

BEFORE THE ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

On March 12, 2020, during a regular meeting of the Arkansas State Board of Education, the State Board considered the Petition of the Harmony Grove School District to close its Sparkman K-12 campus, which is an “isolated school” as defined by Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-601, at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. The State Board conducted the hearing pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602 and the Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing the Closure of Isolated Schools.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On January 16, 2020, by majority vote, the Harmony Grove Board of Directors voted to close the District’s Sparkman K-12 campus at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, with five members voting in favor of closure and two voting against closure.
2. On January 31, 2020, the District filed with the State Board a Petition for Closure of a Building of an Isolated School; namely, its Sparkman K-12 campus.
3. At the time of the District’s Petition, the enrollment at its Sparkman Campus was 118 students, with Sparkman Elementary School serving 60 students in grades K-6 and Sparkman High School serving 56 students in grades 7-12.
4. For the 2018-2019 school year, the Sparkman Elementary School received a letter grade of “C,” and the Sparkman High School received a letter grade of “D.”
5. In its Petition, the District reasoned that its Sparkman campus must be closed for fiscal reasons, and that its closure would allow the District to better address the academic needs of all District students. The District also stated that transporting Sparkman campus students to the Harmony Grove campus would be done in a manner as to minimize the students’ inconvenience

to the fullest extent possible, and would provide those students with enhanced access to academic programs and extracurricular activities.

6. The Petition was opposed by a group identifying itself as “a group of citizens, taxpayers and patrons of the Sparkman schools.” The group filed a written Opposition to Petition for Closure of Sparkman Schools.

7. Both the District and opposition presented additional evidence and argument during the hearing.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND ORDER

8. The Sparkman K-12 Campus is an “isolated school” as defined by Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-601.

9. Because the Board of Directors of the Harmony Grove School District did not vote unanimously to close its Sparkman Campus (although a majority of members voted to close the campus), Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b) requires State Board approval for closure of the Sparkman campus.

10. According to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b)(2)(C), the State Board shall only approve the closure of an isolated school, such as the Sparkman campus, if it determines that the closure is in the best interest of the students in the school district as a whole, and that the closure would have no negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate a valid court order.

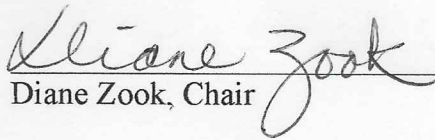
11. There was no evidence presented that closure of the Sparkman campus would have a negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate a valid court order.

12. Based on the Petition and the Opposition to Petition, as well as evidence and argument presented at the hearing, the State Board found that closure of the Sparkman campus

would not be in the best interest of the students in the school district as a whole, and thus denied the District's Petition, effective March 12, 2020.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

On this 24 day of March, 2020



Diane Zook, Chair