

Upshur County Schools Special Circumstance Review Update

July 2024



Background

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) Office of Federal Programs conducted a routine monitoring of Upshur County Schools in December 2022. This resulted in a report of findings which was completed on February 10, 2023. Per Federal Program protocols, counties are provided 60 days to respond to findings, establishing Upshur County Schools' deadline for response as May 8, 2023.

The State Superintendent of Schools notified the WVDE Office of Accountability the week of May 8, 2023, of his intent to commence a Special Circumstance Review of Upshur County Schools. This put into motion planning phases inclusive of team members from the offices of Accountability, Federal Programs, and Finance.

The team began its Special Circumstance Review of Upshur County Schools on May 22, 2023. The review process, consisting of interviews and document review, was conducted as outlined in West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) Policy 2322: West Virginia System of Support and Accountability. The initial findings of the review process were presented to the WVBE in June 2023, at which time the WVBE voted to intervene in the operation of Upshur County Schools. The WVBE was updated on Upshur County Schools at the December 13, 2023, State Board meeting. Staff outlined additional focus areas with items of noncompliance, areas of progress, and next steps.

Notable Areas of Progress

- » Upshur County Schools examined overtime pay which revealed the county was spending nearly \$1 million annually in overtime. This resulted in a review of policies and practices to improve operational efficiency.
- » In September, Upshur County Schools began setting learning targets and goals with its schools and as a county, began working toward improving leadership across the system and developing a common understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- » Upshur County Schools began a credit recovery review in mid-September after discovering the county's credit recovery process/program was yielding questionable results where students recovered large numbers of credits.
- » First quarter data meetings were completed with all principals in October. This included beginning-of-year data analysis, discussions of school-based concerns, strategic planning, self-reflections, and the establishment of achievement goals.

- » Also in October, Upshur County Schools identified changing behaviors of students as an area of concern. It engaged external resources to develop sessions with principals. This effort assisted schools in providing necessary supports to keep students in school and maximizing learning while keeping behaviors in check. This also ensured services were not duplicated or impeding progress with students.
- » The county conducted a curriculum and resource audit in all schools. The process attempted to bolster academic efficiency by determining with teaching staffs what programs were necessary and what programs could be eliminated.
- » Superintendent Miller convened the first superintendent's advisory meeting in November. Each school submitted two names to participate, one professional personnel and one service personnel.
- » Following the December 13, 2023, WVBE meeting, Upshur County Schools processed the repayment of more than \$800,000.00.
- » By the start of January 2024, Upshur County Schools notified the WVDE it had reviewed and revised two sections of the policy manual: bylaws and finance. As of June, a draft of the entire policy manual is being prepared for review to be made available on the county website.
- » The WVDE completed a Special Education audit in December 2023 at Superintendent Miller's request.
- » Upshur County Schools secured a Special Education specialist to address items outlined in the audit. Subsequent guidance, mentoring, and support has led to multiple action steps. This included a process of reviewing all student IEPs and training on topics inclusive of Policy 2419, Functional Behavior Assessments, Behavior Intervention Plans and Manifestation Determination Hearings.
- » Steven Wotring, transition liaison and advisor, reported a comprehensive restructuring of the strategic planning process. Data talks for the county have been completed quarterly at each school. The final round was completed in May with principal evaluations.
- » Upshur County Schools reports all personnel at the board office have received an evaluation for the 2023-2024 school year. This had not occurred for many central office staff since 2019.