

ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 9, 2025
9:00 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. ADRIENNE WOODS, Chair
MS. LISA HUNTER, Vice Chair
MR. RANDY HENDERSON
MR. JEFF WOOD
MS. LEIGH KEENER
MR. KEN BRAGG
DR. GARY ARNOLD
MR. DAVID PEACOCK
DR. AARON ABBOTT

NON-VOTING BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. STACY SMITH, Assistant Commissioner
MS. JEANIE WILCOXON, Arkansas Teacher of the Year

ADE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MR. DANIEL SHULTS, Legal Counsel

ALSO APPEARING:

MS. COURTNEY SALAS-FORD, Chief of Staff

LOCATION:

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

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PROCEEDING

2 | I. ACTION AGENDA

3 I.I POYEN SCHOOL DISTRICT WAIVER REQUEST - STANDARDS FOR
4 ACCREDITATION 1-A.5 (CLASS SIZE)

5 CHAIR WOODS: We'll move on to our action
6 agenda. First, is the Poyen School District.

8 We are looking for a Standards of Accreditation
9 class size waiver; correct?

10 MS. WORSHAM: That is correct.

14 I am here to present a waiver request from the
15 Poyen School District for a standard of accreditation
16 waiver for class size. The superintendent is on the
17 Zoom today and is prepared to provide information
18 regarding their request.

1 forget about the waiver and boot this crazy lady out.

2 So, you know, we -- we have a purpose. So we're
3 having a great fun day.

4 Our district -- it's a blessing because we are,
5 you know, experiencing rapid growth, and so we are
6 very thankful for that. We have approximately about
7 25 to 30 new students this year, and for a small,
8 rural school district that has made quite the impact.
9 Last year, we also gained about that same number of
10 students. So from last year to this year we're up
11 about 66 students, so it's been a rapid process of
12 growth. And so we're at like 566 right now, so we're
13 very thankful for that. But with that comes making
14 sure that we are putting our best and our brightest
15 in the classroom. We're also very fortunate because
16 letter grades just came out and our elementary and
17 our high school both A letter grades. So we want to
18 make sure that we are maintaining that consistency
19 and that high level of engagement and instruction for
20 our students.

21 So right now each of our classes are over two.
22 But, again, we want to make sure we have that highly
23 effective teacher in there, that we are preserving
24 that fidelity with our HQIM, providing consistent
25 services for our students. We have already -- we

1 already had a part-time paraprofessional that helped
2 in the two classrooms, and for right now we've
3 already added another full time, so it takes down on
4 that student/teacher ratio. I am -- like this, I'm
5 actually interviewing someone at 2:00 today that is
6 graduating in December. So, unless she runs for the
7 door, we're hopeful that -- you know, that we will
8 have someone that is high-quality in place whenever
9 we come back from Christmas break.

10 But for right now, if you have been in a small
11 district as administrators -- this is my seventeenth
12 year as a superintendent; I was a curriculum
13 coordinator before that. So we are all very active
14 in the classrooms, walk-throughs; I've covered in
15 classrooms; I've helped in the second-grade
16 classroom. You know, we're all just making sure --
17 we are a very strong PLC school. So our teachers are
18 collaborating together. I'm in the PLCs every chance
19 that I get, so I'm able to be in there and assist
20 with that. You know, doing walk-throughs; you know,
21 making sure student engagement is happening in the
22 classrooms; we're tracking our student growth on our
23 benchmarks, our attendance, our behavior data, and
24 then also, of course, getting feedback from our
25 teachers and our parents.

1 So until we can put -- again, we don't just want
2 a warm body; we want the best. We want a
3 high-quality educator in the classroom, and hopefully
4 we will have that by January. So if y'all know of
5 anyone that wants to be, you know, part of Poyen
6 School District, then have them contact us. I would
7 love to talk to them.

8 So that's kind of where we are right now. Are
9 there any questions?

10 MS. KEENER: I'll start.

11 CHAIR WOODS: Ms. Keener, I think you're also on
12 Zoom, so I wanted to acknowledge. You can start if
13 you have any questions.

14 MS. KEENER: Yes. Good morning. Thank you. I
15 am in Pittsburgh for a conference, so I'm excited to
16 join virtually. I did have a couple of questions.

17 So, first of all, congratulations on sort of
18 bucking the trend of reduced enrollment. That's huge
19 and exciting to hear. You mentioned that y'all have
20 200 classrooms. And from what I could tell in the
21 request, both are over 25 at this point?

22 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes. Both are two over. Yes.

23 MS. KEENER: Both are two over. Okay. So the
24 paraprofessionals that you have -- I think you had
25 one -- one that's shared. And then one that would be

1 in one of the classrooms or --

2 SUPT. KISSIRE: No. She is actually in both
3 classrooms. So we're able to kind of work it out
4 where the one we share is kind of alternating with
5 the one that's full-time for second grade, so that
6 during all that core instruction it's cutting down
7 that student/teacher ratio and there is someone in
8 there. And, of course, we are very strong in
9 inclusion too. So our special ed. teachers are also
10 pushing in. So we have at least two to three, you
11 know, licensed educators -- you know, they're in the
12 classroom, and then also our paraprofessional that's
13 in there.

14 MS. KEENER: That's great. I appreciate the
15 SPED teachers rolling in and working in the national
16 environment. I really -- I love it.

17 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes. Me too. I am so
18 pro-inclusion. It's -- yes, it's amazing, it's
19 awesome.

20 MS. KEENER: Well, given the -- for bucking the
21 trend that you guys are increasing enrollment, I
22 wonder what -- of course, I'm hesitant to do it for
23 more than one year. I want to see that, you know, I
24 guess that a -- that the district is working to
25 certify those teachers that are interested in that.

1 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes.

2 MS. KEENER: You mentioned you're interviewing
3 someone today. So are you considering splitting this
4 into three classrooms?

SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes. And kind of what we're looking to do -- and also just on a side note, we are going to start the pre-educator program next year in our district. So love to grow your own, so I think that that's going to help as well with that. So what we kind of look to do is -- looking at our data, looking at that lowest 25 percent that we have, what we're looking to do is to take that lowest 25 -- which would be probably about eight students -- and actually make a classroom with them so that that teacher, who will be a brand-new teacher coming in -- but also working with the paraprofessionals, they can do a little bit more intensive -- you know, break into even smaller groups and doing some individual assistance and stuff like that. So just -- yeah, just kind of pulling that lowest 25 percent, so we'll make it a smaller classroom. It's less, you know, flipping over the applecart halfway through the year, because that can be challenging for students. But I think that, you know, kind of taking those that need a little bit more intensive instruction in a smaller

1 group setting, that through our new teacher and our
2 paraprofessionals and our inclusion that we'll be
3 able to do that.

4 MS. KEENER: So maybe I'm misunderstanding. I
5 am a big believer in best practices and heterogenous
6 classrooms being the best place for all students.

7 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes.

8 MS. KEENER: Explain a little bit more about
9 isolating those that are performing at the lowest 25
10 percent in their own classroom. That gives me pause.

11 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yeah. Yeah. Would not be
12 isolating. They will still -- everything else will
13 be part of that -- we just want to be able to provide
14 more intensive instruction for them. So, I mean,
15 they're still right there in the building, they're
16 still -- you know, lunchtime, they're -- you know,
17 activity times, you know, music, PE, all that kind of
18 stuff -- everything all the same. But all we want to
19 be able to do is just to provide more intensive
20 support for those students in a setting. So, you
21 know, again, sometimes in the classroom when you have
22 some of your students that are, you know, in that
23 lower percentile -- and if you have 25 in the
24 classroom and then you've got your students that are
25 kind of, you know, right here in the middle, and then

1 you've got your -- you know, your higher achieving,
2 your GT students, it's hard to differentiate with
3 everything and teach to every level. So if we're
4 able to take some of those students that are
5 struggling more, put them in a smaller group setting
6 with that additional staff, that licensed teacher, a
7 paraprofessional, the SPED teacher pushing in, then
8 we're able to provide more intensive support for them
9 that we might not be able to do in a classroom of 25
10 that is all the way across the spectrum with, you
11 know, achievement level, so that we can -- and no one
12 would know, parents -- you know, we're not saying how
13 to work with your kid because this is where they
14 fell. It would just be -- it would kind of be no
15 different than like pulling out for RTI or something
16 like that where you're just providing that more
17 intensive instruction in a smaller group setting so
18 that we can help those students more and they're not
19 left behind in a classroom of 25 with all the various
20 ability levels.

21 MS. KEENER: You know, I'm -- I understand your
22 reasoning behind it, but I'm wholeheartedly against
23 that idea. Just understanding best practice and the
24 role of the teacher as differentiation being a core
25 piece of that job, and I wonder if you're proving the

1 point for the need for an additional certified
2 teacher to split into three heterogenous, you know,
3 mixed delivery sort of rooms.

4 SUPT. KISSIRE: That's something we would
5 definitely entertain. We were just trying to look at
6 doing a smaller group setting so that we could
7 provide more intensive services for those students
8 that needed it. So we're -- you know, we're flexible
9 with that. Because, again, we haven't even hired
10 anyone yet, so we've not set anything in stone with
11 what will be done.

12 MS. KEENER: Thank you.

13 Ms. Woods, I'm going to pause for now and let
14 someone else ask questions. Thank you.

15 CHAIR WOODS: I'll start on my right. Mr.
16 Henderson? Mr. Bragg? No. Mr. Wood? Ms. Hunter?

17 MS. HUNTER: So I just -- I'm sorry if I'm just
18 a little confused about some of this request here.
19 So we have a -- the second-grade class who is large.
20 There's, let's say, 54 students; right?

21 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes.

22 MS. HUNTER: And so you're asking for this
23 waiver for three years to follow that particular
24 class all the way through?

25 SUPT. KISSIRE: I had actually gone back and

1 modified that to just one year.

2 MS. HUNTER: Oh, okay.

3 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes.

4 MS. HUNTER: Okay. Thank you for that.

5 SUPT. KISSIRE: Uh-huh.

6 MS. HUNTER: And, again, not to go back to what
7 Ms. Keener was saying, but, you know, your mindset at
8 least is for this third teacher, whoever he or she
9 may be, follow this class?

10 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes. Uh-huh.

11 MS. HUNTER: And then in -- at least in your
12 current thinking it is then -- the lowest 25
13 percentile would be --

14 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes.

15 MS. HUNTER: -- or 25 percent would be kind of
16 --

17 SUPT. KISSIRE: Just to finish out this year,
18 just that -- just our second semester. Yes.

19 MS. HUNTER: Oh, just the second semester. So
20 --

21 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes. Uh-huh. Yeah.

22 MS. HUNTER: -- they would not be following them
23 into third grade?

24 SUPT. KISSIRE: No. No. This is just for this
25 year to focus on those -- just in that second

1 semester we would have that full-time teacher in and
2 hired just to assist more intensive with those
3 students in the second grade. Because, again, the
4 next year is third grade and we're looking at, you
5 know, what happens with third-grade promotion. So,
6 you know, trying to provide that additional support
7 next semester, just that one semester to -- you know,
8 for those students that are right there and kind of
9 need that additional push, that smaller group setting
10 and so-forth. But when they go into third grade, we
11 will start the year with it just being split between
12 the three teachers like -- just we normally would,
13 nothing different.

14 MS. HUNTER: Okay. Thank you.

15 SUPT. KISSIRE: Uh-huh.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Dr. Arnold?

17 DR. ARNOLD: I just want to make one
18 clarification with my colleague, Leigh Keener. So
19 when it was clarified that this was just for one
20 year, do you still retain your point of view?

21 MS. KEENER: Thank you. I appreciate that. I
22 still very much disagree with the idea of separating
23 based on achievement. I think -- yeah, I don't -- I
24 think differentiation is a key role of every
25 certified educator. And I'm -- it gives me pause.

1 I'm not quite -- I'm not quite settled on that point
2 yet. I appreciate --

3 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah.

4 MS. KEENER: I appreciate that.

5 DR. ARNOLD: And thank you. I just wanted your
6 expertise and knowledge to inform this. And so I was
7 just trying to determine whether it was based on
8 numbers or differentiation. You've made that clear.
9 It's very helpful. Thank you.

10 SUPT. KISSIRE: And even in a classroom,
11 students that are in that percentile there's still
12 going to be differentiation. Because, you know, some
13 of the students are going to be on the lower end of
14 that and some might be right there at what we used to
15 call the bubble -- students that would be, you know,
16 right there in that area. So there's still going to
17 have to be differentiation. It's -- it's kind of
18 like the way we do RTI, because that's what you have
19 to do with, you know, Response to Intervention is
20 take those students, assess what their need is, and
21 then provide those services in that, you know,
22 smaller group setting. And so, you know, we're -- we
23 were kind of looking at taking that same approach to
24 it for that one semester of being able to go in, just
25 like RTI, and provide that more intensive support

1 before those students went into third grade and back
2 into a regular setting.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Dr. Abbott?

4 All right. If there are no more comments, then
5 the floor is open for a motion.

6 MR. BRAGG: I move we accept the waiver.

7 CHAIR WOODS: I have a motion by Mr. Bragg. Is
8 there a second?

9 MR. PEACOCK: I'll second.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Second by Mr. Peacock.

11 Okay. All in favor say aye.

12 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

13 CHAIR WOODS: All opposed?

14 Hearing none, motion passes.

15 SUPT. KISSIRE: Thank you all very much. We
16 plan to keep our A's and keep on teaching our kiddos.

17 CHAIRMAN MOORE: Thank you. Have a good day.

18 SUPT. KISSIRE: Thank you. You too. Bye-bye.

19 CHAIRMAN MOORE: Bye-bye.

20 **I.III. WESTSIDE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT WAIVER REQUEST -**
21 **STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION 1-A.5 AND RULES GOVERNING CLASS**
22 **SIZE AND TEACHING LOAD**

23 CHAIRMAN MOORE: All right. Next we have the
24 waiver request by Westside Consolidated School
25 District. Another Standards for Accreditation?

1 MS. WORSHAM: That's correct. So this is
2 actually an Act 1240 waiver which is -- is requested
3 for multiple years. The previous one was a one-year
4 request just for standards. This is a request for
5 two standards, which is class size and teaching load,
6 for the Westside Consolidated School District. They
7 have put on here 25-26 school year and going forward.
8 If approved, typically we would approve these for
9 three years, but that is a board discretion. And so
10 the -- Mr. George is here to speak to the school.
11 This waiver request is to allow for some flexibility
12 in their scheduling at their high school. And I'm
13 going to hand it over to Mr. George to provide the
14 information from the district.

15 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

23 So the -- what -- what we're looking for -- and
24 I'll -- I'll kind of explain our scheduling. But
25 what we're looking for is a piece of the overall

1 process of our professional learning community
2 scheduling to make sure that we have additional
3 opportunities for students to get enrichment and, oh,
4 interventions. So Ms. Dean actually made this, and I
5 will try to follow some of that, but I have some of
6 my -- my own things.

7 So, again, it's a 1240 waiver. Looking at
8 Arkansas Connections Academy, the ability to do this,
9 it would apply to our 8th through 12th grade
10 students; and, again, 25-26 year going forward. The
11 last two previous years you've approved a one-year
12 waiver and asked me to come back. I had hoped to
13 have done this in July of this year. We had some
14 miscommunication on whether or not I would need this
15 waiver anymore. Once the accreditation hit showing
16 that I had my two teachers -- that we'll discuss
17 later -- that they were flagging, we went ahead and
18 set this up to come back to you.

19 So, again, it's to enhance student learning.
20 It's to have this innovative schedule that we've had
21 running for the last three years. And as I said,
22 this is a part of the bigger piece.

23 So a few years ago, I guess in 2023, like a lot
24 of schools, we jumped off headfirst into the PLC
25 processes. We -- we took a group, which I was

1 principal at the time -- we took a group to White
2 River School in Seattle. Actually, Sunday morning
3 we're leaving again. I'll be going with another
4 group of -- of our teachers, so this will be our
5 third group that we've sent through. When we went to
6 that we really started to try to figure out how we
7 could get more time for our kids. Probably you would
8 consider it a tier two level support for our
9 students, to have more -- more intervention or
10 enrichment time.

1 is our -- our schedule, how that lines out. Again,
2 90-minute blocks for one through three on the A/B
3 schedule; fourth and fifth are 45-minute blocks. So
4 each -- each teacher sees each kid three times a
5 week. And, again, that -- that took away the -- the
6 -- the opportunity to see one kid more than the other
7 during those -- during that two-week span.

8 On our Fast Fridays a lot of our teachers -- and
9 this has kind of modified over the last few years --
10 the original intent was on the Fridays that our
11 teachers would give common formative assessments;
12 that way, they could have time to meet on Monday,
13 have Tuesday and Wednesday -- and the original plan
14 was intervention days. Last year, listening to our
15 teachers, we slowed that process down because it was
16 moving a little bit fast. Most of them still do the
17 common formative assessments. They all have their
18 scheduled meeting team time throughout the week. But
19 the -- we kind of let them pace out when the common
20 formative assessment would be more naturally for
21 them.

22 So the -- the -- the time that the teachers have
23 with the interventions, we actually added a day last
24 year. So we went from two days of
25 interventions/enrichment to three days intervention/

1 enrichment. We also had Capturing Kids' Hearts. We
2 moved away from that this year because we're pouring
3 all of our resources into the interventions and such.
4 So, currently, on Monday they have homeroom during a
5 30-minute block, 9:30 to 10:00. In those, they will
6 get scheduled up on RTI. The RTI Scheduler is the
7 program that we use. Teachers can talk about grades.
8 We can send people to specific classes if they're not
9 -- if they've got some zeroes or not handed in type
10 things. But then on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we
11 have the intervention blocks, the enrichment blocks.
12 And then on Friday we do not have those; every class
13 meets, so we lose that 30 minutes of block time.

14 My teachers -- the class load, I do have two
15 teachers, and this has been the same two teachers for
16 the last couple of years. They -- they are well
17 aware of them being over, but they have -- this year
18 my art teacher, senior high art teacher is 42
19 students over on Fridays only. And my computer
20 science teacher is 19 students over the 150 cap on
21 Fridays only. Important to note, they never have
22 more than 30 students in a class. So we're -- we're
23 working with that baseline, but because we are
24 meeting two different schedules on Friday they bleed
25 over a little bit.

1 This waiver gives us the flexibility to continue
2 on with the -- the innovative schedule that we've
3 tried to put together to continue to have our kids
4 get this extra time.

5 The -- the blocks again, 90 minutes; fourth and
6 fifth are 45 minutes. On -- wherever their team
7 meeting is throughout the week, they are using the
8 data from the CFAs, they're using the data from their
9 formative assessments in class to make decisions on
10 who needs to come to these intervention times.

11 Now I don't believe it got in your packet, but
12 over -- over the course of three years -- let me find
13 my packet -- over the course of three years, we've
14 tracked how many sessions that we've had from our RTI
15 Scheduler. This particular year -- of course, we're
16 only in October -- we've had 827 sessions that have
17 been made by teachers that students have the ability
18 to (a) enroll themselves in, or (b) the teacher pulls
19 them in. There's open and closed sessions that they
20 can kind of run with that. Last year, there was
21 3,710 sessions created. And the first year we did
22 this, there was 2,721 sessions. So a total of over
23 7,000 chances for students to get into places they
24 needed to be at to help with some things. Of course,
25 in our -- in our time -- intervention time, say the

1 math teacher, she may pull five kids in there. We
2 don't want a large environment. Our non-core people,
3 they're going to have more kids. Say my art teacher,
4 he may pull in 25 people because, number one, he's
5 popular, kids wants to flock to him, but, number two,
6 they may have things that they're working on that's a
7 -- a longer paced assignment that they're able to get
8 some extra time. So we've had -- we've had great
9 success with that.

10 As far as our school district data, high school,
11 we're a C school. We -- before Covid, we had two
12 years at a B. When we came back from Covid, we've
13 been -- up until this year when some point values
14 changed and stuff -- we were a C. We were increasing
15 each year. This year, we still fall in that middle
16 level C situation. We believe there are some coding
17 things on our end that will help our score. I know
18 there was -- the update last week that -- that came
19 out, I believe we went up. State average was like
20 five points; our score went up nine or ten points in
21 that. So we are -- we are really -- have the focus
22 on student achievement.

23 Again, we are offering enrichment sessions here.
24 So I want to point out that our AP scores over the
25 last five years -- this past year we had 54 percent

1 of our students that took an AP -- AP test qualified
2 with a three or higher on that, which is -- last year
3 was 39 percent; the year before was 28 percent. So
4 we are seeing some gains in our AP scores as well.
5 So it's not just in that area, but that is a -- a
6 visible place that we can look that we do see that
7 there's some success that is coming with this.

8 Everything that we have done is data driven in
9 this process. And I will say that last year when I
10 was here, one of the questions -- not necessarily
11 particular to the waiver -- we have -- we have
12 seniors who are on campus that get what they need,
13 and they may leave school. They've -- the board
14 asked do I have data for that. At the time I didn't.
15 And I wish I had this year's data, but as I said, my
16 -- my principal did not get that before she left.
17 But my data for seniors -- and this is in the 24-25
18 school year -- asking do you have a modified
19 scheduled? Essentially, can you leave early? Do you
20 have to be here each block of the day? Eighty-one
21 percent said they had a modified schedule; Eighteen
22 percent said they did not. Did you arrive late or
23 early on A days? Thirty-one percent, 46 percent said
24 they arrived late or early on A days. B days was 25
25 percent and 44 percent. And then, currently, what

1 days do you attend? Eighty-four percent was both A
2 and B days, so we don't have kids that are just not
3 coming one day a week, and nine percent was one day
4 or other. And what are you doing on those days? And
5 43 percent go to work -- we are a working-class
6 community. They -- a lot of our kids have to help
7 their parents pay for different things that they
8 need. Sixty-four percent, they have the credits that
9 they need. But there's also -- the vast majority of
10 these kids, they're either going to work, as I said,
11 or they're going and taking college classes onsite at
12 Arkansas State, or they are going home and doing --
13 it's not a concurrent class. My son, for instance,
14 takes college concurrent classes sitting at school in
15 the computer lab. But if it's not a concurrent
16 situation, they're on their own time and they're
17 building college credit virtually at home. So
18 they've got that option of how they want to build
19 things. So we're not just not having people there.
20 There's 18 percent or so of our people who are just
21 -- I don't know what they do. But, again, that --
22 that was last year's data.

23 So with -- with all of that, I appreciate your
24 time. I'm happy to take any kind of questions. But,
25 again, this is -- this is two teachers. They -- they

1 understand that they've -- they've been notified
2 three years that they have a few students over.
3 These are not core classes that are over. And,
4 again, this -- this has really worked for us to be
5 able to ensure that every student sees a teacher an
6 equal amount during the week.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

8 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, ma'am.

9 CHAIR WOODS: I'll start on my left this time.
10 Mr. Peacock, do you have any questions?

11 MR. PEACOCK: Yes. Sorry. This is the first
12 time I've asked questions sitting here.

13 SUPT. GEORGE: That's okay. Welcome to the
14 Board.

15 MR. PEACOCK: And I apologize, I had feedback
16 somehow through my system, so I'll fix that going
17 forward.

18 First off, I'm very familiar with Westside.
19 It's a great school. Y'all do a great job, so
20 congratulations on that.

21 Is there an alternate path instead of a waiver
22 that would allow you to -- the teachers to have 150
23 -- to exceed the 150 students a day?

24 SUPT. GEORGE: There is. There is a -- there's
25 a small amount. We've got -- I've got some guidance

1 on how to figure that out. I believe one teacher
2 would be \$2,500 maybe; the other teacher would be
3 about \$1,500. And, again, that -- that is something
4 that we've come here the last couple of years. That
5 -- that question has been asked, answered. It's --
6 it's a piece of a larger -- a larger thing. And I
7 will say, as I -- as I mentioned, I -- I tried to get
8 here in July -- June, July of this year. And if the
9 Board -- your position is not to approve this, at
10 that time we could try to make small adjustments and
11 that type -- we can do a financial adjustment at this
12 point. But it is -- it is something that -- that I
13 know that these teachers have -- have had the
14 conversation before and they're not over their 30.
15 So that seat still has a rearend in it, the same
16 amount of time -- over 90 in 45 minutes over those
17 two classes that come in. Just on Fridays it happens
18 to have two rear ends, twice on fourth and fifth
19 block, and that's kind of where we get put over at.

20 MR. PEACOCK: So this -- the -- the additional
21 compensation, would it present an undue hardship on
22 the school district that -- that -- that would --
23 that would lead you not to want to do that for the
24 teachers?

25 SUPT. GEORGE: Not necessarily. No. And --

1 and, again, this is -- this is your first --

2 MR. PEACOCK: Yes.

3 SUPT. GEORGE: -- time on the board.

4 MR. PEACOCK: I may be --

5 SUPT. GEORGE: It's my first time as
6 superintendent.

7 MR. PEACOCK: -- asking the same question that
8 people have already asked.

9 SUPT. GEORGE: So I'm -- I'm getting that
10 picture this year as we go. Again, we are -- we have
11 been very financially lean --

12 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah.

13 SUPT. GEORGE: -- throughout the years. We --
14 we are just starting a 15.2 million dollar building
15 addition to our high school that we had to put off a
16 few years ago because we didn't have the money to do.
17 We thought it was going to cost one thing; it was
18 going to cost another. However, we are doing that
19 with our money. We're not asking patrons to kick in
20 at this point, and that -- that will come down the
21 road for other additions. But we've just -- as a
22 district, we've really tried to be financially lean
23 so we can do things for our students. And, again,
24 this -- this is a possibility that -- that we could
25 do. And, you know, as -- as the waiver asks, I wish

1 we could do this without having to come back next
2 year. I'm happy to keep coming back. I'm happy to
3 go another route if we need to, and that would've
4 been really easy in July. But this way to do it, we
5 could still do at this point.

6 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. Thank you.

7 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

8 CHAIR WOODS: Dr. Abbott? No. Dr. Arnold?

9 DR. ARNOLD: So the -- the issue is that the
10 community really endears Fast Friday. And the -- I
11 understand the -- the 30 count.

12 SUPT. GEORGE: Uh-huh.

13 DR. ARNOLD: Tell me again the exact count on
14 Friday. What is --

15 SUPT. GEORGE: So on -- on Fridays, our art
16 teacher, I guess, is 42 students over; so 192. And,
17 again, that's -- that's never more than 30 in the
18 class. We just mix the time up to where two
19 different classes come in there, so he gets
20 overloaded. Again, popular teacher, everybody wants
21 him. It's an elective. So, quite often -- sometimes
22 we have to push kids that direction because we have
23 nowhere else in the schedule. The computer science
24 teacher was at 19 students over. Now this was
25 actually before the October 1 numbers. I -- I did

1 this a few days before that just so we could get this
2 presentation turned in to the Board and I have my
3 information set. So it -- you know, the basketball
4 coach, nobody worries about how many students -- or
5 the football team, nobody worries about the number of
6 students. They want more students. The football
7 team needs more students. Same thing with -- with
8 art, he wants more students; he wants to expose the
9 -- the kids to this thing that he has going.
10 Computer science, you know, that's -- everything is
11 pushing towards computers at this point, so that's
12 why from 8th grade to 12th grade -- and we only have
13 one computer science teacher. So, again, this --
14 this -- we bleed over just a little bit. There was
15 -- the first year that we came, there was an
16 opportunity -- there were a couple of core teachers;
17 we self-adjusted on some things to make that not
18 happen. But, again, these are -- these are places
19 kids want to be at.

20 DR. ARNOLD: Okay. So -- and I'm just gaining
21 information.

22 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

23 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you for your transparency.
24 So one teacher has 192, the other --

25 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

1 DR. ARNOLD: -- is 169?

2 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

3 DR. ARNOLD: All right. And so how did the
4 teachers feel about this?

5 SUPT. GEORGE: In the past, like I said, they've
6 -- I've had the personal conversation with them two
7 previous years, just saying, hey, you understand
8 you're -- you're over the -- the limit? And, again,
9 they were -- they were fine with that. I did not
10 have that conversation this year. Quite honestly,
11 I'm not sure that my high school principal did. But
12 I don't have that information.

13 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I really appreciate your
14 honesty there.

15 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

16 DR. ARNOLD: And then, lastly, that -- if the
17 intent to Friday is personalization, you know, with
18 the -- how it's -- why it's structured that way and
19 the catch-all purposes of the day -- so I'm not
20 trying to squeeze you at all, but it just stretches
21 my imagination to see more personalization with these
22 high numbers. How -- what's your impression as
23 superintendent, are those personalization objectives
24 accomplished or accomplishable with these numbers?

25 SUPT. GEORGE: So the -- the personalization

1 comes more in the intervention/enrichment; so that's
2 Monday through Thursday. The -- the Fridays is to
3 get -- to make sure that every teacher sees their
4 students an equal amount of time throughout that
5 week. So you talked about community -- yes, our
6 community likes that. I -- honestly, I don't care if
7 my kids go to college. I don't care if they go into
8 the workforce. I don't care if they go into the
9 military. If they're going to work at McDonald's, I
10 want them to be the best hamburger flipper McDonald's
11 has and then go be the manager. I have preached that
12 to my students my entire time as high school
13 principal. And in -- in some of these sessions that
14 we have, we have community members who come in and
15 they're providing work-related sessions. We have
16 colleges that come in and provide those work-related
17 sessions to give kids exposure to the things that
18 they may not know that are out there for them.

19 The Fridays, where that really helps us at --
20 previous, we have a snow day on a random day during
21 the week; you don't know what day is your next day
22 when you come back because it's like, do we pause it,
23 do we say it's a B day, do we say it's -- now you
24 know Mondays and Wednesdays are A days; you know
25 Thursday and Tuesday are B days. And you know if you

1 come on Friday you have every single class. So that
2 -- that has really helped parents out, that has
3 helped students out, being able to figure their
4 schedules out, especially new students into the
5 district.

6 DR. ARNOLD: Dr. George, thank you for your
7 frankness.

8 SUPT. GEORGE: I wish I was a doctor, but I
9 don't ever foresee that I'll ever go back to school
10 again. So I'm there every day -- and never say
11 never, but --

12 DR. ARNOLD: Right. I'll just go with --

13 SUPT. GEORGE: -- I do appreciate that.

14 DR. ARNOLD: I'll go with Chris, then.

15 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, that works.

16 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you for your frankness.

17 SUPT. GEORGE: I've heard much worse.

18 CHAIR WOODS: Ms. Hunter?

19 MS. HUNTER: Yes. So, you know, I remember you
20 and so -- and I remember this whole conversation. So
21 the way -- it's a throughput issue on Fridays for
22 these couple of teachers, I understand that. And
23 that really doesn't bother me because, you know,
24 they're not -- like you said, the classrooms,
25 individually, are not oversized. You know, I am -- I

1 do consider -- continue to like -- how are we really
2 measuring this kind of non-traditional approach that
3 you're taking? I mean, I know there's a lot of
4 schools that do the A/B block scheduling.

5 SUPT. GEORGE: Uh-huh.

6 MS. HUNTER: But this kind of -- it's kind of a
7 hybrid, in a way.

8 SUPT. GEORGE: Uh-huh.

9 MS. HUNTER: And, you know, are we seeing -- I
10 mean, you said you were a C school. And, I mean, are
11 we seeing real growth in your students?

12 SUPT. GEORGE: So we -- as I said, previous to
13 this year -- and now we're on a new scoring rubric,
14 and I was actually pushed -- pushed into duty. I was
15 in Hope's standards settings in Little Rock last
16 spring. My assistant principal was supposed to be
17 there, with medical issues that she had that is
18 related to this. She could not attend, so I was -- I
19 was there to be able to see how that was built and to
20 see the -- the wide variety of thoughts that were in
21 the room. But we had been progressing each and every
22 year, and then now we have a new ball game that we're
23 -- that we're playing.

24 MS. HUNTER: Right.

25 SUPT. GEORGE: We have some miscoding things,

1 ROTC. Love the ROTC kids that were here -- Air Force
2 ROTC, that's what we have. They had their first two
3 pilot people. We have -- we've had five that have
4 been able to -- to get that designation over the last
5 several years and it's amazing. But some miscoding.
6 When we start talking about the merit and distinction
7 on the diplomas, you know, there are some things
8 there to clean up; it's going to bring our grade up.
9 But all these interventions and all these enrichments
10 -- and enrichments, as I said, it's -- it's -- you
11 can see some of the scores that we're having in our
12 upper-level kids, that they're getting more exposure
13 to -- you know, it's not just we're bringing in the
14 kids that need help; we're trying to push kids
15 further ahead as well.

16 MS. HUNTER: Right.

17 SUPT. GEORGE: So we catch that in our AP
18 scores. And -- and I -- I will go on record here, I
19 do not believe that a score is an indicative of the
20 students that we have. Our teachers work hard; our
21 students work hard; our parents are great. It is
22 what it is. We will continue to try to increase that
23 score because we're competitive. We don't like
24 seeing a C. If my son brings home a C, you can do
25 better than that.

1 MS. HUNTER: Right.

2 SUPT. GEORGE: We're at the bottom of a
3 mountain. We're continuing to try to find ways to
4 climb up that mountain and this avenue helps. And,
5 again, all of our resources we're throwing into PLC.
6 I'm -- I'm about to go to the Solution Tree building
7 to be with some of my teachers there. And, again,
8 we're going to White River. We're trying to get as
9 much exposure to different levels of our teaching
10 population as we can so they can start bringing that
11 magic into their grade-level classrooms.

12 MS. HUNTER: And so this begins in 8th grade;
13 right?

14 SUPT. GEORGE: This -- this particular thing,
15 yes.

16 MS. HUNTER: Yeah.

17 SUPT. GEORGE: We're -- we're an 8 through 12
18 building at our high school. And so when 8th graders
19 come to us, they fall under this block schedule with
20 the Fast Friday.

21 MS. HUNTER: And they -- I know the question was
22 did the community like it. Do students like it?

23 SUPT. GEORGE: Students like it. And, of course
24 --

25 MS. HUNTER: Okay.

1 SUPT. GEORGE: -- some don't know any
2 difference.

3 MS. HUNTER: Yeah.

4 SUPT. GEORGE: Because they've -- they've -- as
5 I said, this has been going for like ten years, so it
6 was before I was assistant principal. I think this
7 is my ninth year of administration. I will say that
8 through the course of the last three years I've been
9 here with you, as I said, we try to run a really lean
10 operation. So we -- if we tried to go back to the
11 standard seven period a day, like -- like what we
12 had, we're going to fall under this situation.
13 Because what we essentially have here is an
14 eight-period day on Fridays.

15 MS. HUNTER: Uh-huh.

1 where you've -- where you've selectively --
2 especially in our eighth grade, in Algebra I, you can
3 -- we've got two teachers that kind of split the
4 load. You don't get it from this one, you can get
5 pulled in intervention to this one and maybe hear it
6 a little bit differently.

7 MS. HUNTER: All right. Thank you.

8 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, ma'am.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Wood?

10 MR. WOOD: Mr. George, welcome back. I too -- I
11 too remember you and I like you a lot. I appreciate
12 you coming down here. You're very competent and
13 you're a great representative of your school district
14 and you present good information.

15 I am a little critical of block scheduling.
16 There are two things that I've grown to hate, and
17 that is A/B block scheduling and four-day school
18 weeks.

19 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

20 MR. WOOD: I think they're both of the devil.

21 SUPT. GEORGE: I completely agree with the
22 four-day. I don't understand how anybody can look at
23 performance and say we can get better coming one day
24 less a week.

25 MR. WOOD: Yeah. A few years ago, we -- one

1 motivation for us choicing our student from one
2 school to another was because the school that we left
3 was -- had a A/B block schedule. You can imagine my
4 annoyance when the school we got to adopted an A/B
5 block schedule and the school we left went back to a
6 traditional seven or eight period day.

7 I'm curious, what -- what, like, evidence do you
8 have that A/B block scheduling is effective
9 academically for students?

10 SUPT. GEORGE: I will tell you, like I told you
11 last year when you asked me how many students go home
12 and play X-Box, I don't have that.

13 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

14 SUPT. GEORGE: I can -- I can try to get that.
15 And -- and as -- as I did -- I was prepared last year
16 getting those numbers, and y'all had also mentioned
17 coming into my district and walking around and seeing
18 the things that we've done. Yes. And we would
19 always welcome you. I wanted that information to be
20 able to give to you specifically and say, hey, this
21 is -- this is where our kids are at and what our kids
22 were doing. And, you know -- and as I said, that --
23 that block schedule, especially for the senior
24 graduation requirements, we -- we require as a
25 district two additional credits over the top of what

1 the state requires. But in this block scheduling, we
2 have the opportunity to gain credits a little bit
3 quicker. So when you have a senior who gets there --
4 again, they can start these college credits; they can
5 start going to work -- it allows a little bit more
6 flexibility on that. Back in the day, we did a
7 seven-period schedule. You had -- I guess it was
8 seventh block that was work study that students could
9 go out to go get a job at that point. But this
10 offers a little bit more flexibility down the line to
11 our 11th grade student who we can still offer that
12 work study to. But we know that we're going to be
13 able to get their credits by the time they're a
14 senior.

15 So that's -- studies on which is best, no, we've
16 not done that. We've just seen that this has worked
17 in our school district.

18 DR. ARNOLD: And, Mr. Wood, the -- just because
19 it's educational jargon, yeah, as Lisa pointed out,
20 it's a hybrid block schedule that's being presented
21 here.

22 MR. WOOD: Sure.

23 DR. ARNOLD: And so there is such a thing as
24 A/B, A/B, A on Friday.

25 SUPT. GEORGE : And that's what -- that's what

1 we've had before this whole process started was it
2 just went into infinity, A/B, A/B, A/B, A/B, A/B.

3 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah. Yeah.

4 SUPT. GEORGE: And we were -- we were missing a
5 class. So the math kid on one week is only going to
6 see their teacher twice the next week, rather than
7 three times. So that's -- that has -- you know, the
8 minutes that -- that our students are seeing their
9 teachers, they're equal. We're -- we're above the
10 number of minutes that we -- that we need to have
11 district-wide on our calendars and all that kind of
12 stuff. But, again, our -- our middle school, they've
13 got -- they're starting to go to a version to be able
14 to work in some of their intervention stuff. It
15 allows them flexibility in that as well.

16 MR. WOOD: Are they -- is your middle school on
17 an A/B block as well?

18 SUPT. GEORGE: Their -- their 5th and 6th grade
19 have not been. Mr. Allen, my -- my principal, is
20 looking at possibly 7th grade. And, of course, we're
21 also trying to look at bringing, oh, the acceleration
22 pieces to -- to our students. So right now, high
23 school level, we've -- we've only had Algebra I
24 available to 9th graders. Next year, we're pushing
25 it back down to 8th grade. That's, you know, credits

1 for 8th graders traditionally for us. I don't know
2 about other schools. We -- we would have a kid take
3 a credit in 8th grade, they're not mature enough, and
4 then it blew an honor graduate thing four years down
5 the line, five years down the line. So, but that --
6 that is something with the new standards of scoring
7 and things that we've got to look at. And everything
8 is data driven and we're -- we're trying to make best
9 decisions in everything we do for our kids, and this
10 one has worked.

11 MR. WOOD: Yeah. Well, I'll push back just a
12 little bit. It doesn't sound like it's data driven
13 because you don't --

14 SUPT. GEORGE: And I understand what you're
15 saying. Yes, sir.

16 MR. WOOD: But I welcome it and I'm not picking
17 on you at all.

18 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

19 MR. WOOD: You're not the only person to come
20 and not be able to provide evidence --

21 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

22 MR. WOOD: -- that A/B blocks are better
23 academically for students. I truly just wonder, what
24 is the purpose of this phenomenon? You said you
25 don't know why they adopted it nine or ten years ago.

1 I suspect it's budgeting. I don't know. But you're
2 here asking, you know, because you've got 42 kids on
3 -- on Friday; you've got forty -- 42 too many kids on
4 Friday --

5 SUPT. GEORGE: Right.

6 MR. WOOD: -- and that's going to cost a little
7 more money if -- if -- if that teacher were to be
8 paid for those. And so I suspect that it's
9 financial. I don't know.

10 SUPT. GEORGE: It very well -- very well
11 could've been. And I was middle school dean of
12 students at the time. I did not have a seat at that
13 table.

14 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

15 SUPT. GEORGE: So I don't know the conversations
16 that went into it.

17 MR. WOOD: I just maintain that I don't think
18 that kids, certainly middle school students but even
19 high school students, can maintain good focus for 90
20 minutes in math or science or, you know, dense
21 topics. And I think -- I think we're expecting a lot
22 of kids to succeed in that environment. I think
23 college kids struggle with that on Tuesdays and
24 Thursdays.

25 SUPT. GEORGE: And -- and I would say, science

1 specifically, there is -- there's a great opportunity
2 and our teachers do a pretty good job at it. But
3 they've got 45 minutes, say, of direct instruction
4 and then they've got 45 minutes of lab or whatever it
5 is, so you're able -- you're able to get that in.
6 This is not intended to be double the amount of time
7 to give out more worksheets, so that -- in that
8 45-minute class, that they have. So in the modified
9 block that we do, fourth -- the fourth period math
10 class, that teacher is teaching the same material
11 over two days as they are teaching that same level on
12 the other day. I completely understand what you're
13 saying.

14 DR. ARNOLD: And I just -- I'm -- go ahead. I'm
15 sorry.

16 MR. WOOD: No, no.

17 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I just wanted to make sure
18 that also the intent of this isn't really to vote on
19 block scheduling; it's to vote on Fast Fridays and
20 the overload and the -- considering the alternatives
21 of either more pay or -- or whether it's fair or not
22 to the teachers how they feel. And so -- but because
23 we could have a forum on block scheduling versus the
24 seven period. So I just wanted to make sure, before
25 I vote, I know what the issue is. And for me it

1 still comes back down to the numbers on Friday.

2 SUPT. GEORGE: And I -- and I will say, Mr.
3 Wood, I completely respect what you're asking me, and
4 I don't have it. And like I've tried -- you asked
5 the question last year and you were -- you were the
6 one that threw the most questions at me the first
7 year. I'm happy with that and I understand that. I
8 try to find what I'm asked of --

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

10 SUPT. GEORGE: -- going -- going forward.

11 MR. WOOD: Well, I would welcome that.

12 SUPT. GEORGE: So this --

13 MR. WOOD: I would welcome anything that
14 enlightens me on the value of block scheduling. I
15 know that we're not voting on block scheduling, and
16 this is about Friday. But block scheduling is a
17 critical reason why you're here, that's why I bring
18 it up in this discussion. So let's talk about Friday
19 --

20 SUPT. GEORGE: Okay.

21 MR. WOOD: -- and the waiver request and the
22 alternative that was mentioned a minute ago. Four
23 thousand dollars a year --

24 SUPT. GEORGE: Uh-huh.

25 MR. WOOD: -- it would cost you to pay these two

1 teachers under the other alternative. You can't --
2 you don't have \$4,000 to pay the teachers extra?

3 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, I do. And I am in more of a
4 position to know that now more than ever, as I -- as
5 I was previous. And, again, this is not devaluing
6 the teacher; this is -- this is putting value to the
7 process that we are trying to get more kids, quite
8 honestly, into their classrooms on these days.
9 Because I want these teachers to see their kids the
10 same amount that the other teacher gets to see them.
11 And it's -- again, I go back to the -- to the coaches
12 and the -- the -- those type of classes. The art is
13 -- is not the English. Now, that's not saying that
14 the art can't do something to help with reading.
15 That's -- that is saying that these kinds of classes
16 should draw more people to them. And it's just -- we
17 don't have the staff to take on that load at this
18 point. But, yes, we -- we could feasibly do that.

19 MR. WOOD: All right. I'm going to -- I'm going
20 to vote no on the waiver request because I would
21 prefer you to take the route that pays the teachers a
22 little more money for the extra work that they're
23 doing. It's not a rejection of your Fast Friday. I
24 like your Fast Friday. I like the -- the tweaks
25 you've made to it this year. I feel like you have --

1 you've given it a little more -- a little more stake.

2 SUPT. GEORGE: Uh-huh.

3 MR. WOOD: And so I like what you're doing. I'm
4 just -- I'm going to vote no, honestly, for the
5 teachers --

6 SUPT. GEORGE: And I completely respect that.

7 Yes, sir.

8 MR. WOOD: -- to have just a little more --

9 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

10 MR. WOOD: -- for the work. That's all I have.

11 DR. ARNOLD: And that was good. Thank you.

12 Because I was hoping that we could get to that point
13 as well, that does relate then to the question of
14 overload and what the recompense for that is. And
15 that seems to really take care of the short-term, and
16 then these broader issues for later on. So, thank
17 you for narrowing our discussion to that, Jeff.

18 CHAIR WOODS: Please.

19 MS. HUNTER: Well, I mean, just kind of to -- we
20 are not here to debate block scheduling or anything
21 like that. But my question to Ms. Smith is -- I mean
22 -- and we study four-day -- four-day, five-day, you
23 know. Do we have different studies around block
24 scheduling?

25 MS. SMITH: There's a mix of studies out there.

1 But we'd be happy to pull some of the most recent
2 data and see what we see on that.

3 I think the clarification that I wanted was,
4 when we were talking about the art teacher and that
5 she has 192 students, they're -- or he is giving
6 currently 192 students grades throughout the week if
7 they have 192. It's not just on Friday; right? They
8 have 192 students assigned to them for A/B or --

9 SUPT. GEORGE: Well --

10 MS. SMITH: -- is it just on Friday?

11 SUPT. GEORGE: -- he has 192 students assigned
12 to him on -- and I -- I don't have that number with
13 me. But on, say, Monday and Wednesday he may have
14 142, and on Thursday and Friday he may have
15 140-whatever. He's never going to hit that number on
16 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,
17 because he is essentially seeing more classes, 45
18 minutes as opposed to the 90.

19 MS. SMITH: Right.

20 SUPT. GEORGE: And, again, back to the seat --

21 MS. SMITH: But it's personal caseload for
22 grading --

23 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes.

24 MS. SMITH: -- giving feedback is 192 --

25 SUPT. GEORGE: And the --

1 MS. SMITH: -- kids.

2 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes. And as I -- as I said, at
3 whatever point, it was the -- the intent was
4 originally common formative assessments, not really
5 doing new teaching during those days, get your
6 students in, be able to map out a plan for the next
7 week of what was going to happen. Now, we've
8 listened to our teachers and some of them would
9 rather have that 45-minute time to do some things and
10 more naturally place the --

11 MS. SMITH: Right.

12 SUPT. GEORGE: -- assessments elsewhere.

13 MS. SMITH: Right. Thank --

14 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes.

15 MS. SMITH: Thank you for that clarity.

16 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes.

17 MS. SMITH: I've just seen it where they had
18 Fast Fridays or something like that and your arts and
19 your computer science and things were used as
20 enrichment, and additional kids were being placed.

21 SUPT. GEORGE: Right.

22 MS. SMITH: But these are these -- this is --
23 this is --

24 SUPT. GEORGE: This is the actual class. Right.

25 MS. SMITH: This is his caseload?

1 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes. Yes, ma'am.

2 MS. SMITH: Okay.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Bragg?

4 MR. BRAGG: The extra class, is -- is this a
5 curriculum that they've already taught that day or
6 does it require extra prep? Is it --

7 SUPT. GEORGE: Are we -- we talking about --

8 MR. BRAGG: The Friday.

12 MR. BRAGG: Uh-huh.

1 MR. BRAGG: So it's not really requiring
2 additional prep though?

3 SUPT. GEORGE: Not necessarily, no. No, sir.

4 MR. BRAGG: I guess I'm a little confused over
5 the -- over the pay part. The waiver is -- is
6 strictly to allow the student numbers --

7 SUPT. GEORGE: To go over 150. And it would be
8 for Friday only.

9 MR. BRAGG: So the pay is not relevant to the
10 waiver?

11 SUPT. GEORGE: The pay, to my understanding, is
12 a way around asking for the waiver.

13 MR. BRAGG: Okay.

14 SUPT. GEORGE: And there's -- there's a formula
15 Brooke -- Brooke has sent me that -- that I've kind
16 of plugged in that we would look at thirty- -- I
17 think it's 36 or 37 Fridays in the year that we would
18 plug this formula in, and that's kind of where I got
19 my -- my numbers on the -- on the pay.

20 MS. SMITH: There's legislation out there that
21 allows a teacher in secondary to have a caseload of
22 150 if the district provides additional compensation.

23 MR. BRAGG: Okay.

24 MS. SMITH: And so if they get their waiver from
25 having 150, they don't have to compensate.

1 MR. BRAGG: Okay.

2 SUPT. GEORGE: And -- and the waiver -- the 1240
3 waiver is based on the charter school that is able to
4 do that without the additional.

5 MR. BRAGG: So whether you pay them or not, the
6 curriculum and the time, would all still be the same?

7 SUPT. GEORGE: We could keep it the same. And
8 -- and, honestly, going -- going forward to next
9 year, if we're allowed to do this, we can make some
10 changes on our end. And it may be kind of how we did
11 the -- the core classes, that we selectively tried to
12 limit maybe some numbers that -- that got placed in
13 there. So if we didn't get this, we could look at it
14 on these two particular classes. Again, it's these
15 two teachers every single year. And the -- but,
16 again, I hate to limit the kid that wants to go be
17 Bob Ross and make -- you know, do art. But you would
18 have to cut down however many students per class to
19 be able to make Fast Friday work without it.

20 MR. BRAGG: So if you didn't have the waiver
21 today, you would have to start paying them?

22 SUPT. GEORGE: I would. I would get the
23 approval from -- I would need to get the approval
24 from my board to -- to do that.

25 MR. BRAGG: Okay. Thank you.

2 MS. HUNTER: So is it fair to say that if you
3 begin the compensation -- if you go the compensation
4 route, then you don't have to come back here?

5 SUPT. GEORGE: I believe so. Yes.

6 CHAIR WOODS: I think that's my biggest issue
7 with this whole thing is we keep coming back for the
8 same issue, and there's an easy solve for it.

9 SUPT. GEORGE: Okay.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Henderson, do you have some
11 questions?

25 SUPT. GEORGE: Right. And -- and I will say, so

1 weekly our K-12 -- pre-K-12 -- I mean, our pre-K does
2 it as well -- they have -- they have their team
3 meetings where they're talking about the things that
4 they've went through through that week and where they
5 want to assess and that type of thing. Every other
6 week, our -- or as needed, our district level, we
7 meet, and we bring some good things that are going
8 on. Our principals bring the things that are going
9 on in those. Our principals, assistant principals,
10 they try to be in as many of these meetings as they
11 can be in. I was at two yesterday. I'm -- I'm -- as
12 first year superintendent, my high school people know
13 me. But I want to be in those rooms and hearing the
14 conversations that our K through 7 are having. So I
15 -- I'm showing the value that we're placing on this,
16 as well. And, again, we're building; we know it's
17 not perfect, and we keep trying to take steps to make
18 it as best we can.

19 CHAIR WOODS: Ms. Keener, do you have questions?
20 No. Okay.

21 MR. WOOD: I'd like to call the question.

22 CHAIR WOODS: For a motion? Please.

23 All right. So having no further comments, then
24 I need a motion.

25 MR. WOOD: I move to deny the waiver request.

1 CHAIR WOODS: I have a motion to deny the
2 request by Mr. Wood. Do I have a second?

3 MS. HUNTER: Second.

4 CHAIR WOODS: Second by Ms. Hunter.

5 All in favor of denying the motion say aye.

6 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

7 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

8 Hearing none, motion is -- the waiver is denied.

9 SUPT. GEORGE: And -- and just to be clear, the
10 concept is good; the delivery of how we make that
11 concept happen is --

12 CHAIR WOODS: Right. We're not voting on your
13 schedule.

14 SUPT. GEORGE: Right. Yes.

15 CHAIR WOODS: So we're just saying you don't get
16 the waiver.

17 SUPT. GEORGE: Okay.

18 CHAIR WOODS: That's all we're saying.

19 SUPT. GEORGE: Okay. Great. I can -- I can
20 live with that.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Go back and do that.

22 SUPT. GEORGE: And truly, last three years, I
23 appreciate your time and you hearing us out as we've
24 tried to go through this process.

25 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

1 MR. WOOD: Well, we appreciate you.

2 CHAIR WOODS: Yes.

3 MR. WOOD: I would actually like to come see you
4 and your school.

5 SUPT. GEORGE: You're always welcome. Again,
6 it's -- it's not perfect. We have our things that we
7 can do better. But, again, every decision that we're
8 trying to make is for our students.

9 MS. SMITH: Mr. George, I hope that -- today you
10 said several times that your art teacher is very
11 popular, and students want to be in their class. And
12 I hope this is opportunity to present that to your
13 local board, that this is a great teacher who's in
14 demand by lots of students and make the case for them
15 to get the additional stipend for the caseload that
16 they carry. It's not -- it's not an opportunity to
17 remove students from, but it's an opportunity to
18 actually recognize that teacher and allow him to
19 continue to do great things. So, thank you.

20 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, ma'am.

21 MR. WOOD: Yeah. I hope I was clear in my vote
22 that the purpose was to -- my hope was not that you
23 would reduce the students in the class, but you would
24 just pay the teacher --

25 SUPT. GEORGE: Correct.

1 MR. WOOD: -- more --

2 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

3 MR. WOOD: -- for doing a great job.

4 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes, sir.

5 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you so much.

6 SUPT. GEORGE: Yes. Thank you so much.

7 CHAIR WOODS: At this time, Courtney have

8 started yet over at the Capitol?

9 MS. SALAS-FORD: They are just about to start,

10 so it's up to you if you want to recess and go?

11 CHAIR WOODS: How long does it take to walk

12 over?

13 MS. SALAS-FORD: A couple minutes?

14 CHAIR WOODS: Ten minutes?

15 MS. SALAS-FORD: It's up to you.

16 CHAIR WOODS: So they -- they are getting

17 started, like right now? I mean, if it's my

18 decision, I say keep, but -- all right. Let's keep

19 going.

20 **I.III. PETITION FROM THE OZARK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT TO**

21 **CLOSE ITS BRUNO-PYATT CAMPUS**

22 CHAIR WOODS: All right. So then our next is

23 going to be the petition for the Ozark Mountain

24 School District to Close Its Bruno-Pyatt Campus.

25 Ms. Ford, I think you're presenting.

1 MS. SALAS-FORD: We're actually going to have
2 our legal team present, if that's okay. So, yes, Mr.
3 Shults will be coming up.

4 CHAIR WOODS: Good morning.

5 MR. SHULTS: Good morning. Thank you, Ladies
6 and Gentlemen of the Board.

7 This is pretty simple. I know we took care of
8 one of these not too long ago. But this is a
9 situation where there are certain school districts'
10 class size -- isolated school districts -- or
11 isolated schools within a school district. That
12 district has voted -- the district board of directors
13 has voted to close that isolated campus. And by
14 statute, because there was one dissenting vote, this
15 board has to ratify that decision. It has to be
16 filed 30 days prior to the board meeting, which it
17 was. That's why it's on this agenda rather than the
18 prior one. And the standard -- well, two standards
19 -- one, it -- it can't negatively impact
20 desegregation, which is not at issue here; number
21 two, the State Board shall only approve a motion to
22 close an isolated school district or part thereof if
23 the closure is in the best interest of the students
24 is -- of the school district as a whole.

25 So if there are no questions of me, I'll turn it

1 over to the district and they'll present to you.

2 CHAIR WOODS: Good morning.

3 SUPT. KNAPP: Thank y'all for allowing us this
4 time today. I'm Jess Knapp and I am too a first-year
5 superintendent of Ozark Mountain School District.

6 Accompanying me today are a couple of our board
7 members, Mr. Travis Freeman and Mr. Andy McCutcheon,
8 who are the president and vice president
9 respectively.

10 So please allow me to initially provide a
11 general overview of Ozark Mountain School District
12 and some context for this request. Ozark Mountain
13 School District comprises four schools: Western
14 Grove Elementary, which has a population of 166
15 students; Ozark Mountain High School, which has a
16 population of 241 students -- and both of these are
17 located at the same campus in Western Grove,
18 Arkansas; St. Joe Elementary, which has a population
19 of 85 students; and Bruno-Pyatt Elementary, which has
20 a population that's been reduced to 15 students and
21 reduction of population is the general reason why
22 we're here today.

23 I'm just going to kind of summarize here. The
24 consensus among a lot of longstanding district
25 employees and stakeholders is this has been a result

1 of several events, beginning with the consolidation
2 of schools in 1973, and culminating with the August
3 6, 2025 school board meeting in which the Ozark
4 Mountain School District board voted six-to-one in
5 favor of closing the Bruno-Pyatt Elementary campus.

6 We're here to request that this campus be closed
7 and we have a plan to integrate these students into
8 the elementary schools as seamly as -- seamlessly as
9 possible, transport these students in a manner that
10 is as efficient as possible, and utilize the staff
11 who are currently serving this campus.

12 We're already taking measures to integrate and
13 acclimate the students to the other elementary school
14 within Ozark Mountain School District, primarily the
15 St. Joe Elementary campus. And we're prepared to
16 undertake the aforementioned process in a manner
17 that's conducive to the holistic well-being of our
18 students and that has our students' best interest as
19 our paramount objection.

20 I'll go now to kind of a historical overview.
21 In 1973, the Bruno and Pyatt schools consolidated,
22 and the current building was constructed. In 2004,
23 Bruno-Pyatt, Western Grove and St. Joe consolidated
24 to form Ozark Mountain School District. In 2020, the
25 high school basketball teams consolidated within the

We have had an enrollment decline over the last several years. Our current enrollment is 15 students. And some of the data that we presented is a projection of 17 students, so let me just clarify that. In 2022 and '23, we had a total of 158 students. That's when we still had an elementary and a high school at Bruno-Pyatt. In 2023-24, we had 57 elementary students; in 24-25, 27 elementary students; and that's dwindled to a current -- the current population of 15 students.

18 We serve students in grades 1st through 4th, and
19 we have nine students in 1st through -- I'm sorry --
20 1st through 5th grade. We serve students in 1st
21 through 5th grade. We have a combined class of
22 grades 1 through 3, where we have nine students. And
23 we have a combined class of grades 4 through 5, where
24 we have six students. We're staffing two full-time
25 teachers and one part-time SPED teacher at this --

1 this point, as far as certified staffing goes.

2 In Ozark Mountain School District, we do have
3 letter grades of B across the board, except for
4 Western Grove Elementary which has a letter grade of
5 C. The simulated letter grade for Bruno-Pyatt was a
6 B. These students will also be introduced into a
7 student -- I'm sorry -- into an elementary school
8 that has a B grade, as well.

9 Financial realities, our expenses above revenue
10 -- in the year of '25, we were \$631,541 above
11 revenue. And we're projected to be \$315,878 above
12 revenue this year due to our -- the cuts that we've
13 made. We don't have a dean of students there now.
14 We have a principal serving both campuses. As I
15 mentioned, we've reduced our staff. We do have a
16 mold issue which is primarily contained to the
17 basement. We've made sure that we've taken all of
18 the safety precautions as far as our students go.
19 But this is a -- an area that we use as a safe room,
20 so that is a concern.

21 As far as transportation and safety routes go,
22 we're prepared to transport these students in -- as
23 -- as minimal a time as possible. The most that --
24 time that will be added to the current routes is 20
25 minutes, and that could be reduced a little bit with

1 the paving of a county road.

2 We're already transporting meals there, so that
3 -- that's something that -- that won't change.

4 We are prepared to reassign our staff. We're
5 actually exceeding maximum capacity in three classes
6 at Western Grove, and we've scheduled to accommodate
7 those needs. But we can definitely use these
8 teachers, and we have a plan to do so.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

17 SUPT. KNAPP: Thank you.

18 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Henderson?

19 MR. HENDERSON: You mentioned transportation, 20
20 minutes. When you run those routes, are we talking
21 about the two routes, one bus, or are we talking
22 about several buses? I'm just curious to know --

23 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, sir.

24 MR. HENDERSON: -- what logistics look like?

25 SUPT. KNAPP: Our current routes -- the first

route, elementary students are only -- only on that bus for a duration of 15 minutes. So we would be adding 20 minutes to that time.

4 MR. HENDERSON: Okay.

5 SUPT. KNAPP: The second route, elementary
6 students are only on that route for 32 minutes'
7 duration. So it would add 20 minutes to that one, as
8 well. We do have four students -- I'm sorry -- five
9 students who are transported by parents currently and
10 that arrangement would -- would continue. We've been
11 very transparent with our -- our stakeholders about
12 this and they're all privy to the fact that this
13 could be something that is -- is likely to happen.
14 So we -- we've communicated with them about
15 everything that we could think of.

16 MR. HENDERSON: In regards to geographics, how
17 far approximately are the schools?

21 MR. HENDERSON: Okay.

24 MR. HENDERSON: Okay. Thank you.

1 MS. HUNTER: Is that going to happen, the paving
2 of the road?

3 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, ma'am. They've -- they've
4 indicated to us that it will.

5 MS. HUNTER: Okay.

6 SUPT. KNAPP: Yeah.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Bragg?

8 MR. BRAGG: No.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Wood?

10 MR. WOOD: I don't have any questions. These --
11 these questions are -- are difficult for any
12 community. But the -- the numbers are just
13 overwhelming to me. Fourteen students costing
14 \$630,000 for a campus, at \$45,000 per student, that's
15 --

16 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, sir.

17 MR. WOOD: That tells the whole story to me.

18 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes.

19 MR. WOOD: So I'll support it.

20 SUPT. KNAPP: Yeah.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Ms. Keener, do you have any
22 questions?

23 MS. KEENER: No.

24 CHAIR WOODS: All right. Ms. Hunter?

25 MS. HUNTER: So just one -- one point of

1 clarity, and I think you addressed it.

2 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, ma'am.

3 MS. HUNTER: This condition is not going to
4 create any kind of overage on the teacher/student
5 ratios or anything?

6 SUPT. KNAPP: No, ma'am.

7 MS. HUNTER: Just a transition?

8 SUPT. KNAPP: The majority of these will be
9 going to St. Joe and we have plenty of space and
10 teacher capacity to accommodate those needs.

11 MS. HUNTER: Okay. Thank you.

12 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, ma'am.

13 DR. ARNOLD: No. Clear for me.

14 DR. ABBOTT: I kind of agree with Mr. Wood so
15 far. I didn't -- one point of clarification: I
16 haven't heard yet like what the board member who
17 voted against it, what his concern was. And then I
18 would love to hear -- I mean, just the concerns of
19 the community if you've heard any.

20 SUPT. KNAPP: Very few. I mean, there -- there
21 has been some resistance, I think mostly out of just
22 loyalty and of allegiance to the -- you know, their
23 alma mater.

24 DR. ABBOTT: Yeah.

25 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, sir.

1 MR. WOOD: Did the board member live in either
2 Bruno or Pyatt?

3 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, sir.

4 MS. HUNTER: He represents that --

5 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, he does.

6 MS. HUNTER: He or she?

7 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, he does.

8 MR. PEACOCK: I have a couple of questions. You
9 talked about the integration plans for the students.
10 Could you just elaborate on that a little bit on how
11 you're going to help them be comfortable
12 transitioning to a new school in the middle of a
13 school year?

14 SUPT. KNAPP: We've already taken some measures
15 to do that. They've been attending our Terrific Kid
16 assemblies and our -- our awards ceremonies, pep
17 rallies and such. And also last week there was a --
18 I mean -- I'm sorry -- last year there was a weeklong
19 period in which there was no water at the Bruno-Pyatt
20 school, and we experienced a similar situation this
21 year. So they've already -- they were integrated
22 during that time, as well. So, you know, those are
23 some measures that have been taken.

24 Other than that, you have two pretty small,
25 close-knit rural communities where everyone kind of

1 knows everyone else. We're all, you know, pretty
2 well acquainted with each other, students included.

3 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah. That same question, you've
4 talked a lot about the cost. What -- what will be
5 the cost? Is there a plan to -- to sell the existing
6 facility, take it off the roll so that it is not a
7 financial --

8 SUPT. KNAPP: We know that there are some
9 regulations that we have to follow as far as making
10 it available for a charter school, unless we apply
11 for a waiver. I've looked into -- I've spoken with
12 representatives from Northark, from the hospital
13 association -- the North Regional Medical Center --
14 and some other non-educational entities. There
15 doesn't seem to be a lot of interest in it at this
16 time because of the proximity -- the location. It's
17 a very rural location. But we're going to continue
18 to look into that.

19 MR. PEACOCK: Thank you.

20 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, sir.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Did you have a question?

22 MR. WOOD: No.

23 CHAIR WOODS: Oh, okay.

24 My one question, was there any thought to moving
25 them over at semester, letting them finish out the

1 semester and then moving over?

2 SUPT. KNAPP: That's our plan.

3 CHAIR WOODS: That -- that is the plan. Okay.

4 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, ma'am.

5 CHAIR WOODS: Excellent.

6 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes.

7 CHAIR WOODS: I don't have anything else. Okay.

8 Does anybody have a motion?

9 DR. ABBOTT: I move to approve the petition.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. I have a motion by Dr.
11 Abbott to approve the petition.

12 Do I have a second?

13 DR. ARNOLD: Second.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Dr. Arnold.

15 All in favor say aye.

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

18 Hearing none, motion passes.

19 SUPT. KNAPP: Thank you.

20 MS. HUNTER: I just want to make one comment.

21 SUPT. KNAPP: Yes, ma'am.

22 MS. HUNTER: I'm impressed with the approach and
23 the sensitivity that you've taken -- you and your
24 entire team have taken on this. I know this can be
25 kind of uncomfortable in the community, but it seems

1 like y'all have taken great care. So I appreciate
2 that.

3 SUPT. KNAPP: Thank you, Ma'am. I appreciate
4 that. Thank you, all.

5 **I.IV. 2026 STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATES**

6 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. And I think our last action
7 item is approving the 2026 State Board of Education
8 meeting dates.

9 MS. SALAS-FORD: Not much of a presentation.
10 But as you know, by law, you all are required to set
11 your meeting dates for the next year. We've stuck
12 with the standard second Thursday of the month. But
13 if you have any questions, I'm happy to answer.

14 MS. HUNTER: I have a question --

15 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah.

16 MS. HUNTER: -- just maybe not for this round.
17 You know, like is there a requirement that we meet
18 every month?

19 MS. SALAS-FORD: No, there's not. It is
20 entirely up to you all the frequency. There are some
21 occasions where -- let's say you met every other
22 month on a regular basis; we might have to call a
23 special meeting to meet certain timelines of things.
24 But that would be occasional, not necessary to be
25 every month.

1 MS. HUNTER: Thank you. Thank you.

2 MS. SALAS-FORD: Uh-huh.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Motion to approve the dates?

4 MR. HENDERSON: I make a motion to approve.

5 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. I have a motion by Mr.

6 Henderson. Do I have a second?

7 DR. ABBOTT: Second.

8 CHAIR WOODS: Second by Dr. Abbott.

9 All in favor say aye.

10 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

11 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

12 Hearing none, the dates are set.

13 MS. SALAS-FORD: All right. Thank you.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

15 (The meeting was concluded at 10:33 a.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)
) ss
COUNTY OF PULASKI)

I, Miranda McEntire, Certified Court Reporter #852, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me in the caption on the foregoing proceedings are true; and that the foregoing proceedings were reported verbatim through the use of the voice-writing method and thereafter transcribed by me or under my direct supervision to the best of my ability, taken at the time and place set out on the caption hereto.

I FURTHER CERTIFY, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or employed by the parties hereto, nor financially interested or otherwise, in the outcome of this action, and that I have no contract with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an interest in the action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original deposition transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial attorney, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties in the action.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 14th day of October, 2025.



MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR
Certified Court Reporter #852

