

**Minutes**  
**State Board of Education Special Committee on Academic Distress Meeting**  
**Friday, September 11, 2015**

The State Board of Education Special Committee on Academic Distress met Friday, September 11, 2015, in the Arkansas Department of Education Auditorium. Chair Vicki Saviers called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m.

Present: Vicki Saviers, Chair; Diane Zook; Brett Williamson; and Ouida Newton.

Additional State Board members present: Charisse Dean; Joe Black; and Susan Chambers

Absent: Toyce Newton

**Reports**

**Report-1 Chair's Report**

No report.

**Consent Agenda**

Ms. Zook moved, seconded by Ms. Chamber, to approve the consent agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

Item included in the Consent Agenda:

- **Minutes - August 14, 2015**

**Action Agenda**

**A-1 Progress Report from Blytheville High School - A New Tech School and Blytheville Middle School, Blytheville School District**

Mr. Elbert Harvey said the Blytheville High School - A New Tech School and Blytheville Middle School, Blytheville School District were classified as Academic Distressed on February 12, 2015.

Blytheville School District Superintendent Mr. Richard Atwill said the district has embraced the academic distress classification. He said the district was employing a strategic process for improvement.

District Curriculum Director Ms. Sally Cooke said the district was utilizing data to identify the root causes and target the needed changes. She said partnerships have been formed among staff between the primary, elementary, middle school, and high school.

New Tech Director Ms. Teryn Spears said instruction and culture are critical to the change needed at the Blytheville School District. She said the culture included student empowerment for their own learning, enabling students to learn through 1-1 technology, and engagement of students in problem-based learning. Ms. Spears said the student surveys indicated reductions in absenteeism and out of school suspensions. She said the students are taking ownership for their learning.

Mr. Atwill said the culture was changing. He said the district had declining enrollment but the community stakeholders are participating in the changes at the schools. He said the students have a voice in the changes. He said teaching and learning are the focus and technology is one of the many tools being used.

Ms. Cooke said the district has streamlined the approach to using data to inform all school improvement decisions and efforts. She said leaders were observing in classrooms and providing feedback to teachers. She said all educators are serving as interventionists and have received training. She said intervention time was built into the schedule for the middle school and high school. Ms. Cooke said there was vertical alignment of instruction and intervention in the district.

Ms. Spears said the students were initially resistant to the change but now the students are embracing the changes and holding each other accountable for their learning. She said the community was volunteering as support for the schools.

Ms. Spears said the students are matched with an advisor who assists the students with their career planning. She said the district is also partnering with the local technical college to provide opportunities for students to learn specialized skills.

The team discussed how the district was addressing the four improvement recommendations.

ADE School Improvement Specialist Dr. Robert Toney said the district offers no excuses. He the staff has a culture of candor to ask the tough questions in order to find the best solutions.

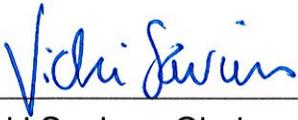
Mr. Atwill said the school board has been very supportive and involved in the school improvement.

The State Board commended the district on their progress and encouraged the team to continue to reach out to other regional communities for support.

## Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

*Minutes recorded by Deborah Coffman.*

  
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Vicki Saviers, Chair