



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MINUTES

Charter Authorizing Panel

June 19, 2025

Arkansas Department of Education

DESE Auditorium

4 Capitol Mall

Little Rock, AR 72201

9:00 AM

I. Call to Order

The June 19, 2025 Regular Meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) was called to order by Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray at 9:08 AM. CAP Members attending in person were: Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray (Chair), Ms. Edie Stewart, Dr. John Bacon, and Dr. Tina Moore. CAP member attending via Zoom: Mr. Phillip Baldwin. Due to electronic issues, Mr. Baldwin chose to remove himself from the meeting. Absent was Dr. Crystal Beshears and Ms. Toyce Newton. LaBria Brown, Litigation Attorney for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), Office of Legal Services, provided a legal procedures overview.

II. Consent Agenda

The Consent Agenda was introduced by Dr. Darrell Smith and requested to add an item to the consent agenda involving the Academies at Rivercrest District Conversion Charter School. Dr. Moore made a motion to accept the item onto the consent agenda. The motion failed. Dr. Smith then transitioned to the consent agenda:

- Minutes of the May 15, 2025 Charter Authorizing Panel Meeting
- Charter Amendment Request--Arkansas Lighthouse Charter Schools
- Charter Amendment Requests- eStem Public Charter Schools
 - a. Request to split eStem Elementary School between two locations
 - b. Request to relocate eStem Junior High School
 - c. Request to relocate eStem High School
- Charter Amendment Request for Iota Community Schools

- Charter Amendment Request for Pinecrest Fayetteville
- Charter Amendment Requests for Somerset Academy Schools
 - a. Somerset Academy Bentonville High School
 - b. Somerset Academy Bentonville Middle School
 - c. Somerset Academy Bentonville (K-5)
 - d. Somerset Academy Little Rock High School
 - e. Somerset Academy Little Rock Middle School
 - f. Somerset Academy Little Rock (K-5)

The CAP expressed concerns with approving the schools as listed on the consent agenda. CAP expressed an interest in having a work session to discuss the schools further. Dr. Bacon made a motion to remove the schools from the consent agenda for this month. The vote was unanimous. Following the vote, Mrs. Stewart moved to approve the May 15 CAP meeting minutes and Dr. Moore seconded. The vote unanimously passed.

III. Action Agenda

The Action Agenda was introduced by Dr. Darrell Smith and included the following:

- A. Charter Amendment Request for Academies of Math and Science to raise the enrollment CAP to 700.
- B. Presentation and Discussion:

- **Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Erik Greenberg, Academy of Math and Science**

Mr. Greenburg discussed the history of the school and provided a presentation. He generally discussed the schools influence on the community and facilities. Mr. Greenburg presented additional information including class size and financial data. He then expanded on the rationale for requesting the increase in student enrollment CAP.

- **Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Brandi Adams, AMS**

Ms. Brandi Adams expanded on the presentation focusing in on the at-risk populations they serve. She presented the increase in their academics and emphasized they were not satisfied and will continue to grow. She presented the NWEA results and how they were very excited with the results especially in the kindergarten population. She fielded questions from the CAP regarding the staff and how they recruit new staff members. Ms. Adams expanded on the quality and tenure of the staff and the geographical locations. She expanded on how they recruit new students and their supporting efforts. She also answered questions surrounding the SPED population and how the needs of that population are met.

- Ms. LaBria Brown from ADE Legal Services identified no legal concerns.
- **Dr. Tina Moore** questioned the reason for class size increases and the rationale. Additionally, she inquired about the intervention blocks and the importance in the bigger picture of the school moving forward. She also asked about the staff hiring process and if they had identified any key concern areas. Dr. Moore emphasized that the school maintains professional development specifically focused on AIMS program in the Arkansas.
- **Dr. Bacon** followed up with concerns about the size of staff with the increase of the population. It was clarified that the document had a typo and that the school will have approximately 51 staff to meet the increase. He also inquired where the staff personnel are recruited. He asked how the student population was recruited and retained in lieu of other school down sizing. He closed his line of questions with being excited to see the growth and direction the school is going.
- **Edie Stewart** opened with generally complimenting the efforts of the school and its model of recruitment. She inquired about the SPED population in regards to the staff and support services available. In discussion it was mentioned that the school does not currently have a literacy coach and that this is mitigated by staff currently training in Arizona to meet school needs better.

Following the presentation, the Chair asked for a motion regarding the amendment. Dr. Bacon moved to approve the enrollment CAP increase and Mrs. Stewart seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 4-0 (Dr. Bacon - Yea, Ms. Edie Stewart - Yea, Dr. McMurray - Yea, Dr. Moore - Yea).

IV. Legal Concerns

Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray requested LaBria Brown, Litigation Attorney, to address legal concerns. Ms. Brown reported no issues.

V. Reports

- A. Mr. Freddie Scott, Office of School Choice, introduced the reports section.
- B. Exalt Academy of Southwest Little Rock
 - **Tina Long, Superintendent, Exalt Academy**

Mrs. Long reported on the expansion from absorbing Arkansas Military and First Responders Academy (AMFRA) which was shuttered in April. She presented information on maintaining the military aspect of the previous school as to serve the previous AMFRA student population. Ms. Long reported on expanded facilities to meet the increased needs of their students. She discussed the expanded partnerships to include Baptist Hospital in developing opportunities for their students and the Walton Family Foundation in supporting their first year with the high school component. She discussed Exalt's marketing campaign and the targeted populations, including Spanish speaking populations. Ms. Long ended by discussing ways in which staffing is being addressed to meet current school needs and did not express any concerns moving forward into the next school year.

- Dr. Moore inquired about the anticipated student population for the school in the next year.

C. Closures and Non-Renewals (2025-26 School Year)

- Mr. Scott discussed the closures and non-renewals for the upcoming 2025-2026 school year. He expanded on the key school closures and non-renewals.
- Dr. Moore inquired about the process of the closure for a school. Mr. Scott explained the general process including the responsibilities for the both the school and the department. Dr. Moore expressed an interest in developing some kind of "exit interview" to gain a better understanding of the reasons for school closers.

VI. Adjournment

Dr. Moore moved to adjourn the meeting, motion seconded by Dr. Bacon. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 10:33 AM.

Minutes Prepared By:



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Minutes Approved By:



Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair
Charter Authorizing Panel
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