
ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

TAKEN MARCH 13, 2025
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Arkansas Diamond Court Reporting

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A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

DR. SARAH MOORE, Chair
MS. KATHY McFERTRIDGE-ROLLINS
MS. LISA HUNTER
MR. KEN BRAGG
MS. LEIGH KEENER
MS. ADRIENNE WOODS
DR. GARY ARNOLD
MR. RANDY HENDERSON

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

MR. JACOB OLIVA, ADE Secretary
MS. STACY SMITH, Deputy Secretary of Education
MR. BEAU MCCAHLAIN, Arkansas Teacher of the Year
MS. HOPE WORSHAM, Assistant Commissioner - Public School
Accountability

LOCATION:

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
- AUDITORIUM
#4 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

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P R O C E E D I N G S

V.1 ASHDOWN WAIVER REQUEST OF STANDARD 4-B.1

1
2
3 CHAIR MOORE: We will move on to your Action
4 Agenda. I don't believe there are any changes to
5 the agenda. Well, then we will start with our
6 first Agenda item, the Ashdown School District is
7 requesting a waiver for their superintendent. And
8 I see Ms. Debbie Greathouse on Zoom here this
9 morning.

10 MS. WORSHAM: Good morning, Hope Worsham,
11 Assistant Commissioner for Public School
12 Accountability. I'm bringing to you a waiver
13 request from the Ashdown School District. It's a
14 request to waive Standard 4-B.1, which requires a
15 licensed superintendent to be in place for the
16 school district.

17 The reason the District is requesting this
18 waiver at the moment is because their
19 superintendent had to vacate that position in
20 January, I do believe, and they have an interim,
21 that person is not licensed at the moment, however,
22 and they do not intend to seek licensure because
23 that is not their future path, and Ashdown is
24 currently seeking a superintendent, so this is such
25 to get them through the remainder of the school

1 year, and that person is serving in that capacity
2 and she's here today to speak if you have any
3 questions.

4 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. Ms. Greathouse,
5 would you like to speak?

6 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: I think we kind of
7 told our story on our application, but I'm happy to
8 go through it with you if you would like for me to.
9 But I think the most important thing I want to tell
10 you today is, we have hired a full-time certified
11 superintendent.

12 He will be coming on board on July 1. He's
13 not going to leave his current school, so now I
14 have two certified superintendents that I'm working
15 with daily, our previous superintendent, Mr.
16 Nichols, and my newly hired superintendent, Mr.
17 Robert Poole from Prescott. I have all of my
18 fellow superintendents that are helping me. Mr.
19 Benny Weston, director of our Coop. Lots of help I
20 have been offered and very graciously accepted.

21 CHAIR MOORE: Well, thank you for sharing
22 through that and I know -- how long have you been
23 in the District?

24 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: I've been in the
25 District for 34 years.

1 CHAIR MOORE: That's amazing.

2 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: I've served in a
3 variety of capacities; however, administration was
4 never my desire. I like working with kids. But I
5 have served as dean of students for parts of two
6 different years, when we had administrators who
7 became sick or ill. I've been Federal Programs
8 Coordinator now for 14 years. I worked extremely
9 close with Mr. Nichols. I've handled all aspects
10 of accreditation and accountability, budgeting,
11 that's why Mr. Nichols chose me to fill in this
12 role and so the District could have someone come on
13 board.

14 It was the least amount of disruption to our
15 campuses to allow our administrators to stay in
16 their current positions rather than pull one off
17 the campus. This is testing season coming up and
18 our campuses have very good plans in place for
19 student achievement and we wanted that to continue
20 very smoothly, uninterrupted, and so I agreed to
21 take this position.

22 CHAIR MOORE: Well, thank you and thank you
23 for your many years of service to the State and to
24 students.

25 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: Thank you.

1 CHAIR MOORE: I'm going to open it up for
2 Board Member questions, Ms. Worsham and Ms.
3 Greathouse, to my left. Mr. Wood?

4 MR. WOOD: Well, the application with the
5 waiver says that you're the most knowledgeable
6 employee in the district with regard to budgets,
7 personnel policies, practices, accreditation,
8 accountability, you're extremely competent,
9 organized and pay close attention to details.
10 You've got my vote. I hope that the next three and
11 a half months in Ashdown are the most successful
12 three and a half months in the history of the
13 school district for you, and I hope you'll take all
14 the credit for whatever gains your District makes.

15 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: I appreciate that, but
16 it's a very big team effort.

17 CHAIR MOORE: Ms. Rollins, do you have a
18 question?

19 MS. Rollins: I also wanted to comment and
20 just say the District is very fortunate to have you
21 step forward and take this role for several months,
22 and it's, like you said, it's during testing and
23 it's a very busy time of year and I really
24 appreciate you stepping forward. I did notice that
25 your School Board was unanimous in its decision, so

1 I feel great about that as well. So thank you
2 again.

3 MS. DEBBIE GREATHOUSE: Thank you.

4 CHAIR MOORE: Board Members to my right,
5 questions or comments? With that, anything else
6 Ms. Worsham?

7 MS. WORSHAM: No.

8 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. We will open the floor up
9 for a vote.

10 MR. WOOD: Move to grant the waiver.

11 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. There's a motion by Mr.
12 Wood to grant the waiver. Is there a second?

13 MS. ROLLINS: I'll second it.

14 CHAIR MOORE: A second by Ms. Rollins. All in
15 favor say aye.

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIR MOORE: Any opposed? Motion passes.
18 Thank you.

19 **V.2 HEBER SPRINGS WAIVER REQUEST OF STANDARD 4-F.1**
20 **AND ARK. CODE ANN. §6-25-104.**

21 MS. WORSHAM: The second waiver request this
22 morning comes from the Heber Springs School
23 District, and is a request to waive Standard 4-F.1,
24 and Arkansas Code Ann §6-25-104, both of which
25 require a certified library media specialist. In

1 this particular request, the Heber Springs School
2 District has been under this waiver for the past
3 three years. They have advertised for the position
4 and have received no applicants, and so they felt
5 like since they have not received any applicants to
6 this point in their efforts to recruit, that they
7 would want to come request the waiver to continue
8 offering library media services in the capacity
9 that they have been doing in the past three years.
10 And I do believe we have a representative from the
11 District online if you have any questions.

12 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. Heber Springs School
13 District, do we have anyone present?

14 MS. RITA LEE: Yes. I'm Rita Lee, Assistant
15 Superintendent, and our High School Principal,
16 Shannon Martin is here as well.

17 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. If you-all could
18 share a little bit more about why you're requesting
19 this this morning.

20 MS. SHANNON MARTIN: So we currently have a
21 paraprofessional that has been overseeing our
22 library and maintaining its use by students and
23 teachers. We have had the job posted since before
24 Christmas and we've had no certified applicants for
25 the position.

1 MS. RITA LEE: I think we've had some internal
2 interest in its, but library media is kind of like
3 GT, we also have an opening for that that we had a
4 hard time filling, But for library media, there's
5 course work and a Praxis exam and all that's
6 required and all the people that, internally, were
7 interested in it already had a masters, so getting
8 additional course work wasn't going to move them up
9 on the pay scale, and so they, you know, opted out
10 after that.

11 I'm not -- we've kind of had a hard time
12 recruiting teachers around here. It's a great,
13 beautiful place to live and we have great students
14 and it's a great school, but it's kind of an
15 expensive area to live because the housing is kind
16 of high, and so we kind of run into that problem
17 frequently here.

18 CHAIR MOORE: I'll open the floor up for Board
19 Member questions. To my left, questions? Doctor
20 Arnold?

21 DR. ARNOLD: Yes. Could you comment on the
22 duration of the waiver request? Is five years too
23 --- not optimistic enough for finding candidates?

24 MS. RITA LEE: Well, we certainly will keep it
25 posted. My plan is just to keep that, just in case

1 we do have someone. The paraprofessional that we
2 have in there right now, if we by chance got the
3 waiver and then we had someone apply that was
4 certified, we would move them into that position
5 and just move the parapro into another place in the
6 District.

7 It doesn't have to be for five years. If we
8 need to do three again, that's absolutely fine too,
9 but I just -- I just put five as -- our other
10 waivers were for five years so I just did the same
11 thing. But we can certainly go less if we need to.
12 And we will continue to look, we just -- I tried to
13 recruit our former librarian that retired several
14 years ago and she didn't want -- she didn't want to
15 come back to work full-time. She would do part-
16 time, but she didn't want to do a full-time job.

17 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I certainly understand the
18 precedent of the five years, so thank you for that,
19 I just hope it doesn't reduce motivation.

20 CHAIR MOORE: Ms. Keener?

21 MS. KEENER: Yes. So you said there was a
22 paraprofessional in the role currently. Can you
23 talk about her progress towards certification?

24 MS. RITA LEE: She's not working towards
25 certification at all. She has no desire to go back

1 to school or anything like that. She's been a long
2 time -- I think she's probably been at the District
3 25 years, at least, but she's just -- she fits into
4 this role very nicely. It would be good if she
5 would do that, she just doesn't have an interest in
6 doing that.

7 MS. KEENER: And then you mentioned that the
8 other internal candidates that were certified with
9 a masters did not seek the position because it
10 would require an additional masters and the current
11 pay scale they wouldn't receive additional pay.

12 MS. RITA LEE: Right.

13 MS. KEENER: Who sets the pay scale for your
14 district?

15 MS. RITA LEE: Excuse me?

16 MS. KEENER: Who sets the pay scale. Who set
17 that limitation that prevents you from hiring that
18 certified teacher?

19 MS. RITA LEE: Well, the Board of -- our
20 School Board approved it, and we do, we do have a
21 bump up for masters, but she -- all the people that
22 were interested already had a masters, so they're
23 already topped out on that line item. And they --
24 she -- they thought it would just be a testing out
25 thing, you would take the Praxis for library media

1 and then, you know, that would be all, but there's
2 course work, I think 30 hours of course work
3 required for it.

4 MS. KEENER: Thank you.

5 MR. WOOD: So how long has the District been
6 without a certified individual in the position?

7 MS. RITA LEE: Three years, I believe, is what
8 -- is what we've been -- the waiver is.

9 MR. WOOD: And tell me what's going on in
10 neighboring districts with regard to this position.

11 MS. RITA LEE: To my knowledge, the ones that
12 are around us are in the same situation that we
13 were when ours retired, like, they have someone
14 that's been a long-time employee, just hasn't
15 retired yet. So I don't think they've had to try
16 to find anybody new. And we -- we're kind of, in
17 our surrounding area, we're the only one that has a
18 separate middle school so we have to have three
19 librarians, and that just makes it -- makes it hard
20 for, you know, us to get someone.

21 We lucked out last year, the middle school,
22 our person retired and we had an elementary teacher
23 that did not have a masters already and so she
24 wanted to do an ALP and that, you know, kind of
25 killed two birds with one stone for her, it gave

1 her master's pay, plus the bump to the library that
2 she wanted.

3 MR. WOOD: Well, I guess I'm concerned,
4 because I agree with you that Heber Springs is a
5 wonderful place to -- certainly to visit, I've
6 never lived there, but to visit. I think it's
7 beautiful and I can't imagine that it's hard to
8 attract people to want to live in that beautiful
9 part of the state.

10 My encouragement is to double your efforts on
11 this and to talk to your Board about increasing the
12 pay for that position to make it more competitive
13 and more attractive for candidates. I personally
14 -- given that it's been three years now, I think
15 that I would be in a position to appose this long
16 of a waiver.

17 I think I would go to a one year at a time
18 plan at this point, and hope that that would be an
19 encouragement for the District to -- I'm not -- I
20 don't say this in a position that you-all haven't
21 made effort, I don't know, but I just -- to do
22 everything you can, because I really can't believe
23 that there's an excuse for people to not want to go
24 to Heber Springs, it's a wonderful town. Anyway,
25 that will be my position; I'll support a one year

1 waiver.

2 CHAIR MOORE: Ms. Hunter, and then we'll go
3 back to Ms. Keener.

4 MS. HUNTER: Good morning. I'd like to go
5 back to one of the opening comments. Did I hear
6 correctly that this position has been posted since
7 Christmas?

8 MS. RITA LEE: Prior to.

9 MS. HUNTER: So prior to Christmas. So has it
10 been posted for three years, or did it post just
11 shortly before this application for waiver?

12 MS. RITA LEE: We posted it before Christmas
13 because we knew the waiver expired in June, and so
14 I think it was -- I think it was around the first of
15 November that we posted it for this time. But, no,
16 it has not been posted the whole time, for three
17 years.

18 MS. HUNTER: Yes. So I'll just echo Mr.
19 Wood's comments regarding the length of the waiver
20 request, particularly in light of the fact that
21 it's -- you've been on waiver for three years and,
22 you know, as that waiver was expiring, then you
23 attempted to post as opposed to actively working
24 during the entire waiver period. So I would agree
25 with -- I think I would go along with a one-year

1 waiver over a five-year waiver, for sure.

2 MS. RITA LEE: Okay.

3 MR. BRAGG: I understand what the
4 paraprofessional would do as far as their routine,
5 but what, specifically, would be shifted to the ELA
6 teachers? What are those responsibilities?

7 MS. RITA LEE: They are taking on the research
8 piece of it that the traditional library media
9 specialist would do. They are all handling that in
10 their classroom. And honestly, when we had a
11 librarian, they were still doing that because we
12 were one-to-one school with Chromebooks so it was
13 just easier for them to handle research in their
14 classroom without going to the library, you know,
15 back and forth to do that. So they're taking on
16 that.

17 She handles -- the paraprofessional that we
18 have in there now handles the technology, checkout
19 or if -- she does all of our Chromebook maintenance
20 and keeping up with that, tracking that with
21 students, and she takes care of the library check
22 -- the book, you know, check-in and check-out
23 procedures.

24 MR. BRAGG: Okay. And they've been doing that
25 now?

1 MS. RITA LEE: Yes. Yes, they've been doing
2 that for a while.

3 CHAIR MOORE: Board Members, more questions?
4 Ms. Kenner?

5 MS. KEENER: Yes, I want to follow-up on
6 something. So I'm concerned about the
7 paraprofessional. I feel like she's made a choice
8 if she's choosing not to pursue the additional
9 certifications. She's essentially pulling herself
10 out of the running by denying the opportunity to
11 meet the legal requirements, regardless of their
12 validity and how strict they are. She's choosing
13 paraprofessional pay.

14 So I'm concerned that we're continuing to put
15 someone in that position that has such high
16 requirements, because of the importance of that
17 position, and they're choosing not -- I guess not
18 to have that growth mind set, and that we are
19 putting additional burdens on the classroom
20 teachers, ELA teachers, when that is supposed to
21 fall, based on requirements and laws and that kind
22 of stuff. So that is of concern to me, I just need
23 to express that and I'll turn it over.

24 DR. ARNOLD: Doctor Moore --

25 CHAIR MOORE: Yes, Dr. Arnold.

1 DR. ARNOLD: I just want to add to what I said
2 earlier. I used the motivation word. I just
3 wanted to comment that if I were the superintendent
4 and received a five-year waiver, filling that
5 position would be the last thing on my mind. And
6 so I would also reiterate the recommendation of no
7 more than a years waiver.

8 CHAIR MOORE: I noticed on your application we
9 have -- I will say we have strongly suggested
10 districts, when they're coming for a waiver that
11 they've already held, to give us data as to the
12 effectiveness of that waiver. I noticed that not
13 only is there lack of data or any detailed
14 information, you also clicked on the box, the
15 purpose of the waiver is to promote innovation. Is
16 that true, and can you speak to why you have, sort
17 of, no information as to the success of this
18 position?

19 And I know, again, it's different than if we
20 were asking for a math teacher or science teacher
21 waiver, but this is a position where students in
22 ninth through twelfth grade deserve the opportunity
23 to go to the library and to get those skills.

24 MS. RITA LEE: I think, as far as data, I
25 really don't know what kind of data we would

1 provide other than our ELA, you know, scores have
2 been good and our kids are getting -- we're meeting
3 all the standards. We're still teaching all the
4 standards, covering all the research piece. And
5 the library, you know, of course it's still open
6 and available for checkout or study time or
7 anything like it always was.

8 I think we have seen such a decline over the
9 last several years in students wanting to go get a
10 physical book in their hand. You know, they
11 consider reading -- I'm still old school, I like to
12 have a real book, but the majority of our kids that
13 read for enjoyment or outside of the classroom,
14 they do it on their phone or they have an audio
15 book that they listen to at night on their
16 computer, or something, and so we're not seeing the
17 volume of kids.

18 We still have that in elementary, that's still
19 going strong. In middle school it's better, but in
20 high school we just don't have the volume of kids
21 that we used to have coming in and out, checking
22 out the books. But, you know, we still are
23 handling all the standards and covering all those
24 just like we did before when we had a librarian.

25 CHAIR MOORE: I appreciate that, but I also

1 hear even more so the need for innovation and that
2 we need to be doing bigger and better things to get
3 students in libraries, in front of books, and doing
4 that. And so, you know, we take each case into
5 consideration individually, but we also have to
6 think about, what if we had 260 districts come to
7 us and say, we don't think the high school
8 librarian position is necessary anymore. And
9 that's a different case.

10 And I'm not hearing you say it's not
11 necessary, but I'm hearing you say that it's
12 minimalized because your classroom teachers can do
13 it, and that's a greater conversation. I'll stop
14 there. Board Members, other questions or comments?

15 Actually, I do have a question, and this might
16 be premature, but I know there is legislation
17 proposed around licensure, but this -- this is not
18 a licensure waiver, correct, this is a --

19 MS. WORSHAM: This is requesting to not employ
20 a position that is required --

21 CHAIR MOORE: Okay.

22 MS. WORSHAM: -- that requires a certified
23 staff member, yes.

24 CHAIR MOORE: So it's not -- do we have any
25 other waivers like this for some other positions?

1 MS. SMITH: So the requirement for school
2 districts to have a library media specialist is a
3 legislative requirement, and it's in our standards.
4 And so for standards of accreditation this district
5 is asking to be waived not to be required to have a
6 library media specialist. That's what they're
7 waiving. You are correct, there is a law right now
8 about licensure, that people will not be able to
9 come and waive licensure requirements, so it's --

10 CHAIR MOORE: So that's not this?

11 MS. SMITH: That's not what they're asking for
12 here.

13 CHAIR MOORE: This is the position. Do we
14 know how many other districts currently do not --
15 either have waived the library media position at
16 the high school level?

17 MS. SMITH: Do you know it off the top?

18 MS. WORSHAM: I don't know the numbers, I
19 could find it out for you.

20 CHAIR MOORE: Okay.

21 DR. ARNOLD: Madame Chair?

22 CHAIR MOORE: Yes, Dr. Arnold?

23 DR. ARNOLD: I'll be bold. It's only March,
24 so if this motion doesn't get a second, I do
25 understand, but I would move that we not grant a

1 waiver to this request.

2 MS. KEENER: Second.

3 CHAIR MOORE: There's a motion by Mr. Arnold
4 to not grant the waiver, a second by Ms. Kenner.
5 Questions or comments, Board Members? Okay. All
6 in favor say aye.

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIR MOORE: All opposed? Motion passes.
9 Thank you, Heber Springs, for being here today.
10 I'm sure the agency will be in touch with you
11 moving forward.

12 MS. RITA LEE: Okay. Thank you.

13 **V.3 NORTH LITTLE ROCK WAIVER REQUESTS FOR ALTERNATE**
14 **SCHOOL CALENDAR**

15 CHAIR MOORE: Next we have the North Little
16 School District for a request to alternative school
17 calendar.

18 MS. SMITH: Yes. So this is the same kind of
19 waiver request that we saw many school districts
20 doing last year. It's a waiver of when they notify
21 the Department the type of calendar. So the North
22 Little Rock School District started the year with a
23 traditional 178. They're asking to move to an
24 alternate calendar.

25 To be able to do that, they have to get the

1 waiver on when they notify us. Dr. Jacob Smith
2 from North Little Rock is here today.

3 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you, Dr. Smith, for
4 coming. If you'd like to give some remarks on your
5 request.

6 DR. JACOB SMITH: Absolutely. Members of the
7 Board, Secretary Oliva, thank you guys for having
8 me today. Much like last year, we've had a winter
9 surge in regards to inclement weather and the North
10 Little Rock School District has been closed for six
11 days this year. We're under a traditional model
12 and we're actually moving to a minute calendar next
13 year, but that did not make it through our PPC's
14 and community process in order to be voted on for
15 this year.

16 And so we're coming before you again to ask
17 that we, going forward, because we use a hundred
18 minute early release model under our traditional
19 calendar, we'd like to use those hundred minutes
20 for the remainder of the year as student
21 instructional time as opposed to students being
22 released and us performing PD and things of that
23 nature. And so it's not a massive adjustment in
24 regards to our -- over our structure of our day and
25 our effect on our students and community, but it

1 would, with this alternative calendar, it would
2 allow us to use that time for instructional time to
3 make up for the time that was missed.

4 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. Board Members,
5 questions? To my left, Ms. Rollins.

6 MS. ROLLINS: So what are your start and
7 ending times for the day?

8 DR. JACOB SMITH: Oh goodness. At each school
9 level, I just placed a memo out in regards to that.
10 Bear with me, I apologize. Yes, ma'am. The start
11 time would not change, and so our Pre-K begins at
12 7:30 and ends at 2:30. Elementary school would be
13 7:40 to 2:55. Middle school would be 8:15 to 3:35.
14 And high school would be 8:40 to 4:10.

15 MS. ROLLINS: Okay. So tell me again how many
16 minutes you're adding to a day.

17 DR. JACOB SMITH: It would just be ten
18 additional minutes, but we already go 20 minutes
19 what is required each day in regards to
20 instructional time. So under a normal, I guess,
21 requirement would be 360 minutes, six hours per
22 day. We actually go 380 minutes. And so that is
23 how we bank 100 minutes weekly whenever we go five
24 full days, and then that's how we do an early
25 release with that banked time, which you cannot

1 carry from week to week under a traditional
2 calendar. You can only apply banked time for the
3 particular week, which is why we use that model on
4 a full five-day week, because that's how we garner
5 those 20 minutes.

6 MS. ROLLINS: How are the students responding
7 to this?

8 DR. JACOB SMITH: Kids are very resilient and
9 versatile and so they're -- I think there is a push
10 on if we can use that time, both on behalf of our
11 staff and our students, to be able to get out as
12 close to on time as possible. That would be the
13 push from the community and the feedback we've
14 received from the Board.

15 MS. ROLLINS: So you feel like they're fully
16 engaged the whole time?

17 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

18 MS. ROLLINS: Okay.

19 CHAIR MOORE: Other Board Member questions to
20 my left? To my right questions?

21 MS. WOODS: What would be your current end
22 date converting to this model?

23 DR. JACOB SMITH: May 30th.

24 MS. WOODS: Okay.

25 MS. ROLLINS: What was your question? I'm

1 sorry.

2 MS. WOODS: What would be their end date by
3 converting to this model.

4 MS. ROLLINS: Okay.

5 CHAIR MOORE: Do you have any -- outside of
6 Spring Break, do you have any other days off before
7 May?

8 DR. JACOB SMITH: I don't believe so. We try
9 to keep April pretty open because of the testing
10 window in regards to time off, that's kind of our
11 high priority. And so Spring Break ended up the
12 last week of March this year, and I think after
13 that we're just kind of in testing mode until we
14 get to the end of the race.

15 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. As far as adding, so you
16 will add ten minutes to every day for the rest --
17 the remainder of the school year; is that correct?

18 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

19 CHAIR MOORE: How will that work out at the
20 high school level? Where will those minutes fall
21 for students?

22 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am. So we're on a
23 block schedule, is the way we are, and so it's four
24 periods per day, and so we would make an
25 adjustment, basically extend two and half minutes,

1 two and a half minutes, two and a half minutes, two
2 and a half minutes each period.

3 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. Next year you said you-
4 all are looking to go to the calendar -- to the
5 minute -- hours calendar. How many days would you
6 plan to have next year?

7 DR. JACOB SMITH: Next year it would be -- so
8 that was a unique process as well, like I said,
9 going through the process of community and
10 everything, 176, we would only have two additional
11 professional development days off of our
12 traditional calendar, but our Pre-K, because of the
13 standards associated with that, needs to be open
14 the full 178.

15 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. I've been a local critic,
16 I think, of going fewer days of school. I've also
17 noticed when we're moving to the hours we have to
18 get really particular, and I know the Agency does,
19 about what those six hours are, and we need to be
20 guaranteeing that the students are actually fully
21 received six instructional hours at school. Can
22 you guarantee that at each level?

23 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

24 CHAIR MOORE: Do you dismiss buses early, or
25 are those, the end of the day is truly the first

1 time that kids are leaving your campus?

2 DR. JACOB SMITH: The end of the day as far as
3 I'm aware, ma'am.

4 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. So you're not cutting
5 short? I've seen that in practice too where the
6 end of the day is the end of the day for some
7 students, but buses leave earlier. And I know
8 that's a real challenge, but if we are starting to
9 count hours, we need to fully count hours of kids
10 in seats learning and we don't want to short change
11 kids.

12 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am. We run a three
13 tier transportation system, and so elementary,
14 middle, high, there's a 30-minute gap in between
15 basically when each one ends because we're adding
16 ten minutes at each level. It's not effecting that
17 transportation process.

18 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. Board Members, other
19 questions?

20 MS. ROLLINS: So you didn't have any built in
21 days for snow, or bad weather in your calendar this
22 year?

23 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am, we did, at the
24 end. As required by law, you're required to build
25 in five inclement weather days, and so we do have

1 that built in, but the ask is, is just to be able
2 to use the time we have applicable so we don't have
3 to extend the year.

4 MS. ROLLINS: Okay. And when was your end
5 date? I'm sorry.

6 DR. JACOB SMITH: May 30th.

7 MS. ROLLINS: May 30th. Okay.

8 MS. KEENER: When were your days -- when were
9 your built-in days?

10 DR. JACOB SMITH: It's the last five days, so
11 May 30th, I believe is on a Friday, so it would be
12 June 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th.

13 MS. KEENER: And it would -- to meet the 178
14 days it would be two additional days, is that what
15 you -- how many additional days would you need, I
16 suppose?

17 DR. JACOB SMITH: So if we are allowed --
18 granted the waiver, and we use early release time
19 as instructional time, that would make up -- that
20 would make up 1620 minutes, which is four and a
21 half days, and then extending the school day for
22 ten minutes for the rest of the year would make up
23 the other day and a half.

24 So the majority of the time -- the majority of
25 the time our students are already used to because

1 four days a week they're going 380 minutes on a
2 full 5-week day, and so us keeping that Wednesday
3 as a 380 minute day is really more of a normal day
4 than an early release. The real ask, the real
5 difference would be that extra ten minutes.

6 CHAIR MOORE: I guess I'm confused. So what
7 happens on Wednesdays, there is a little bit early
8 release?

9 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am. So under our
10 traditional calendar, on every -- so because we go
11 380 instructional minutes, we bank 20 minutes a day
12 beyond what is required by law, the 366 hours. And
13 so every Wednesday we go a full week. We have a
14 hundred minute early release day on Wednesday so
15 that way we can provide professional development,
16 have a data day, things of that nature. And so
17 that is how our calendar is built right now under
18 the traditional model.

19 CHAIR MOORE: So every Wednesday your kids are
20 getting out an hour and 40 minutes early.

21 DR. JACOB SMITH: If it's a -- if it's a full
22 five day week, yes, ma'am.

23 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. And you have no interest
24 in filling -- not adding ten minutes to each day,
25 but filling out that Wednesday?

1 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am. The ask would
2 be is that under the alternative calendar, the
3 Board and PPC's have already approved to use that
4 hundred minutes as instructional time.

5 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. So you will go a full day
6 on Wednesday now --

7 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

8 CHAIR MOORE: -- for the rest of the school
9 year?

10 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

11 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. Did you get a lot of push
12 back? Was this the first year you did that early
13 release Wednesdays?

14 DR. JACOB SMITH: No, ma'am. We've been -- I
15 believe this is our second or third year, and the
16 Board was -- and State Board was gracious enough
17 last year for us to do this with what happened with
18 inclement weather and it was actually very positive
19 feedback in regards to the staff.

20 CHAIR MOORE: But you don't get negative
21 feedback from parents around having to, you know,
22 find childcare every Wednesday earlier?

23 DR. JACOB SMITH: No, ma'am. In fact, we get
24 more negative comments from our community, students
25 and staff as well in regards to having to extend

1 the year, vacations, trips, things of that nature,
2 summer ball, I mean, however you want to define it
3 there's lots of things that happen come June.

4 CHAIR MOORE: I understand that, but also want
5 to maximize our students' learning time. And I
6 understand that staff development is important, but
7 it's also hard to swallow losing -- you know, doing
8 schedules like that as a parent.

9 MR. WOOD: I appreciate what you're saying,
10 but one thing we have to also remember is one thing
11 that does not occur in June is learning.

12 MS. HUNTER: Hundred percent.

13 MR. WOOD: It just doesn't matter. You can
14 have --

15 MS. HUNTER: After Memorial Day.

16 MR. WOOD: That's right. You can have the
17 schools open, nothing happens. They're cleaning
18 classrooms and taking up bulletin boards.

19 CHAIR MOORE: You can say that in Arkansas,
20 but if you go to the Northeast they're in school
21 through the end of June, so we need to change that
22 mind set, in my opinion.

23 MS. KEENER: Agreed.

24 MR. WOOD: Well, no, they have a different
25 culture.

1 CHAIR MOORE: Because we have a lot of schools
2 going to full calendars.

3 MR. WOOD: That's because school is another
4 month, not when you're talking about the last three
5 days --

6 CHAIR MOORE: No, I agree with you, but I
7 think that's been our ethos in the South for so
8 long, that if we have districts going to different
9 calendars we've got to start changing that and
10 pushing districts to change that.

11 MR. WOOD: I would bet anything that the last
12 three days in New York are as productive as the
13 last three days in Arkansas.

14 CHAIR MOORE: Absolutely. It's just a
15 calendar thing.

16 MR. WOOD: It just doesn't matter where it is.

17 CHAIR MOORE: Yes. I think what does matter
18 is the assessment window and, you know, our
19 assessment window doesn't change for snow days and
20 so --

21 MR. WOOD: I've been pounding the desk ever
22 since I've been up here that we should start
23 earlier in August and end school earlier because I
24 don't even think learning occurs in May, but that's
25 neither here nor there.

1 DR. JACOB SMITH: We are starting earlier next
2 year under the alternative calendar.

3 MS. HUNTER: So I do have a question.

4 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am?

5 MS. HUNTER: So I understand your current --
6 and this is really just -- if I'm supposed to know
7 this, I apologize, but in your earlier comments you
8 said that you're banking those extra minutes on
9 those longer days, but that they can't carry from
10 week to week. So how then do you early release on
11 Wednesday?

12 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes, ma'am. So under a
13 traditional calendar you can bank time within the
14 given week and apply it to that given week, but you
15 can't --

16 MS. HUNTER: Yes.

17 DR. JACOB SMITH: So I can't take a hundred
18 minutes and apply it to the next week and add it to
19 the hundred minutes of that week and do a 200
20 minute early release, so like a half day. Whatever
21 the rules of the game are in regards to a
22 traditional calendar in the way that law has been
23 passed, you are not allowed to carry it beyond the
24 week you are talking about.

25 MS. HUNTER: So, just for my own. So it's not

1 that you have to have actually done the extra
2 minutes, it's just that you have to plan -- because
3 I think about you've early released on Wednesday,
4 now it snows -- something happens on Thursday,
5 Friday, so you really haven't banked all those
6 hours, so to speak. Like, to me banking is like a
7 pre thing rather than, you know, a planned thing.
8 Anyway, thank you. I understand what you're
9 saying, but I don't really know that I agree with
10 it.

11 MS. WOODS: But to your point though, but then
12 those would fall underneath a snow day, inclement
13 weather.

14 MS. HUNTER: Yes, or something.

15 MS. WOODS: I understand exactly where you're
16 coming from.

17 MS. HUNTER: You know, I don't know if it's
18 the inclement weather.

19 MS. WOODS: My position is we're squabbling
20 over, like, three days at this point --

21 MS. HUNTER: Agreed.

22 MS. WOODS: -- and he's the one in the
23 District running it, so I will defer to what you
24 think is best.

25 CHAIR MOORE: I think I --

1 MS. WOODS: I think we're getting really,
2 really specific.

3 CHAIR MOORE: We are. I think I use my
4 platform that we want to continue to send a strong
5 message that learning matters and state time
6 matters for students in classes learning. And I
7 know that's going to be a conversation up at the
8 Capitol at some point, or should be, and so that is
9 my personal -- it will my position at this time to
10 do that.

11 MR. WOOD: Because I completely agree that
12 adding two and a half minutes to a high school
13 class is practically worthless. I don't believe in
14 that. But I also don't believe that making them go
15 in June is of any value. Families don't want to.
16 Our culture is that we want to move on to our
17 summer break --

18 CHAIR MOORE: After Memorial Day. Yes.

19 MR. WOOD: -- at Memorial Day. And I support
20 -- as a parent, as a former local school board
21 member, I'm a strong advocate for that, but the
22 problem is the people on the Hill up there
23 apparently don't agree with that idea, or the Parks
24 and Tourism lobby is simply too strong and they get
25 in the way of starting school earlier every year.

1 But I don't understand that because if you
2 transition vacation time to May and not early
3 August, May is when people want to be outside doing
4 things, August is not.

5 CHAIR MOORE: And Memorial Day is the 26th
6 this year, so I know a lot of districts are getting
7 out before then. So you-all are getting farther
8 than other districts.

9 DR. JACOB SMITH: So then I incorrectly spoke
10 then. If that is the case then we would be out for
11 that day.

12 CHAIR MOORE: Okay. That Monday.

13 DR. JACOB SMITH: There is one in addition.

14 MS. HUNTER: The Friday before.

15 DR. JACOB SMITH: Yes.

16 MS. HUNTER: Well, I'm with you, let's just
17 wrap this up.

18 MS. WOODS: I will motion to grant the waiver
19 and give you the 168. You can put that down.

20 MS. HUNTER: I will second.

21 CHAIR MOORE: There is a motion by Ms. Wood, a
22 second. Any questions or comments? Okay. All in
23 favor say aye.

24 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

25 CHAIR MOORE: Any opposed? Motion passes.

1 Thank you.

2 DR. JACOB SMITH: Thank you-all.

3 CHAIR MOORE: Secretary?

4 MR. OLIVA: If it's okay, I think I'm going to
5 make a comment about calendars, if I may. We have
6 lost our way in this state by thinking that going
7 to school is not important. And even though we're
8 dealing with some nuisances with inclement weather,
9 and I'm very empathetic to that, having 178 days of
10 school is our minimum, not the maximum. It's a
11 minimum expectation. And every year we have
12 districts chipping away at that minimum by banking
13 minutes. And I get, Mr. Wood, what you're saying
14 is adding a week for inclement weather. Then why
15 are we adopting a calendar that says if we have
16 inclement weather we're going to extend a school
17 year? It should be built into your school year
18 calendar, because we have professional days, we
19 have teacher work days, we may have to surrender
20 some of those days. Do we need a fall break and a
21 spring break; do we need Thanksgiving off; do we
22 need all these days? 178 days of in-person
23 instruction is not a ridiculous requirement, and
24 our legislature graciously funds 178 days of in-
25 person instruction.

1 So we have all these schools that are saying,
2 we're going to meet that 1,068 hour requirement,
3 but we're only going to build a calendar of 175
4 days, or I think we just heard a 176 day calendar
5 next year. And then we have some that are going a
6 hundred and -- we have schools in this state that
7 have in-person instruction 143 days. How is this
8 allowed? If learning matters and being in front of
9 high quality teachers matters, then we need to do
10 something, working with our friends in the
11 legislature to say that this is a priority in that
12 when we invest in our schools to make sure that our
13 students have access to a full day of learning,
14 that it is at a minimum of 178 days.

15 However a school district wants to adopt a
16 calendar and meet that 178 day requirement, that's
17 where I give them that local control. Do you want
18 to start August 1st? Do you want to start in
19 September? You want to go four days a week, five
20 days a week? Some days go three, some go seven,
21 some do half days. You can figure that out. But
22 178 days of in-person instruction is not a lot to
23 ask for. And, by the way, that's well below the
24 national average.

25 So we already, as a state, go below the

1 national average and then we just keep letting
2 people chip away and chip away and chip away. We
3 keep seeing these things to try to bring back AMI
4 days. I'm sorry, sending a kid home a packet that
5 says that this is equal to a full day of learning
6 is ridiculous. And when I first got here and
7 started questioning AMI days, I would get requests
8 from districts saying, We're requesting to go to an
9 AMI day, the basketball team made the state
10 championship, we want to send a pep rally bus to go
11 root for them. Excuse me? That's what we mean for
12 a full day of learning?

13 So I know we're going to deal with inclement
14 weather, we need to be empathetic to our districts,
15 but I think, as an Agency, we should take a strong
16 stand that saying we're going to schedule a
17 calendar that has 178 days of in-person instruction
18 should not be that hard. Thank you.

19 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you, Dr. Oliva. I know
20 this is anticlimactic after that. I think the
21 national average is closer to 180.

22 MR. OLIVA: I believe you're right.

23 DR. ARNOLD: And to Dr. Moore's point,
24 typically in the northeast, and we are competing
25 and we need to be competitive. So I like that mind

1 set. Thank you.

2 CHAIR MOORE: Any questions or comments?

3 Okay. Thank you.

4 **V.4 CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST TO APPROVE THE**
5 **ARKANSAS BETTER CHANGE (ABC) FY25 - AGENCY GRANT AWARDS**

6 CHAIR MOORE: With that we'll move forward to
7 Agenda Item Number Four, request to approve the
8 Arkansas Better Chance Grants. Ms. Williams,
9 thanks for coming today.

10 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: Thank you Board Members.
11 Before I start, I just want to acknowledge Board
12 Member Leigh Keener for working alongside us and
13 really pushing us. I think in the past when ABC
14 recommendations have been brought to the Board, and
15 I have not been involved in the past several years
16 until recently, but I do think even when I was
17 administering over at DHS they were just brought as
18 a list. And I want -- I'm going to walk you
19 through the process of how we came to you today
20 with these recommendations.

21 So I want you to see the data that was used in
22 that process. So I do have the clicker thing. On
23 the slides, if I can get it started. It's always
24 -- it doesn't like me for some reason. All right.
25 So many of you know we funded local leads over the

1 past year and a half as a result of the LEARNS Act,
2 and the local leads in communities working
3 alongside early childhood as well as other
4 stakeholders.

5 One of the things that they did early on in
6 the first cohort and second and now third, is to do
7 a trial count. But more recently, in December,
8 they did a Coordinated Funding Request for seats
9 across birth to five. So we have seats that are
10 funded through the Federal Childcare Block Grant,
11 we have some infant/toddler contracted seats that
12 are very new. We have Pre-K seats, we have
13 Arkansas Better Chance that we're going to talk
14 about in a few minutes, that also includes center
15 based and home visiting, as well as an early Head
16 Start grant. So across all those programs, the
17 Coordinated Funding Request came in with requests
18 in all of these areas.

19 This is just a cycle map so that you can see
20 it. I'm not going to read everything, guys, I'll
21 try to move quickly because I know you have other
22 items. I think the big message here is there were
23 almost 5,000 additional seats requested across the
24 state from birth to five, which is more than we
25 have the ability to serve in the Office of Early

1 Childhood, way more.

2 We will continue to refine and work on this
3 Coordinated Funding Request process as it's very
4 new, and I think programs maybe didn't understand
5 it as our local leads were asking for them to
6 submit. Some of them are thinking, there is no new
7 funding why would I submit. So we will continue to
8 work on that, but I wanted you to just see the
9 first attempt at this was a pretty big request.

10 In addition to the Coordinated Funding
11 Request, there were lots of Board Members who asked
12 questions last year, and I did not -- I took note
13 of that, around home visiting and all the questions
14 that were raised. You also asked us to bring this
15 to you earlier, and that's why we're here earlier
16 in the year to ask. But my team has looked at
17 enrollment data for the past three years in
18 Arkansas Better Chance.

19 I was quite surprised, as I have not been
20 administering, that there were enrollment issues in
21 about 16 programs. And when I say enrollment
22 issues, I'm talking about significant enrollment
23 issues. We look at least programs to be at 85
24 percent enrollment, because if you have a hundred
25 children, you would have a classroom of 20, you

1 would probably have to hire five teachers at a
2 minimum for those five classrooms. So we
3 acknowledge that there may be a little bit of
4 movement, but we're looking for at least 85.

5 And so my team put together data and looked at
6 the last three years. We, as a result of that data
7 and the Coordinated Funding Request, we have -- are
8 recommending shifts in 277 slots. We are taking
9 them from 16 agencies that had three years worth,
10 not just one year of the three, but three years
11 worth of under enrollment in ABC, because it is not
12 fair to children sitting out there who need to be
13 served to have to wait.

14 We are also proposing that those be
15 reallocated to 14 existing agencies who did have
16 good enrollment, or who have made a suggested
17 change, and then three brand new agencies. So I'm
18 going to show you slides about the specifics. I
19 wanted you to see the request across the programs.
20 So those 5,000 seats, about 1200 for them were for
21 ABC seats in classrooms, and about 66 were for home
22 visiting. There were infant/toddler seats, so
23 there are people that are asking to serve younger
24 children, as well as Early Head Start and our CCDF
25 program. And you can kind of see the breakdown of

1 agencies requested.

2 Probably up until about a month ago, I think I
3 told Secretary Oliva and Stacy last year, that if
4 there were seats that were turned in, if you will,
5 or relinquished to us, then I would probably come
6 to the Board and suggest that we put that back into
7 the budget because there's been no increase in ABC;
8 however, the data here is so compelling. These
9 programs know the reimbursement for these programs
10 and they're still asking for over 1200 seats. And
11 we have a wait list in our Childcare Federal Block
12 Grant that we put into place in February, so we are
13 at the top. We're serving all the families that we
14 can.

15 And so as I go through these slides and show
16 you across these areas, and this is just a
17 breakdown by providers and the seats and the totals
18 for each of those program areas, and then just a
19 breakdown by county. We looked at counties that
20 are serving less than 40 percent of the children to
21 make these recommendations to you.

22 So we did zero to 40 percent, we did 41 to 50,
23 51 to 70, and 71 to 100. There are two counties in
24 the state that are at 71 to 100, which is real
25 exciting, but there are only two. There are a lot

1 of counties, 26, that fell below the 40 percent.
2 So we looked across these requests to make these
3 recommendations, all across the state in those 26
4 counties.

5 This is the seat request, and the colors
6 represent the lead -- local lead cohorts. So
7 Cohort 1 is that first local lead cohort, and then
8 red is the second one, and then three is the blue.
9 So that's a newer -- the Cohort 3 is the newest
10 local lead group. We also, as you're looking at
11 this data, you know, later, if you look at the
12 county level data, there are programs like, you
13 know, a coop that may be housed in one county. If
14 they have several hundred home visiting slots,
15 those are in that county. So you'll see sometimes
16 the request might be lower or higher than what's
17 recommended, just know that it's probably a result,
18 and we put a little note there so that you can see
19 it, a result of that home visiting going into one
20 area, not spread across the multiple counties that
21 it serves.

22 But this is in your packet and you guys can
23 look at that at your leisure, and if you have
24 questions, I'd be happy to try and answer questions
25 about that. There were 16 agencies, as I

1 mentioned, that we reduced due to low enrollment.
2 Now, we notified these programs back in the fall,
3 November, December. They received a letter from
4 our staff and we made that funding adjustment to
5 them then. If they served some additional children
6 we allowed them to do that, but we wanted them to
7 know that we are looking closely at this and that
8 our rules allow us to do that. I'm not sure what
9 the practice has been in the last few years since I
10 haven't been administering, but when I was
11 administering this is sort of the practice that we
12 did, we were moving those slots. And so we let
13 them know. So I want you to know they've been
14 notified.

15 There's one agency that relinquished. It's a
16 school district that's serving paying children too,
17 and they're combining, which is wonderful. They're
18 doing a blended program with ten ABC slots and ten
19 paying slots. Maybe for their staff, I didn't get
20 the details, but they relinquished those
21 voluntarily. And then one agency requested to move
22 their slots, or to allow the coop to administer
23 those slots. So just want you to be aware those
24 were a part of this.

25 And so this is where we are requesting the

1 reallocation. And then in your packet, you have
2 the full sheet. All of the programs that were at
3 full enrollment, you know, we're requesting those
4 slots to go back to those programs. This is just
5 for those 277 that we pulled back in, or that were
6 relinquished, and where we're making those
7 recommendations.

8 All of these are in counties that are zero to
9 40 percent served, they're the lowest tier of where
10 children are being served across the state. I can
11 tell you, they represent across the state. There
12 are five community based providers, including two
13 brand new family childcare homes. And the homes
14 have -- we've already looked at their backgrounds,
15 they have degrees, which is real exciting, but
16 they're only asking for, like two children, or
17 three children, which means they're blending
18 funding. They're going to be serving paying
19 children and maybe some through CCDF Federal
20 Childcare, which is really probably a better model
21 in terms of funding in early childhood right now.

22 So that is the list. I'm happy to take any
23 questions. And again, just really want to thank
24 Leigh for all her, really support and just push to
25 make us do better, be better and to really dig into

1 this data. And I know she may have comments about
2 some of the work. These are the three new programs
3 that are not existing. Alma Primary, the
4 superintendent there has been a long Pre-K
5 supporter and has already started a Pre-K on other
6 funding, but they asked for slots and they're in
7 the 40 percent and below. Bright Beginnings is one
8 of the family childcare homes. I believe that one
9 is in Carroll County. And then Little Donna's
10 Family Home, it's on there, Howard County.

11 So we're really excited about these three new
12 entities, especially these community based
13 providers. So this is just a breakdown with the
14 funding allocation and the number of home visiting.
15 And so, Doctor Moore, I just want you to know that
16 while it's not my goal to eliminate home visiting,
17 we have reduced home visiting, in fact, because
18 many of those slots that were not being filled were
19 in home visiting. So that concludes my comments,
20 so I'm happy to take any questions from the Board.

21 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. Board Members,
22 questions to my right? Mr. Bragg?

23 MR. BRAGG: What's the source of -- are there
24 multiple sources of funding?

25 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: That's a great question.

1 So there's a 114 million, Mr. Bragg, and 7.5 is a
2 TAN of transfer to the agency, but the rest of that
3 is state general revenue.

4 MS. ROLLINS: I'm sorry, it's what?

5 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: It's state general
6 revenue.

7 MS. ROLLINS: Okay.

8 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: It comes from the state.
9 It's allocated through the legislature, and it's
10 part of the original ABC program, and then
11 expansion that happened in the early 2000's.

12 MS. ROLLINS: So do we know, at this point, if
13 any of the Medicaid cuts that they're talking about
14 will affect our children in Arkansas with this
15 program?

16 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: Ms. Rollins, I do not
17 know specifically. That would -- we are working
18 closely with our colleagues in the early
19 intervention side of the House. I've not been made
20 aware of any changes to that, but we can certainly
21 ask questions and see if we can get any data on
22 impact. I know what you're talking about, but I
23 have not been made aware of any specific cuts that
24 would impact the children in early intervention.
25 And that would be that population that, you know,

1 are being served through Medicaid.

2 MS. ROLLINS: Yes, it's probably too early.

3 CHAIR MOORE: Board Members?

4 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I will -- I attended the
5 committee meeting that Leigh ran, and she can run a
6 meeting. It was really productive and informative
7 to me, so shout out to Tonya and Leigh for their
8 professionalism and their work on this. It's
9 highly detailed and you care about each center and
10 each child, so I just wanted to say that. I wasn't
11 fully clear on one of your committee member's
12 concerns, maybe you could comment on that.

13 MS. KEENER: Yes. Thank you. I'm going to
14 basically dismiss everything you just said because
15 I have a lot to learn as committee chair. So I
16 appreciate the compliment, but you're flat out
17 wrong. I've been thinking about this a lot. So
18 bottom line, as a state board member, I recommend
19 that we approve this action item, the subcommittee
20 does not, and so I want to follow up on that and
21 kind of give some background knowledge.

22 Long story short, I know Doctor Sarah Moore
23 said it before, I'll say it again, this meeting did
24 not go as well as it could have or should have.
25 There was a date change the last -- well, that was

1 not communicated well enough. Only three committee
2 members were able to able to come, two were popping
3 in and out. So when we got to the vote -- well,
4 that's in addition to myself. When we got to the
5 vote it was down to one person. That's of concern.

6 The attachments were not on the agenda, so the
7 members had zero prior knowledge of any of this
8 information. So they were given the information,
9 they had to digest it all and then make a
10 recommendation in a very short amount of time.
11 That was not ideal.

12 And it means that I asked them, these devoted
13 members who care deeply, to do exactly what I was
14 trying to avoid by creating this committee, and
15 that was what you guys wanted to avoid as well.
16 When I pulled this from the consent agenda about a
17 year ago, it was because we didn't have enough
18 information to, sort of, blindly approve 114
19 million dollars worth of state money, taxpayer
20 money.

21 You know, when I pulled this it was because we
22 wanted more data, we needed to be able to defend
23 our decisions, and that is what has happened in the
24 last six months to a year, and I was privy to that
25 process. I saw how that Coordinated Funding

1 Request went, I saw the data that came in, we asked
2 more questions, like she says, I pushed. My
3 committee members -- the committee members were not
4 privy to that information, so of course they're
5 were like, I can't approve this, I don't have the
6 information. So that is why I recommend approval,
7 but the committee does not.

8 I basically have a lot to learn to be a Chair,
9 and I ask that you approve this and I ask that our
10 committee members will give me grace and
11 forgiveness as I learn and do better moving
12 forward. The other thing, if you'll go back to the
13 slide on the three new providers? I'm going to
14 push again. Sorry.

15 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: That's okay.

16 MS. KEENER: While she's going back, the three
17 new providers you'll notice are Level Two Better
18 Beginnings providers. That's on a six star system.
19 They're not high quality rated providers; however
20 --

21 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: Sorry guys, I'll get
22 there.

23 MS. KEENER: Thank you. Yes, you'll see on
24 the bottom they're Level Two out of six. I want to
25 watch this because this is their opportunity to

1 engage with the State Board, to increase their
2 Better Beginnings level. If we come back next year
3 and we look at these levels and they have not
4 increased, or perhaps one of our funded programs
5 decreases, or they are not coming back with quality
6 scores or great outcomes or high class scores, all
7 the things that we need to focus on, we will look
8 at that reallocation in a different way.

9 And the other thing that I want to say that I
10 need to reiterate, and Ms. Williams did a fabulous
11 job doing this, in a very kind way, but we as a
12 Board have been approving ghost children, funding
13 for ghost children. So a program may have,
14 initially had -- I'm just making up these numbers
15 because it's not about a specific program, but they
16 may have 20 kids enrolled and requested money for
17 20 kids and over the years they're now only serving
18 ten kids. But as a Board, through a consent
19 agenda, we kept giving them money for 20 kids.
20 That's not going to happen anymore. That's why we
21 wanted to pull it last year because we couldn't
22 look at this and say we're doing right by
23 taxpayers, we're doing right by our kids. We are
24 moving in that direction. So thank you.

25 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I recognize this is not a

1 fawn fest, but Ms. Keener is too self-effacing.

2 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: I agree.

3 DR. ARNOLD: I witnessed the meeting and the
4 attendance wasn't her fault. And the people that
5 spoke up wanted it both ways explicitly. They
6 would say, we want our cake and we want to eat it
7 too, in that we don't want agencies to lose seats
8 and we would like -- we don't want waiting lists
9 and we would like our money. So what's the Chair
10 to do with that? So I think she resolved it with
11 such a positive spirit and respecting those voices
12 while, at the same time anyone that would hear the
13 transcript would have rolled their eyes.

14 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. I'm glad you were
15 able to be there, Doctor Arnold, and thank you,
16 Leigh, for your work, and Ms. Williams. I know
17 there's been a lot of changes in the past two
18 years, and it's exciting to see this progress as
19 you-all have more information and are better able
20 to serve. I have a few questions -- yes, you can
21 go first.

22 MR. HENDERSON: Yes. Looking at the program,
23 you know, I really see value in the framework, and
24 I think it could really be impactful. The question
25 I have is somewhat preliminary. How -- I see

1 you've got three districts that were selected. Was
2 it a lottery process? What was the determining
3 factor to selecting the districts?

4 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: So we used a lot of data,
5 Mr. Henderson, to do that. So it was using the
6 Coordinated Funding Request that came in from local
7 leads, it was using what percent of the children in
8 a county is being served. And so those new
9 programs -- now, there are existing programs that
10 also are receiving additional allocation, but they
11 were all in those communities that were zero to 40
12 percent, and they made a request. There are some
13 counties that were zero to 40 that didn't include a
14 request. And so we have work to do there --

15 MR. HENDERSON: Got you.

16 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: -- to help communities to
17 think about that. So those were the big factors,
18 and the enrollment of that program.

19 MR. HENDERSON: So it's fair to say that with
20 Leigh's leadership, these numbers could be doubled
21 by next year?

22 MS. KEENER: What's that?

23 MR. HENDERSON: No. Yes, I do see the value
24 in this and I appreciate your work with this
25 program and I look forward to the future of it.

1 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: Thank you.

2 MS. KEENER: And that was -- I didn't mention
3 this part, but part of the Coordinated Funding
4 Request, what was so beautiful about it is -- this
5 process is that we know that data tells a story,
6 and once this data was laid out, the story was
7 already written, it was like, well, obviously this
8 needs to go to these places. So we can look at
9 this list and each one of us be able to defend
10 these decisions and where this money goes. So
11 we're going to keep pushing. Thank you guys. If
12 someone would make a motion.

13 MR. BRAGG: I have a question. The difference
14 in your appropriation and the award amount, are you
15 anticipating the possibility of more funding?

16 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: No, sir, we're not.

17 MS. KEENER: What's allocated is not enough,
18 bottom line. And if there's an appetite for it
19 right now in the legislator, I'd entertain it, but
20 I don't think there is. Yes, it's a problem.

21 CHAIR MOORE: I believe the answer is the per
22 people amount, that doesn't -- that hasn't changed
23 in years; is that right?

24 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: It changed, Dr. Moore, I
25 think two years ago, there was a little bit of

1 savings and relinquishment and they pushed it back
2 in right before I, you know, came back into it, and
3 raised it to the 5,105 per child, but it was just a
4 little bit.

5 CHAIR MOORE: But this is no change over last
6 year?

7 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: No change. No change
8 over last year.

9 MS. KEENER: By comparison we have districts
10 receiving 20 -- over 20,000 per student per year,
11 so 5,000 is not going to get us where we need to
12 be.

13 CHAIR MOORE: For K-12 students, yes, compared
14 to --

15 MS. KEENER: Right.

16 MS. ROLLINS: Ms. Keener, I sure appreciate
17 all your work on this and putting a new focus on
18 it, and Ms. Williams, I know you've worked for
19 years on this. There's an old saying, we're
20 getting better at getting better. So please don't
21 beat yourself up on this. No, no, no, we're not
22 going to accept that at all.

23 MS. KEENER: Well, thank you, I appreciate it.

24 MS. ROLLINS: I'll make a motion to accept
25 this request for the -- approve the Arkansas Better

1 Chance program.

2 CHAIR MOORE: There's a motion by Ms. Rollins
3 to approve the request. Is there a second?

4 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

5 CHAIR MOORE: Second by Mr. Henderson. All in
6 favor say aye.

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIR MOORE: Any opposed? Motion passes.

9 MS. TONYA WILLIAMS: Thank you, Board Members.

10 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you.

11 MS. SMITH: I do want to make a comment
12 because, first off, Leigh doesn't push, Leigh
13 shoves, okay? But she shoves in the most
14 enthusiastic demand of excellence, and she does
15 that same demand of herself, and that's what you
16 saw just a minute ago. I want to recognize Brandy
17 sitting in the room. Brandy and Tonya's team, they
18 worked -- this is the first time they've went
19 through a process like this to let data really
20 drive the decision making process. It was new to
21 the entire office of Early Childhood. And Ms.
22 Keener asked all the right questions to get us to
23 that point.

24 MS. KEENER: And some wrong ones too.

25 MS. SMITH: Do what? And some wrong ones?

1 Never. So we value your input, we value your
2 leadership. I know the OEC team has grown and they
3 appreciate this. I don't want to encourage -- I
4 want to encourage the rest of you not to do this,
5 just let it be Leigh right now, okay? I'm kidding
6 you. I'm kidding you. No, she's been amazing and
7 she's been a true leader in this field and
8 everybody has grown. Okay? And don't beat
9 yourself up. All the stuff you half said you did,
10 I was like, what is she talking about? Gary, your
11 comments were astute and on point, what you said.
12 I always tell the literacy and learning services
13 team, if we're talking to a bunch of science
14 teachers they say we need more science credits and
15 everybody should take physics and chemistry. Okay.
16 If you're talking to history teachers everybody
17 needs government, everybody needs this, and this is
18 how many credits we need. When you have a
19 subcommittee full of early childhood people, they
20 need more money, yes; they need more seats, yes.
21 Right? So when it comes down to the decision of
22 what actually happens, sometimes it doesn't always
23 meet up. Right? And that's what you saw there.
24 That wasn't anything on you, okay? So I appreciate
25 the work of Tonya's team, and I appreciate the work

1 that this Board just now recognized of Ms. Keener,
2 and of the Office of Early Childhood. So thank
3 you-all.

4 CHAIR MOORE: Thank you. With that, let's go
5 ahead and do a break before our consent agenda and
6 then we'll do consent agenda and move in straight
7 to reports after that. So it's 10:19, we'll come
8 back at 10:25.

9 (WHEREUPON, the proceedings were concluded in
10 the matter at 10:19 a.m. on March 13, 2025.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

) ss

COUNTY OF CLEBURNE)

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