

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS
WESTERN DIVISION

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.*

PLAINTIFFS

No. 4:82-cv-866-DPM

PULASKI COUNTY SPECIAL SCHOOL
DISTRICT, JACKSONVILLE/NORTH
PULASKI SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.*

DEFENDANTS

EMILY McCLENDON, TAMARA EACKLES,
VALERIE STALLINGS, TIFFANY ELLIS,
and LINDA MORGAN

INTERVENORS

ORDER

The Court is attaching Ms. Powell's fourth summary report, which covers achievement-related matters at JNPSD. *No 5502 at 2-3.* The Court appreciates her work.

So Ordered.

D.P. Marshall Jr.

D.P. Marshall Jr.
United States District Judge

19 November 2019

UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THE JACKSONVILLE/NORTH PULASKI SCHOOL DISTRICT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN 2000 -ACHIEVEMENT

On July 18, 2019, Chief U. S. District Judge D. Price Marshall, Jr., directed the Court Expert to issue written status reports on the remaining areas of the Jacksonville/North Pulaski School District's (JNPSD) desegregation plan (Plan 2000) that remain under Court supervision (Doc 5502). This report is number four of eight.

ACHIEVEMENT (Plan 2000-Section M)

Please note that Plan 2000 does not mention the JNPSD, because it did not exist when the plan was written. However, as a condition for being legally recognized as an independent Pulaski County school district, the JNPSD had to agree to being bound by the same provisions of Plan 2000 as the PCSSD. For the purpose of clarity, when citing the plan provision being reported, JNPSD has been substituted in the cases where the plan says PCSSD.

Note: In this case, for reporting purposes, there are only two racial categories: black and white. There is no category for "Other"; all non-black individuals are reported as white.

Background

On November 4, 1999, the PCSSD submitted its new desegregation plan, Plan 2000, for court approval. After the hearing, the district's administrators discovered that a draft copy of an Education Plan, which was a proposed set of goals designed to improve the racial disparities associated with achievement and discipline in the district, had been mistakenly included in the submission. As a result, that draft proposal became what can best be described as an attachment to Plan 2000. The Education Plan, referred to as the "Ross Plan," was authored by Dr. Steven M. Ross, a consultant from the University of Memphis. The plan consists of a series of goals and activities the district would have to take to improve discipline and achievement with respect to black students. All of the goals of the Ross Plan have been imbedded in the Findings Section.

PLAN PROVISION

The JNPSD shall implement the plans designed to improve student achievement, recommended by Dr. Stephen Ross, and shall work with Dr. Ross in their implementation. (M.1, pg 6)

Findings

- FEPSI (Formative Evaluation Process for School Improvement) is a school improvement plan developed by the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), a consulting organization affiliated with the University of Memphis. Elements of FEPSI are some of the tools the JNPSD employs to address achievement as well as discipline. The JNPSD submits an annual Strategic Plan to the Court that contains the goals of the FEPSI model. Using surveys and auditing tools, district personnel are able to develop and employ strategies that they feel will work best for their students. According to the Assistant Superintendent for Desegregation, every school in the district has deliberately adopted strategic education plans that include the goals of the Ross Plan.

- *Note: See Office of Desegregation Monitoring Report: “Update On The Status of The Pulaski County Special School District’s Implementation of Plan 2000” dated August 16, 2006, pgs. 33-41, for an in-depth description of the FEPSI process.*
- AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is one of the most comprehensive programs adopted by the JNPSD that address student achievement. While the program is open to all students, most of the participants are underachieving middle and high school students. Students receive academic instruction and support tailored to their individual needs (including a focus on addressing the education of minority and low income students). The Assistant Superintendent for Desegregation revealed that although the program was not fully implemented until 2018, “AVID has already helped to improve opportunity and outcomes for students who have taken advantage of the program.”
- Response to Intervention (RtI) is another component of PCSSD’s compliance with Plan 2000, as it relates to achievement. It is described as a means to focus educational efforts on individual students. Each school has a RtI committee that is composed of a principal or assistant principal, school counselor, and teachers. The committee meets weekly to develop positive supports for each student.
- Titan Time is designed to provide a specific time during the school day for Kindergarten through 5th grade students to receive individualized instruction. For example, students who are struggling with particular concepts receive instruction prescriptive to their needs. On the other hand, students who are advanced in certain areas receive enhanced instruction designed to challenge them.
- At the 6th grade level, students can take Titan Strategies Class to continue tailored instruction and behavioral supports similar to Titan Time. Jacksonville Middle School has embedded a 25 minutes block each day to provide interventions for students having problems with reading and/or math. These students are tested every nine weeks and regrouped based on needs. The district also provides a 6th grade reading and a 6th grade math intervention class for students identified as being in need of support based on ACT Aspire scores.
- After reviewing the high school’s ACT Aspire data, district officials completely revamped the high school schedule (see scores at the end of the Findings narratives). The schedule was changed from a 50 minutes per class, 7 period day, to a 75 minute per class 5 period block schedule. This schedule allows more time for small group instruction and enrichment. Additionally, students are offered before-school tutoring in math and literacy.
- PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) is a system where teachers and administrators meet as a team during the school day to discuss best practices for students. Overall program design is discussed as well as individual student needs. The district has contracted with Solution Tree (a professional education services company) to train administrators on program basics and to enhance their PLCs. All district schools rated a “C” or below on the State’s school performance indicators have a Solution Tree coach to help address learning.
- Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL), is a framework designed to help the district to “enhance instruction by focusing on real world application of academic skills.” The

- Assistant Superintendent for Desegregation shared that the strategies used in the Ford NGL system help by improving education strategies that address students, especially African-American students, in the style of education that helps them to grow the most.
- In the 2018-19 school year, using the Ford NGL model, the JNPSD developed and implemented the Freshman Seminar and Freshman Academy classes. Freshman Seminar is a transition course for ninth graders that prepares them for success in high school, post-secondary education, and careers. Students learn about themselves with respect to their interests and aptitudes. They also learn study skills, develop life and employability skills, and gain career knowledge.
 - The JNPSD uses NWEA Map testing as the main assessment tool to identify gaps in learning. The tests are administered online to students three times during the school year. The tests are aligned with the district's curriculum and produce a "RIT score" that shows skills mastered or not mastered by students. Teachers use the test results to focus on the areas not mastered. The test results are uploaded to a program named Edgenuity that creates individual instruction paths that are designed to help students to perform at or above grade level in the areas tested.
 - The Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy (CWDSA) is an educational collaboration between the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and Philander Smith College. According to its literature, the aim of CWDSA is "...to improve educational achievement of all students, with special attention to African American and Hispanic students and others who are at risk of academic failure due to socioeconomic disadvantage or other factors." In 2014, under Court order, this program became an additional obligation under Plan 2000. The district is required to provide funding for the CWDSA, and the academy is responsible for: helping the district's students who are enrolled there to improve academic achievement, increase graduation rates, and increase test scores used in college admissions, by using a variety of methods. Some activities involve one-on-one tutoring, teaching critical thinking skills, providing students the opportunity to have "first time" experiences, such as traveling outside of Arkansas, and having cross cultural interactions, both inside the continental U.S. and overseas. CWDSA staff members make visits to district schools in an effort to recruit students to participate in the Scholars Program.

ACT Aspire Results 2016/2018

Black Students	White Students
3 rd grade ELA (51% - 54%)	3 rd grade ELA (66% - 62%)
3 rd grade reading (18% - 21%)	3 rd grade reading (33% - 35%)
3 rd grade science (18% - 14%)	3 rd grade science (37% - 34%)
3 rd grade math (35% - 40%)	3 rd grade math (55% - 55%)
4 th grade ELA (44% - 40%)	4 th grade ELA (60% - 67%)
4 th grade reading (18% - 17%)	4 th grade reading (32% - 43%)
4 th grade science (19% - 13%)	4 th grade science (35% - 39%)
4 th grade math (25% - 19%)	4 th grade math (44% - 46%)

ACT Aspire Results 2016/2018 (continued)

5 th grade ELA (55% - 56%)	5 th grade ELA (58% - 62%)
5 th grade reading (13% - 19%)	5 th grade reading (18% - 34%)
5 th grade science (17% - 16%)	5 th grade science (24% - 34%)
5 th grade math (27% - 20%)	5 th grade math (33% - 39%)
6 th grade ELA (50% - 54%)	6 th grade ELA (50% - 61%)
6 th grade reading (20% - 15%)	6 th grade reading (28% - 27%)
6 th grade science (13% - 12%)	6 th grade science (30% - 37%)
6 th grade math (25% - 37%)	6 th grade math (44% - 29%)
7 th grade ELA (58% - 51%)	7 th grade ELA (65% - 71%)
7 th grade reading (11% - 9%)	7 th grade reading (18% - 26%)
7 th grade science (10%- 8%)	7 th grade science (26% - 26%)
7 th grade math (19% - 13%)	7 th grade math (28% - 30%)
8 th grade ELA (57% - 50%)	8 th grade ELA (65%-63%)
8 th grade reading (25% - 27%)	8 th grade reading (38% - 44%)
8 th grade science (15% - 11%)	8 th grade science (36% - 34%)
8 th grade math (13% - 11%)	8 th grade math (28% - 26%)
9 th grade ELA (31% - 31%)	9 th grade ELA (52% - 49%)
9 th grade reading (14% - 12%)	9 th grade reading (38% - 34%)
9 th grade science (12% - 7%)	9 th grade science (36% - 20%)
9 th grade math (5% - 9%)	9 th grade math (16% - 24%)
10 th grade ELA (31% - 32%)	10 th grade ELA (48% - 59%)
10 th grade reading (8% - 10%)	10 th grade reading (24% - 29%)
10 th grade science (6% - 8%)	10 th grade science (24% - 29%)
10 th grade math (3% - 6%)	10 grade math (13% - 20%)

ELA=English Language Arts

GRADUATION RATES

Black Students

2016 - 77%
2017 - 90%
2018 - 85%

Overall graduation rate

2016 - 71%
2017 - 87%
2018 - 83%

COMMENTS

As of yet, test results for JNPSD students are all over the map. Unfortunately the results so far do not reflect a narrowing of the achievement gap between black students and white students. In addition, the data show no indication that student achievement is improving in the district as a whole.

One explanation could be that much of the student body was educated under the Pulaski County Special School District system, and the change over to the newly formed Jacksonville/North Pulaski School District system was a difficult adjustment for them. Change can be difficult for some, especially children.

JNPSD officials point out that they inherited a low achieving student population at the time the district began operations. It is no secret that even in the best of circumstances, raising test scores is a painstakingly difficult endeavor. It only takes a few low performing students to lower a district's achievement results. Another factor that may be considered is that just about everything and everybody were, and still are, relatively new to the students, and the staff members were new to each other. It takes time to settle in, to effect change, and to develop a "district culture."

Fortunately, the PCSSD has developed a Strategic Plan designed to improve student achievement, and to address issues associated with academic performance. The JNPSD has assembled an arsenal of programs, projects, and interventions designed to address every component of teaching and learning. FEPSI and Professional Learning Communities strengthen and boost teacher skills, while AVID and the Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy are student centered programs that help students to improve academic skills. Other programs provide assessment data and prescriptions to aid staff in developing individualized instructional strategies that assist students on an individual basis to attain academic success. It should also be noted that the graduation rates for black students have exceeded the graduation rates for the rest of the student body in each year examined.

It will take time to determine if all of the JNPSD'S efforts will move the performance needle in the right direction. Three years of data cannot provide enough information to determine a trend in performance in any educational category. In their efforts to improve achievement and to eliminate achievement disparities, district personnel may sometime feel like Sisyphus pushing a boulder uphill, but unlike Sisyphus, given time, they have the tools, the teamwork, and the talent to be successful.