

September 11, 2019

Dear Arkansas State Board Members and Commissioner Key:

The educators of the Little Rock School District have met and worked collaboratively to create a plan for the smooth and successful return of local control to the Little Rock School District (LRSD). LRSD educators work closest to our children and therefore, understand best the needs that must be met in order for our students and our schools to be successful. We believe that the time is overdue for our voices to be heard and taken seriously and our recommendations implemented. We are the professionals who have studied Child Growth and Development, who work closely with our students of greatest need, and who have dedicated our lives to public education in the City of Little Rock. While we believe the decision on how and when the Little Rock School District School Board is restored is best left to the total citizenry of Little Rock, we have the experience and expertise necessary to create the best possible plan for a successful transition to local control and for success of the school district after local control is restored.

The educators of LRSD met last week to work collaboratively on developing a plan for restoring local control to the LRSD and on a plan for what happens after local control is restored to make the LRSD into a world class school district. This week, a smaller group of educators from every level met and disaggregated what was collected from the larger group into a feasible plan that constitutes what is being presented to you this evening. We strongly suggest that you consider the plan we have prepared because we know that it is the best path forward for the LRSD and for the Little Rock community. We do not wish for the school year to be disrupted by the actions that will surely come if LRSD is not restored to local control. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our proposal and look forward to a bright future for our district for our children.

Sincerely,

Teresa Knapp Gordon, President
Little Rock Education Association

Proposal for Moving LRSD Forward After Restoration of Local Control

Rationale:

The following recommendations are rooted in our LRSD educators' expertise in child growth and development, knowledge, and experience, as well as in best practices.

Critical Need:

A study conducted by an impartial party to clearly define why schools were unable to meet the ADE criteria for school success and if the criteria were reasonable based on statewide indicator comparisons.

Currently identified (as of October 19, 2018) and potential LRSD struggling schools:

- LRSD principals at struggling schools who have been at their location for three or more years where there has not been improvement (at minimum moving up one state letter grade) will be removed from their position at the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year or henceforth at the conclusion of their third year beginning with Principals placed in their current position prior to the start of the 2017-2018 school year. Additionally, administrators who are removed will become ineligible for any future administrative, supervisory, or leadership positions in LRSD.
- Student Enrichment should be provided for students and parents after school at no cost.
 - Utilize current and future Community Partners to provide programming for enrichment.
 - Enrichment programs should be staffed by individuals from the community who have not been teaching all day. One potential source to staff the Enrichment Programs could be retired teachers.
 - Consider repurposing City Year Corps members to refocus their work in the after-school Enrichment Program rather than pull-outs from elementary class time which has become sacrosanct with the implementation of the new Literacy Program and increased recess time.
 - Utilize surrounding churches and business partnerships to support after-school Enrichment activities. An example would be someone from a church music ministry coming one afternoon a week to provide musical enrichment.

- Utilize local gyms, dojos, etc. to provide weekly instruction in specific sports and fitness activities.
- Provide additional funding for increased staffing. Supplemental staffing should be made based on school-by-school needs identified by staff, students, parents and community members. Options might include a full-time counselor, social worker, nurse, assistant principal, or other positions to meet the specific needs of the school population as identified by the stakeholders.
- Develop a formal process for teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community to identify school needs and a means to address those needs in accordance with High Reliability Schools' leading indicators 1.5. (Teachers and staff have formal ways to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school) and 1.6 (Students, parents, and the community have formal ways to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school).
- Provide professional development for all staff prior to the contractual start date of the 2020-2021 school year in Social and Emotional Learning and Cultural Competencies by either adding days to the contract or paying them at their daily rate of pay. Notification for this professional development should be made to staff prior to the final day of the 2019-2020 school year.
- Provide staff at the struggling schools with the following incentives:
 - Guaranteed Teacher Fair Dismissal Act and Public School Employee Fair Hearing protections in their contract.
 - Unused sick leave for staff could be bought back at the end of the school year at the sub rate of pay if employees do not exceed a negotiated number of absences.
 - Yoga, mindfulness, and meditation training provided to staff at no cost to twice a week to reduce stress.
- Certified new hires should not be in the process of Alternative Certification. Alternative Certification teachers must have three years minimum of successful teaching experience in order to work in a struggling school. The priority for Human Resources will be to staff the struggling schools with the best teachers.
- Class size reduction
 - Kindergarten classes capped at 14 students.
 - Grades 1-12 classes capped at 20 students.
 - Class size reduction remains in place until struggling schools reach an ADE grade of "C:"

- The Community School Model and/or the Teacher Led School Model should be discussed and implemented with fidelity in the struggling schools where there is support for those models from the staff, parents, schools, and community.
- Additional SPED teachers provided as support for co-teaching in elementary and core classes at secondary.
- Transportation should be provided for parents to attend conferences, other school related events, and when requested to come to a school for a meeting concerning their child(ren) during the school day.
 - Could be through the METRO system free passes like students.
 - Could be a “School Uber” developed by neighborhood support groups or partners
- Translators should be provided for parents/guardians for all interactions at schools and with school personnel following with the ADE Family and Community Engagement Framework.

Districtwide implementation:

- TESS will be implemented with fidelity in all schools, including adhering to all timelines and supports required by the framework.
- Employ Area Assistant superintendents, replacing grade-level Executive Directors, based on a vertical alignment of the feeder patterns from the Early Childhood Centers to the four high schools beginning in 2020-2021. This will ensure parents/guardians are afforded the opportunity to build relationships beneficial for their students.
- Teachers of the Year (District and Grade-levels for a total of 4) will serve in rotation as full Ad Hoc members of the School board to provide educators a voice in developing district policy. This would provide the perspective of educators at all grade levels throughout the course of the year.
- Staffing selections and changes required by consolidation and reconfiguration of schools should be made by a selection committee comprised of the following members:
 - 1 Appropriate LRSD Executive Director
 - 1 HR Coordinator (Certified Personnel)
 - 2 School District Parents/Guardians with students in our schools
 - 1 Community Member

- 2 Teachers/Support Staff agreed to by LREA from the appropriate grade levels (May not serve if applying for any position at the site OR if anyone with a familial relation might apply)
- 1 ADE Department of Educator Effectiveness Member
- The first responsibility of this committee will be to hire a Lead Administrator (Principal) for each site. Once this individual is selected, they will be added to the selection committee for all future hires at that specific location.
- Develop community partnerships based on demonstrated needs identified by the school staff and community members, NOT based on assumptions of needs.
- Collaborate with the City of Little Rock leadership and the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce to provide incentives from businesses to parents/guardians who reduce their student'(s) tardies, absences, and early checkouts each nine weeks.