5.7 million budget would exceed available revenue by more than $200,000 and that a short-term loan would be necessary to enable the district to meet payroll and other obligations through the fiscal year that ends June 30.

By the day's end, Kimbrell said there was some indication that tax revenue might be higher than earlier anticipated in the district, which may lessen the deficit.

The district first attracted the attention of state officials several months ago, when a school accreditation review and an effort to prepare a priority improvement plan for the district's Saratoga High School - categorized as being among the 5 percent of lowest-achieving schools in the state - revealed that while there were students coded as attending Saratoga High, all students were actually attending Mineral Springs High.

"I can't tell you how this happened, but they believed - through someone in the Department of Education - that it was allowable," he said about what became referred to as "the phantom high school."

For the second time in less than five years, the state Board of Education last December deemed that the district was in fiscal distress. As such, it was required to formulate a financial improvement plan.

Kimbrell said Thursday that district officials have not had the knowledge and expertise to get a satisfactory financial improvement plan in place, despite the state Education Department sending teams periodically to the district to help.

Still another issue affecting the district's finances was the fact that about a year ago, the School Board suspended Superintendent Max Adcock, but it never severed his contract. The district continues to pay him based on the contract that expires next month, Kimbrell said.

The district has had two acting superintendents in the interim, including Blackwood, who had previously retired after a long and successful career as superintendent in the De Queen School District.

Asked whether the Education Department could absorb the responsibility of managing a fourth school district, Kimbrell said the Education Department staff "will make it work."

"But it is a stretch," he said, "and it requires us to prioritize the time we have. It does stretch our resources."

Kimbrell said that despite the problems, he was optimistic about the future of the Mineral Springs district.

"It's a small school district, but there is a need for it to remain as a viable, operable district. It is our hope to get leadership in there and build a community coalition to tryto get everything in line so we can turn it back to a local board.

"It's salvageable," he added, and pointed to other districts that have been taken over by the state and were ultimately returned to financial solvency and local control.

"We've seen Decatur do it. We've seen Greenland do it. We've seen Bald Knob do it, and we are seeing Pulaski County make great strides. It's do-able. We think this is what needs to happen to try to make that happen."

Two schools marry while one gets a divorce, Commentary by Steve Brawner (Pine Bluff Commercial)

On Monday, the State Board of Education agreed to let the 357-student Bradley School District merge voluntarily with the not-that-much-bigger Emerson-Taylor School District. It's a marriage of convenience, but one both sides are entering voluntarily lest they be forced to do it later.

Why does this matter to you? Because it's yet another sign that the school consolidation that some have wanted to do quickly is instead happening slowly.

According to a history prepared by Kellar Noggle, former executive director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, the state had 4,734 school districts in 1927. That number quickly fell to 3,086 in 1933 and kept falling to 1,901 in 1947. By 1983, there were 369. Following the education reforms of the 1980s, the number dropped farther to 341 in 1986 and 312 in 1995.

Both Gov. Jim Guy Tucker and Gov. Mike Huckabee proposed administrative reforms to make the state's public school system more efficient. Tucker in 1995 proposed keeping the state's 312 school districts but creating 34 powerful regional boards overseeing them. Opponents said the plan would lead to forced consolidation and it went nowhere. In 2003, after Arkansas was sued a second time by the Lake View School District for inequitable funding, Huckabee proposed setting a 1,500-student minimum for school districts. That proposal led to such a a brouhaha that he joked that he wouldn't be venturing much outside his office until it was safe.

Instead of 1,500, the Legislature set a minimum 350-student requirement. That's been a core principle in the state's strategy for providing adequate and equitable education funding for all students — and for staying out of court. The state apportions money based on a district's student population, and when all the dollars are counted, it equals roughly $10,000 per child. The thinking is that with fewer than 350 students, there just aren't enough dollars to pay the bills and teach all the subjects students need.

The result? When 2004 began, there were still 306 districts. By July of that year, there were 254. Since then the decline has been gradual, but the momentum continues. As school districts near that 350-student minimum, parents begin to send their children elsewhere, hastening the districts' inevitable demise. That's why Bradley chose to proactively consolidate with Emerson-Taylor.

The 350-student minimum largely has accomplished its purpose. It's helped make funding relatively equal regardless of where a student goes to school. It's making the system more efficient so that taxpayers aren't paying for closely neighboring schools that really ought to be merged. It's keeping the state out of court.

But it doesn't always serve the best interests of schools or the state. The obvious example is the Weiner School District in eastern Arkansas, which was forced to consolidate with neighboring Harrisburg. Weiner had high test scores and healthy finances, but it fell below that arbitrary 350-student threshold. During this year's legislative session, Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville, proposed doing away with the number and basing consolidations on academic and financial outcomes, but it didn't pass because any such change must have evidence supporting it or the state will return to court.

There are victims in this story, but there probably aren't any villains. People simply are moving to where there are jobs, opportunities, health care, and all the things more readily available in cities than in the country. When that happens, schools dry up along with their communities.

Moreover, just because school districts consolidate doesn't mean schools do. Emerson-Taylor is the result of voluntary consolidation, and it kept schools open in both communities and plans to keep a school open in Bradley.

Finally, there's this. During the same State Board of Education meeting that led to Bradley's annexation, residents of Jacksonville made progress in splitting their schools from the Pulaski County Special School District.

That would be a good move. Pulaski County is a sprawling district that forms a doughnut around Little Rock and North Little Rock. Those weak community ties have helped make it, year in and year out, one of the state's most dysfunctional districts. Bigger is not necessarily better.

So while Bradley and Emerson-Taylor are getting married, Pulaski County appears headed to a divorce, and the number of school districts will remain at 239. However, the long-term drop in the number of districts will continue. Because of state policies and because of the choices that people make, more schools will be finding ways to live together, for better or worse.

Teacher charged with felonies in alleged sexual assault (Ashley County Observer)

A Crossett High School teacher has been charged with three felonies in connection with alleged sexual contact with a student, according to Tenth Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney Thomas Deen.

An information filed in Circuit Court by the prosecutor's office charges Amanda Leigh Reilly, 31, with two counts of second degree sexual assault and one count of solicitation of first degree sexual assault. Deen said Reilly's last known address was Greenbrier.

Each offense is a Class B felony, the information said.

Deen said the information was filed as a result of an investigation by the Arkansas State Police.

The prosecutor said defendants in such instances are later served with a summons and the information. The summons informs the defendant of the charge and sets a date for appearance before the court, Deen said, adding that, in this case, an arrest warrant will also be sought.

Ussery resigns from CHS (Carlisle Independent)

Sammy Ussery resigned as Carlisle High School principal for the upcoming school year. Ussery was hired as principal during the April 8 board meeting to replace Scott Waymire.

According to Superintendent Jason Clark, Ussery is resigning as principal, prior to his start date due to health problems and mental issues following the passing of his father in January.

Clark said he has known Ussery for many years and found him to be a fine young administrator, with lots of potential.

"I feel for Mr. Ussery and his family," Clark said. "It's unfortunate."

Clark said he would like the public to know that Ussery has done nothing to hurt the students of Carlisle and at this point, he has just been a name.

“It’s not what is best for our kids,” Clark said. “So I need to go in another direction.”

In a letter to the Carlisle High School staff, Ussery said “I regret to inform you that I will not be assuming the position of high school principal. I am sure that you were aware of some of the conditions that led me to resigning as the leader of Russellville High School. I greatly anticipated a new start and new-found health at Carlisle, but things have simply not gone according to plan. The ongoing health and emotional issues that I have experienced this past year due to illness and the death of my father have not been remedied, leaving me unable to take on a new challenge. Mr. Clark and I both agreed that coming to Carlisle in my current condition is not best for the faculty, staff and students of Carlisle High. It is clear to me that you need someone who can begin the work immediately and be their best by July 1.”

The letter continued to say “As I have stated earlier in the press, at some point, I do believe that I will be able to return to school administration, but the healing process is taking much longer that I or my doctors anticipated. Know that Mr. Clark truly does have the school’s best interest in mind and I am sure will work to find you an excellent principal. It seems like you have a wonderful school and best of luck with the next school year.”

According to the Russellville Courier, Ussery was on paid administrative leave from Russellville High School since March, when he submitted his resignation effective June 30. He cited infirmity as the reason for his resignation and was then hired as principal at Carlisle High School in April.

The Carlisle School Board accepted Ussery’s resignation on Monday night during the school board meeting. Brad Horn of Cabot was then hired to fill the position.

Ussery is also facing legal issues. According to the Courier, he was arrested following a traffic stop by the Arkansas State Police near Russellville. He was charged with possession of an instrument of crime, a Class A misdemeanor, and failing to provide right-of-way to a law enforcement vehicle that lights flashing March 25. Ussery pleaded not guilty in Pope County District Court on April 30.

School board hires new principals (Carlisle Independent)

The Carlisle School board unanimously voted to hire two new principals Monday night during the school board meeting.

Brad Horn of Cabot will be taking the position of high school principal for the 2013-2014 school year. Horn has been teaching for 14 years in both the secondary and mid-level grades. He is also served four years in the Navy. Horn is currently a teacher in the Cabot School District.

Superinten-dent Jason Clark said while interviewing Horn for the elementary principal position, he saw better fit for him in the high school principal’s position.

“I saw things in him that would make a top notch principal,” Clark said.

Karen Norton of Warren has accepted the position as elementary principal for the 2013-2014 school year. She has worked in the school system for 17 years and was named the Arkansas Teacher of the Year in 2002. Norton is currently the assistant principal at Monticello Intermediate School.

“I’m very excited,” Norton said.

The board also unanimously voted to accept Clark’s proposal to pay round trip mileage and $50 per day to Norton and Horn for days worked until July 1 when their contracts begin. Clark said he is ready to both of them to work and both are under contract with their districts, which are almost up.

In other business, Clark told the board that the bid deadline for the high school asphalt project has been extended until noon on Monday, May 20. Clark said he is hoping the bids would come in within or below the budget. He said once the bids are in, the board will the decide what they want to spend in asphalt.

The board unanimously voted to authorize Stratton Seed to purchase fill dirt from the high school property for $20 per load, pending they find an alternate route from the high school drive or parking lot. McCallie and board member Cliff Schafer both expressed their concern with large trucks being driven on the school drives and the parking lots.

The board was presented with a proposal to allow a newly-started non-profit football program to use the football field for games. The organization, Carlisle Youth Football League is separate from both the school and the city football program because it is to be Christian based and the gospel will be shared with the boys, according to Eric Thorton.

This is to rid the city or district of any liability issues. Thorton said the program is designed for boys in third through sixth grade and will be privately funded by local churches. Thorton said he and other parents saw both a need and an opportunity to share “Jesus Christ” with these young men, as well as to teach them character, discipline and potentially produce better athletes. The board agreed that more information about the program’s game dates and its role with the city league was needed before any decision could be made.

Clark said the scheduling loyalty would first to the school varsity teams, then to the city and then to the Carlisle Youth Football League, if there was room for a third team.

“We will take this into consideration,” board president Terry McCallie said. “We need to dig into it a little deeper.”

Thorton told the board, despite their decision, the program would still be started.

School of choice regulations have seen a major change, according to Clark. Clark said the racial balance for school of choice is no longer a factor. According to Clark, anyone wishing to Carlisle School District for the 2013-2014 school year has until June 1 to apply. He said according to the new changes, the district cannot lose more than three percent of its population. Clark said there are already five students

wanting to choice into the district; two from Hazen, two from Lonoke and one from DeWitt. He said there is also one student wanting to choice out to Stuttgart.

The district's annual accreditation report is in. Clark said it is often a difficult task, but both the elementary and high school are fully accredited for the 2012-2013 school year.

Also during the meeting, the board unanimously voted to:

• Appoint William Rountree as athletic director

• Hire Holly Boothe as sixth grade literacy teacher

• Hire Bawanna Hooper as psychological examiner

• Accept the resignation of Adam Leatherwood as coach

• Accept the resignation of Sammy Ussery as high school principal

• Accept the resignation of Tim Hill as bus driver

• Accept the resignation of Michael Smith as track coach, social studies teacher and bus driver

• Purchase the TLI testing assessment for $15, 774

• Contract Christopher Saw at $8.25 per hour for tech support

High school graduation is set for 3 p.m. on Sunday at Bison Arena. Sixth grade graduation will be at 9 a.m. on May 28 in the Elementary Cafeteria.

C.J. Parker was absent from the meeting. The next regular scheduled board meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. on June 10 in the board room at the superintendent's office.

From Gangster to Superintendent: Dexter Suggs Recalls Violent Past (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext?nxd_id=664002

ST. LOUIS, MO - In St. Louis, tourists flock to the attractions like the Gateway Arch and Busch Gardens. But driving through neighborhoods like Walnut Park is a different story. Dr. Dexter Suggs, the new Little Rock School District superintendent, knows these streets all too well.

"it's one of the most violent environments in the city of St. Louis," Suggs said, "It's one ofthe reasons probably why the crime rate remains so high."

Suggs walked them, or "ran" this block, using terms he uttered while in a gang, as early as middle school.

"The Dexter back then, we couldn't have a conversation because more than likely I'm going to hit you in your face and I don't even know you," he said.

Suggs protected his turf at all costs. No matter the consequences. He points to his head, where someone hit him with a crowbar, leaving a scar.

"It split me open and blood was gushing," he remembers.

Suggs was also shot twice in his teens, taking two bullets each time.

"You can take your finger and push it in my side and it disappears for a while," he demonstrates, "That particular time I thought I was gone."

But things changed for Suggs when he came to a county-based high school, part of the court-ordered desegregation plan. With A different focus and environment, he experienced something he'd never had before.

"The whole intent of going to a county-based school was to get more involved in school and get out of the streets per se," he said.

And he did, not only excelling in the classroom, but also in sports. And he was recognized for it too.

"It was my desire to uproot myself from this particular environment," Suggs said, noting that it led to changes in his outlook on life.

He finished high school and went on to college. From there, he joined the military -- but not for the money.

"To ensure that i didn't have to come back to this environment," he said.

In the military, he met Roger Allen, another St. Louis native who knew about Suggs before he met him.

"You would hear of Dexter," Allen said, "You would hear of what his exploits were."

But Allen got to see a different side of Suggs in the military.

"Here's this guy who I know at any minute could pull a .44 and kill anybody he wanted to and not think about it and navigating me to take this science class," Allen recalled.

The now-transformed Suggs motivated Allen to go to college. Allen went on to graduate and is now working for the government. As a tribute to his friend's influence on his life, Allen named his son after Suggs.

"To look at where he was and where he is today, Dexter is supposed to be in jail or dead. Easy," Allen said.

That's why Allen believes Suggs is the right fit for LRSD: he can show the younger generation they have the power to shape their futures, no matter their past.

Suggs doesn't start his new job until July 1st, but he's already made appearances at the schools he will oversee. Last week, he greeted students at Forest Park on Bike to School Day, even riding a bike himself.

PCSSD Parents Needed To Pay Outstanding Lunch Balances (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext?nxd_id=663902

LITTLE ROCK, AR-- The 2012-2013 school term will end in a few days and Pulaski County Special School District leaders need parents to pay outstanding lunch fees by May 31.

Leaders instituted a new policy this year, allowing elementary and middle school students to charge their meals, if they don't have money to pay. That can be done up to 3 times until the balance is cleared.

"Please go to your school, contact your cafeteria by phone or your principal, and find out your child's outstanding balance and try to have that paid by May 31," said student nutrition director Regena English.

Last school year, unpaid meals costs the district $161,000. But because of the new policy put in place this year, the costs amount to $5,000.

Ark. lawmakers to formally adjourn session (KATV, Channel 7)

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) - Arkansas lawmakers are returning to the Capitol to formally end this year's legislative session, the first with Republicans in control since Reconstruction.

The House and Senate on Friday plan to formally adjourn the legislative session that wrapped up last month with the approval of the state's $4.9 billion budget.

The sponsor of 3 bills vetoed by Democratic Gov. Mike Beebe aimed at overhauling the state's election commission has said he wants to attempt an override when lawmakers convene. But state Senate President Michael Lamoureux says he believes it's unlikely there will be enough lawmakers present Friday for an override.

The session was the first with Republicans holding a majority in the House and Senate in 138 years. The Legislature will convene again next year for a more limited fiscal session.