

**In The Matter Of:**

*DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL*

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*September 15, 2020*

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ARKANSAS DIVISION OF  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020  
9:00 a.m.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

MS. DEBORAH COFFMAN	Chairperson/DESE Asst. Commissioner - Public School Accountability
MS. TOYCE NEWTON	Former State Board of Ed. Member
DR. NACCAMAN WILLIAMS	Former State Board of Ed. Member
MR. PHIL BALDWIN	CEO, Citizens Bank
MS. ANN CLEMMER	Division of Higher Learning - Senior Associate Director, Government Relations/Special Projects
MS. SONJA WRIGHT-McMURRY	Division of Career & Technical Education - Associate Director for Career Readiness

DESE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. MARY CLAIRE HYATT

ALSO APPEARING:

MS. TRACY WEBB	DESE Coordinator of Monitoring and Systems Support
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LOCATION:

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

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Good morning. Welcome to the September 15, 2020 meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel. I'll call the meeting to order and welcome you to the Arkansas Department of Education auditorium, and ask that everyone please silence all of their devices.

Today's a great day to introduce our Charter Panel. I believe we're all here. I'm Deborah Coffman, Assistant Commissioner for Public School Accountability. And on the Zoom is Phillip Baldwin.

Good morning, Mr. Baldwin.

MR. BALDWIN: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: With me in the room is Sonja Wright-McMurry.

Good morning.

MS. WRIGHT-McMURRY: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: On the Zoom is Dr. Naccaman Williams.

Good morning, Dr. Williams.

DR. WILLIAMS: Morning.

CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: On the phone is Toyce Newton.

Good morning, Ms. Newton.

MS. NEWTON: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: And also on Zoom today is Dr.

1 Ann Clemmer.

2 Good morning, Dr. Clemmer.

3 MS. CLEMMER: Well, take the Doctor off and  
4 we're good.

5 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: All right. We'll do that.

6 Good morning, Ms. Clemmer.

7 Thank you all for joining us.

8 We have a very short meeting today, but we will  
9 have a fair and responsible hearing. I'll ask that  
10 everyone that's speaking speak clearly into your  
11 microphone on your computer and make sure that you  
12 state your full name for the record.

13 CONSENT AGENDA

14 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: So with that, I'll ask our  
15 panel members to please look at the minutes from  
16 August. And if you have any corrections --

17 MR. BALDWIN: I move approval of the minutes.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

19 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Mr. Baldwin has made a motion  
20 to approve, and a second by Dr. Williams.

21 All those in favor?

22 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

23 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Motion passes.

24 A-1: CONSIDERATION OF AMENDMENT REQUEST - ARKANSAS VIRTUAL  
25 ACADEMY

1           CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: All right. With our action  
2 agenda, our first action -- Ms. Webb, you're  
3 recognized.

4           MS. WEBB: Thank you.

5           The Arkansas Virtual Academy is an online open-  
6 enrollment charter school that serves students in  
7 grades K-12 and has an enrollment cap of 4,000.  
8 Today they are requesting an enrollment increase of  
9 1500 students. And we have Ms. Amy Johnson, the  
10 Superintendent, and Kristin Allen, the Academic  
11 Administrator for Arkansas Virtual Academy.

12          CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Hyatt, I don't --  
13 Ms. Hyatt, I don't believe we have anyone  
14 speaking in opposition?

15          MS. HYATT: (shaking head from side to side)

16          CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: So do you want to come up and  
17 go over the procedures this morning for everyone?

18          MS. HYATT: Good morning. Mary Claire Hyatt.

19          The procedure for the amendment request is that  
20 Ms. Johnson will have 20 minutes to present ARVA's  
21 amendment request. Since there's no one speaking in  
22 opposition, we'll remove that time from the  
23 procedures. She'll have the opportunity to have an  
24 additional 5 minutes, if necessary. And then you  
25 could ask questions and engage in discussion before

1 voting.

2 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Thank you.

3 Ms. Johnson and Ms. Allen, if you'll raise your  
4 right hand; do you swear or affirm that the testimony  
5 you're about to give shall be the truth, the whole  
6 truth, and nothing but the truth?

7 MS. JOHNSON: I do.

8 MS. ALLEN: I do.

9 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Thank you. You are  
10 recognized. You have 20 minutes. Please state your  
11 name for the record.

12 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Amy Johnson. I'm the  
13 Head of School at Arkansas Virtual Academy.

14 Madam Chair, Members of the Panel, thank you for  
15 the opportunity to have a few moments of your time  
16 today. We will likely not need our full 20 minutes.  
17 This is a request that you have heard recently from  
18 us. We do have some recent data and I am going to do  
19 my best to try to share that, if all of the  
20 technology cooperates; right?

21 All right. Can everybody see that okay on your  
22 end?

23 Okay, good deal. I never really know. I always  
24 have to check if it's going to be the right size or,  
25 you know, micro.

1           So thank you again for letting us be with you  
2           today. This is the third time we've seen you in the  
3           last 12 months, the first time for our renewal last  
4           December. I know we have some new members since we  
5           were with you in July for a request of an expansion  
6           in our cap then to house the extra interest that was  
7           coming because of Covid. You've seen this quote from  
8           me before -- this is the mantra for our school, in  
9           that we're not interested in what is easy; we're  
10          interested in what is right for Arkansas students.  
11          And if I told you that anything that any educator is  
12          experiencing right now was easy that would be very  
13          naïve. You all are working hand-in-hand with so many  
14          educators across the state, and certainly with our  
15          charter schools. And we all are working very quickly  
16          and as accurately as possible to help seat students,  
17          to help provide those opportunities for them in the  
18          middle of what none of us could have predicted and  
19          certainly can't predict where we'll go from here.

20                 So we are asking for a 1500 seat increase and  
21                 within that increase what we're looking at for our  
22                 current enrollment -- we are at our 4,000 student  
23                 cap. We are currently waitlisted. We have 915  
24                 applications in process, and this is a lower amount  
25                 than what we've seen in the last several months.



1           Some of that is dictated because we did go to a  
2           waitlist, but some of that is also dictated, as I'm  
3           sure you can imagine, that school has begun. So  
4           students aren't making as much movement right now,  
5           but we do have those 915 applications that are still  
6           looking for a seat with us. We currently have 112  
7           students on the waitlist, but if we did have those  
8           open seats they would be coming right away to  
9           Arkansas Virtual Academy. And while we have seen a  
10          slower intake with enrollment than what we were  
11          seeing clearly in June, because school hadn't started  
12          yet, we do still see consistent interest from  
13          families for a variety of reasons. We see the  
14          reasons of normal interest -- maybe there's a medical  
15          issue, maybe their current situation just isn't  
16          working out for them. But we also see an uptick in  
17          students who maybe they've had Covid themselves,  
18          maybe their family is experiencing the illness, and  
19          maybe the school where they are is just pivoting in a  
20          way that isn't conducive to their learning -- the  
21          zig-and-zag of the delivery is a struggle for them.  
22          So we hear all different types of reasons for coming  
23          from our families.

24                   Now it might be an interesting question in your  
25          mind to think, well, if you have 915 applications to

1 process and 112 students on the waitlist, why 1500?

2 The reason that we've asked for 1500, first and  
3 foremost, is we did just grow by 1,000 and our plan  
4 -- I'll give you some stats here in a little bit to  
5 show that our plan to grow by that much was  
6 effective. So we do feel like we can do the 1,000.  
7 We don't feel like we're necessarily going to jump in  
8 the same -- with the same rate that we did in July,  
9 again because we don't have as many applications in  
10 process. But the idea behind 1500 is to have that  
11 cushion; it's to have some runway because we can't  
12 predict what's going to happen. We're not sure how  
13 this virus is going to twist and turn, what schools  
14 are going to need, what students are going to need.  
15 And so as much as I know you all enjoy ARVA's repeat  
16 appearances in front of the Panel, we'd like to get a  
17 little bit of a runway on that cap to have some seats  
18 available so that we're not bumping up against it all  
19 the time.

20 We always like to share with you our academic  
21 progress. This is something that we have been very  
22 transparent and open with the Panel, that this is our  
23 primary goal to improve the academics for ARVA. We  
24 did have a 22% improvement in growth year-over-year  
25 last year for our students. So we feel like the

1 changes that we've made academically, the  
2 remediations, the increase in teacher effectiveness  
3 that we did share with the Panel previously have been  
4 effective.

5 We are continuing to assess our students. We  
6 just are in the middle of -- sort of towards the end  
7 of the window, catching up our stragglers, of our  
8 beginning-of-the-year assessment. We used STAR 360.  
9 We do that beginning, middle, and end of the year.  
10 So you can see our completion rates here. This is  
11 without our K-2 students. K-2 is just beginning  
12 because we do the STAR assessment with K-2 through  
13 the state, within the state windows, the required  
14 window. So that's just beginning for our K-2  
15 students. For the 78% overall completion rate to  
16 date, now let me explain what this means. This is  
17 78% of our students who have completed both  
18 assessments. We track this very specifically because  
19 we feel like it's very important that they complete  
20 both so that we get a well-rounded picture of where a  
21 student is at the beginning of the year when they  
22 come to us. And then you can see that we have the  
23 81% completion rate for reading, just that  
24 assessment, and 83% completion rate for math. Now  
25 when we assess these students I always like to

1 explain that the completion rate -- it seems like,  
2 well, why isn't it 100%? You just give them the log-  
3 in information, they go take the test, and they're  
4 done. That should be very simple. We actually  
5 proctor these assessments. We utilize Zoom and we go  
6 into breakout rooms with them, cameras on,  
7 microphones on, and we assure that there's no adult  
8 in the room helping them with the assessment. We  
9 want valid results, even though they are virtual  
10 results. And so this does take some scheduling and  
11 it takes some time. And so now we are working on  
12 rescheduling all of our students that maybe missed  
13 their test time, going back to get those assessments.  
14 For us the most important thing is that we have those  
15 beginning-of-year scores, because then our teachers  
16 and our data team work through those assessments and  
17 they identify the areas that students really need the  
18 most remediation for. So this is an important  
19 component for us. We'll do this again in January,  
20 and then we'll do it again even after state  
21 assessments in the spring; we'll do it again in May  
22 so that we have a full look at a student's growth  
23 throughout the year and can really assess and help  
24 that student grow in the way they need to.

25 I have to take just a minute and brag on our

1 elementary students. This just happened this week.  
2 I don't know if you all are familiar with Hoda and  
3 Jenna and The Today Show, but our elementary students  
4 were featured by Hoda and Jenna on their social media  
5 platforms this last week. They started a program  
6 last spring to reach out to nursing home residents.  
7 So as you all know, one of the most difficult things  
8 about this virus has been that our nursing homes  
9 can't have visitors. And so as part of our reading  
10 program and as part of our community service outreach  
11 that is very important to us at ARVA, our elementary  
12 students created a YouTube channel and they all  
13 submitted videos of themselves reading their favorite  
14 books. And we worked in collaboration with just over  
15 35 nursing homes across the state and made the  
16 YouTube channel available to those nursing homes.  
17 And many of the nursing homes used the channel on  
18 their closed-circuit televisions or during their  
19 activity time that normally they would have visitors,  
20 and nursing home residents were able to hear our  
21 students read books to them so that they still had  
22 some outside contact, they had contact with youth.  
23 And it was a great opportunity for our students to  
24 still serve and also a great part of our ARVA Reads  
25 RISE initiative to insure that students are actively

1 reading. So Hoda and Jenna just featured us this  
2 week. We're very excited that they got national  
3 attention for such a great outreach in the middle of  
4 a pandemic and be community service-minded at a time  
5 when normally we're all very contained.

6 So those are pieces that we continue to work on  
7 with our student body as a whole. We have a  
8 community service outreach day three times a year and  
9 so we're working very diligently to find ways to do  
10 those virtually this year in light of the pandemic.

11 We are continuing to assess family satisfaction  
12 and teacher on-boarding. I think that this is a  
13 really important piece when you think about our  
14 ability to grow. Our family satisfaction is  
15 remaining stabile. We just grew by over 1,000  
16 students and we have a 2% increase in our year-over-  
17 year satisfaction survey for our parents. So while  
18 that's not a large swing, it is a swing that's  
19 positive and it is a swing that shows that we were  
20 able to, with stability, on-board many more new  
21 families in the same way and with the same quality.

22 We've added 40 new staff and we're successfully  
23 on-boarding them to insure student success. We have  
24 a very specific new teacher strategy and training  
25 platform that we use. And we also have found that

1 one of our best training measures is to simply  
2 partner a new teacher with a veteran teacher that can  
3 be their go-to, that can help them with questions;  
4 and they do some peer shadowing; they do sort of what  
5 we call walk-to-class for teachers where they get to  
6 see how that instruction works.

7 So we're very excited about especially our  
8 families' satisfaction, because any time you take on  
9 several new students that's our first concern. We  
10 want to make sure that we do that well and that we're  
11 still serving our families well.

12 So what are parents saying? And I won't take  
13 the time to read every word to you here. But these  
14 are some direct quotes from our parents that talked  
15 about what ARVA has meant to them in the middle of  
16 Covid. And so you're going to see some common  
17 threads here. You're going to see they have special  
18 needs students that are at higher risk and so it's  
19 important for them to have this opportunity because  
20 they do feel like the can keep their child in a safer  
21 environment. Several mention no hiccups. Our  
22 students come to school with us and they get to  
23 continue on the same platforms and the same  
24 educational experience regardless of what happens  
25 with Covid. We have the blessing that we don't have

1 to worry about pivoting, because we're already here.  
2 So that was a big piece that was important to our  
3 families. And probably my favorite one on this page  
4 is the very last bullet; this parent says, "This is  
5 what it means to me: our son was in ARVA for six  
6 years and we would do it again. It was the best  
7 choice we made." And she included the picture that  
8 you see here when she sent her feedback. And so I  
9 thought, gosh, that picture speaks more than most any  
10 word could because this is what it meant to this  
11 particular family.

12 So just basically, in summary, we are asking for  
13 the 1500 student in cap -- or student increase in cap  
14 to insure that we can seat students as they would  
15 need our virtual environment. And we would be happy  
16 to take questions and to have any discussion that you  
17 all would feel reasonable.

18 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

19 Ms. Hyatt, do you have any issues or legal  
20 concerns?

21 MS. HYATT: (shaking head from side to side.)

22 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Webb, any issues or  
23 concerns?

24 MS. WEBB: No.

25 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: All right. Then we'll start



1 with questions from the Panel.

2 Mr. Baldwin?

3 MR. BALDWIN: Yes, thank you. And good  
4 presentation, very organized, and I think you hit  
5 most of the points I was thinking about.

6 Let me do ask though -- and I know you are doing  
7 special ed. But is there any infrastructure with the  
8 people or technology that you need to implement to do  
9 this, or have you already implemented and it's just a  
10 matter of getting us to approve it and then you're  
11 ready to go?

12 MS. JOHNSON: That's a great question.  
13 Structurally, we're pretty sound. One of the things  
14 -- and I'm sure you all have heard this before -- one  
15 of the things that we continually work to solve is  
16 just internet access for our families. So we were a  
17 part of the state's hotspots initiative, but the  
18 hotspots were based on your 4th quarter ADM. And  
19 that's a very different number than where we are  
20 right now and a very different number than where  
21 we'll likely be even in a couple of months. So we  
22 are trying to work with some providers to make sure  
23 that we can provide what is needed and to make sure  
24 that all students have equal access. We have a  
25 family resource counselor that's very good about also

1 providing information opportunities for free internet  
2 access within a student's particular geographical  
3 area.

4 But I would say that's probably our biggest  
5 barrier. The one that we really work to solve  
6 continually for our students is to make sure that  
7 they can cross that digital divide. We supply  
8 laptops, printers; you know, those pieces are an  
9 easier gap for us to fill than -- you know, I wish I  
10 had the skills to go out and run some internet lines.  
11 But, you know, that's one of those issues that we see  
12 across the state, I know, even for our brick-and-  
13 mortar students.

14 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Sonja Wright-McMurry, any  
16 questions?

17 MS. WRIGHT-McMURRY: No.

18 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: All right. Dr. Williams?

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. Just a couple.

20 What would be y'all's overall capacity? You're  
21 requesting 1500, if I heard correctly. A thousand is  
22 kind of realistic, and you have about a 500-student  
23 cushion. So are we saying at fifteen -- the  
24 additional students, you all can handle this  
25 capacity?

1 MS. JOHNSON: (Nodding head up and down.)

2 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. What areas of the state  
3 are your students coming from?

4 MS. JOHNSON: Well, we actually have students in  
5 all 75 counties of the state, believe it or not. We  
6 have what you would consider as the normal hotspots  
7 -- northwest, northeast, and central. So that's  
8 where, you know, we have sort of -- if you think of  
9 it in a heat map type situation, those would be our  
10 largest hotspots. But we do have enrollment actually  
11 in every single -- from every single county in the  
12 state, so it's a very widespread interest. Of  
13 course, more rural areas, we have a smaller number of  
14 students. But we do have that vast representation.

15 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Newton, any questions?

17 MS. NEWTON: I do. I don't know (sound cutting  
18 out). I was following up on what Phil said about the  
19 technology. And I know you provide (inaudible), but  
20 -- and kids are generally savvy as it relates to the  
21 devices and use of it. Do you ever run into  
22 situations where either the young person or the  
23 family just doesn't possess the capability to be able  
24 to exchange information, learn virtually, based on  
25 the equipment they have? And if you do, Amy, have

1 that situation, how do you address it?

2 MS. JOHNSON: That's a great question, Toyce.  
3 And it's very rare, to your point, that we have  
4 students that don't have sort of that capacity. I'll  
5 give you an example though that's fairly common --  
6 not widely, but fairly common. If we have  
7 grandparents that are raising their grandchildren and  
8 they are serving as the learning coach, we find that  
9 that's a really big gap in understanding. We have to  
10 work very diligently with our grandparents as  
11 learning coaches -- not all; some grandparents are  
12 very savvy. I'm a grandparent. I like to think that  
13 I'm savvy. But --

14 MS. NEWTON: I'm a grandparent, and I'm not.

15 MS. JOHNSON: Well, there you go. So what we do  
16 is we actually have a team of advisors and we call  
17 them our Student Heroes. We actually have an acronym  
18 that's CAPE for the heroes that they serve. And they  
19 are a single point of contact for our most struggling  
20 learning coaches. And they will literally get in  
21 Zoom, ask those learning coaches to share their  
22 screen; they'll walk them through submitting work.  
23 When we could go face-to-face we were willing to meet  
24 them, you know, in their area to provide that support  
25 and sit side-by-side with them. So this particular

1 team of student advisors have -- the majority of them  
2 have also served as learning coaches, and so they're  
3 very well-equipped on what it takes, where -- what  
4 parts are sort of not intuitive as much as others.  
5 And they really serve as a right hand, somebody that  
6 can just lock arms with a learning coach that has  
7 more of those technology struggles. So it's very  
8 rare that the technology itself is a struggle, as  
9 much as just that understanding and bridging that gap  
10 and really helping.

11 I would love to say we graduate all those  
12 learning coaches to a full understanding. Some of  
13 them -- the majority of them do become very  
14 independent, but we do have some that we help along  
15 through their entire time with us. And so we just  
16 found it to be very, very helpful to make sure that  
17 they have that one person that's sort of their 9-1-1  
18 that they know they can go to no matter what and get  
19 a quick answer. And so that's been a really  
20 successful program for us in bridging that gap.

21 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Clemmer, questions?

23 MS. CLEMMER: I don't really have any. I have  
24 served on the board of ARVA -- I stepped down a year  
25 ago, after we merged with ADE -- so I feel like I'm

1 pretty familiar with how they operate. And I endorse  
2 the proposal because I know how diligent they are and  
3 I've had friends whose kids have gone through their  
4 program.

5 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Johnson, you did such a  
6 really great job of explaining how you're utilizing  
7 your interim assessments. Talk to us a little bit  
8 about your plans to be prepared for providing the  
9 state summative assessments -- so DLM, ACT Aspire.  
10 Kind of talk us through how you handle those  
11 situations.

12 MS. JOHNSON: So currently -- what I like to  
13 say, in a quote/unquote normal world, let me tell you  
14 how we do those pieces. And then, you know, based on  
15 what happens with our current environment we'll  
16 adjust to some sort of a modified version, I'm sure.  
17 But currently for our state assessments for ACT  
18 Aspire we deliver all those face-to-face. We  
19 actually rent -- it's a little bit of a budget and  
20 event planning issue; we actually rent about 21  
21 locations across the state to insure that students  
22 don't have a significant travel time before they  
23 test, because nobody tests well if they've been in a  
24 car for two hours. And so we deploy our teachers --  
25 this has been -- our testing coordinator, Lauren

1 Throneberry, is fantastic, and she's been with us --  
2 I think we're getting ready to go on our fourth year  
3 -- I may be a year off on that; I lose track. And  
4 she coordinates our staff with site coordinators that  
5 are incredibly well-trained and veteran site  
6 coordinators. They're very experienced in running  
7 sites (sound cuts out) the state regulations and  
8 requirements. We deploy our staff and they go into  
9 the field for a full two weeks while we assess our  
10 students. We have a massive information campaign  
11 that goes out so our students understand where  
12 they're testing and when, when they need to be there,  
13 what they can expect when they get there. We  
14 actually send out tours, video tours to our students.  
15 One of the things that's hard for us -- a gap that's  
16 hard for us to jump is the comfort in the testing  
17 environment. As you can imagine, in a brick-and-  
18 mortar building most of the time students are walking  
19 down the hall to the computer lab that they've been  
20 in, you know, 15 times already. Our students are  
21 going to a room they've never been before and they  
22 may have some staff there that they've never met  
23 before. So one of the things we've launched is a  
24 video tour of their site and to meet their  
25 coordinators before they ever get there to create

1 that comfort. And so our staff infiltrates these  
2 sites across the state and mans them; we utilize  
3 certified teachers, testing assistants to help us  
4 with those test sites. And we have tested just above  
5 99% of our students every year for the last four  
6 years. So, believe it or not, with all of that event  
7 planning -- because that's really what it is; that's  
8 what I tell people all the time it's event planning.  
9 We're still able to get a very high percentage of  
10 completion. We let our families know on the onset  
11 that this is a requirement of their enrollment with  
12 us, this is a requirement for them to be able to  
13 continue with us, and so they take it very seriously  
14 as well.

15 We run DLM right alongside that process; so we  
16 do it the exact same way. If we need to hold that  
17 assessment outside of the ACT Aspire window, we do  
18 it; we set it up the exact same way. But we do run  
19 several of those alongside that same testing window  
20 when we do ACT Aspire, so it's a big event; we ramp  
21 up for it.

22 We were actually very disappointed we didn't get  
23 to test last spring because our teachers had done  
24 such good, hard work in really digging in to see  
25 growth for our students. So it's the culminating



1 event for us truly in so many ways at ARVA because it  
2 is -- not only is it a large face-to-face event, but  
3 it is orchestrated very carefully to insure we get  
4 all students assessed.

5 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Thank you.

6 Any other questions?

7 Ms. Sonja.

8 MS. WRIGHT-McMURRY: Could you talk a little bit  
9 about some of the ways you guys are supporting your  
10 students with special needs, when they have learning  
11 disabilities or challenges, through this process?

12 MS. JOHNSON: Absolutely. So this is another  
13 fairly orchestrated event. We like to tell people,  
14 when they ask us questions about what we do, we can  
15 do most anything a physical brick-and-mortar school  
16 can do. It's just usually harder. It takes quite a  
17 bit more planning and a little bit more effort. And  
18 so our special education department I'm very proud  
19 of. We work very closely with the Department of Ed.  
20 to insure that we have all of our ducks in a row --  
21 and in fact has cooperated with the Department of Ed.  
22 during Covid to share how we do special education  
23 virtually, how do we assess, how do we supply the  
24 minutes, how do we meet the needs of the IEPs so that  
25 that can be shared with other schools when they have

1 to go virtual. So we do -- very much like testing,  
2 we utilize those assessors that need to provide those  
3 assessments for placement with special ed. across the  
4 state. We contract with them and deploy them when  
5 those assessments need to be given, when we want  
6 something, Child Find or we have a test request from  
7 a parent. And then we have -- we hold IEPs through  
8 Zoom, virtually, just like what we're doing right  
9 here. We have a way where parents can sign virtually  
10 right in our meeting. We have a specific program we  
11 use for that. Our teachers keep up with minutes. We  
12 have class-within-a-class, co-teaching. We have some  
13 resource classes that have worked really well for us;  
14 that's new just in the last couple of years -- for  
15 full credit for our special education students. And  
16 then for those sorts of therapies and extended  
17 resources, if they can't be provided virtually and  
18 still be a benefit to the students -- some things can  
19 be, but clearly if you need occupational therapy for  
20 me to do that with you virtually seems a little  
21 pointless; right? So we actually contract with  
22 therapists and providers all across the state. It is  
23 a huge orchestrated event and we keep contracts in  
24 all areas of the state, because again we have  
25 students from all 75 counties. And they deploy --

1           they know -- we have their schedules, we know when  
2           those students are taking part in those therapies,  
3           and we communicate back and forth with them. Those  
4           therapists actually come to IEP meetings when we hold  
5           them, those annuals, to review, to give reports on  
6           how those therapies are going. And we really just  
7           sort of cover our students; we just put a team around  
8           them, some virtual and some geographically right  
9           where they are, and make sure that we provide  
10          absolutely everything that they would need.

11           MS. NEWTON: Ms. Coffman, I have a question at  
12          this time.

13           CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Go ahead, Ms. Newton.

14           MS. NEWTON: I -- you know, there's so many  
15          things that were unanticipated even for those folks  
16          that are technology savvy, like Dr. Williams and  
17          others. But is there a mechanism that the Department  
18          is using to be able to take the lessons learned and  
19          the best practices from the virtual environment, from  
20          the virtual world, especially from this particular  
21          provider, to be able to share those with the local  
22          districts? I know some are doing well, and some are  
23          doing better than others, but I'm sure that some are  
24          really struggling in the barriers that these folks  
25          seem to have already worked through. So is there an

1 opportunity to be able to make connections with  
2 providers that have figured it out and helping  
3 districts to move forward?

4 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: So, yes, I think -- Ms.  
5 Johnson has kind of identified that the Department  
6 has reached out and asked to kind of describe those  
7 lessons learned and how to share that information.  
8 Our leadership team has been working very diligently  
9 with all of our schools across the state, and we have  
10 pretty regular meetings with many of our stakeholders  
11 to identify resources and to get those out there and  
12 shared. So, yes, I think that's happening. I think  
13 Ms. Johnson can attest to that.

14 MS. JOHNSON: (Nodding head up and down)

15 MS. NEWTON: Right. And, you know, and that's  
16 what I'm thinking. If I remember correctly, that was  
17 one of the pillars behind establishing charters was  
18 to be able to collect a better way of doing it, for  
19 connectivity, and to be able to share those lessons  
20 out across the state.

21 MS. JOHNSON: And, Ms. Newton, I'd also add too,  
22 not only in reference to special education, but our  
23 district testing coordinator that I mentioned has  
24 also met with the testing folks at the Department.  
25 They were very, very anxious to hear how we deploy

1 testing virtually, how we, you know, monitor that and  
2 proctor that to insure that we have valid results  
3 even in a virtual environment. So we have had  
4 several reach-outs from the Department in different  
5 areas, from other schools -- both brick-and-mortar  
6 public and charter schools -- who have asked, "Hey,  
7 how do you do this?" We've really worked to seek any  
8 partnerships, any opportunities. The APSRC has also  
9 been a huge help in that, asking, you know, "Hey,  
10 have you guys figured this out? Because this is a  
11 problem that we're seeing." And so there's been a  
12 lot of conversation about, you know, what we've done.

13 And I appreciate the way that you phrased that  
14 because I tell people all the time we certainly have  
15 not solved all of the issues; we are hammering away  
16 at them just as quickly as they come. But to your  
17 point, there are things that we already carry the  
18 battle scars for that I think, you know, it's  
19 important that we do share that. Because there are  
20 some steps that we can take more swiftly for the  
21 students in Arkansas and in a more accurate  
22 direction, and I think that that's a really important  
23 piece. And to your point, the reason why ARVA exists  
24 -- if you go back and look at some of those early  
25 transcripts, ARVA was created with a lab mindset in

1 place to figure out not only virtual learning but  
2 also innovations in learning in general. And so  
3 we've tried to stay true to that in the unique things  
4 that we utilize with our students. We don't rest.  
5 We're currently launching Project Based Learning at  
6 all levels in our school. We have -- we're doing  
7 projects with kindergarten students this year, and so  
8 I'm anxious to share how that goes. I think it's  
9 going to be -- it could be a little bit of -- I think  
10 it's going to be really good, but I think there will  
11 be some barrels and monkeys along the way that will  
12 be a lot of fun to watch. And so we're really still  
13 pushing that envelope because we feel like we do have  
14 the ability to do some of those things, like you  
15 mentioned, to really move forward in an innovative  
16 way, not only just for our students but for the  
17 learning of educators across the state.

18 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Any other questions?

19 Hearing none, I'll accept a motion.

20 MS. NEWTON: I'll make a motion to approve the  
21 request for an increase for the Arkansas Virtual  
22 Academy to 1500 slots.

23 MS. WRIGHT-McMURRY: Second.

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: I have a motion by Ms.

1 Newton, a second by Ms. Wright-McMurry.

2 Any discussion?

3 All those in favor?

4 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

5 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Motion passes.

6 Panel Members, I'll ask that you go into your  
7 voting sheet and take just a moment to complete that.

8 MS. NEWTON: I'm into mine, but I can't work in  
9 it. So I don't know what the next step is for me.  
10 But I'm for the amendment and -- because of the need  
11 has been demonstrated and verified. But I can't work  
12 into this document.

13 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: All right. If you will --  
14 Ms. Newton, if you'll contact Tracy Webb --

15 MS. NEWTON: I'll do that.

16 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: -- and dictate what you want  
17 her to put in there, she'll do that for you.

18 MS. NEWTON: Okay. I'll do that.

19 (FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

20 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Ms. Johnson, thank you for an  
21 excellent presentation today. It's always a pleasure  
22 to hear from you.

23 Instead of asking each Panel Member to read  
24 that, I will just summarize and say that the Panel  
25 believes that your presentation was excellent; the

1 increase in enrollment is well-considered and will  
2 provide additional options for Arkansas students.

3 So, congratulations and we will move this  
4 forward to the State Board for review.

5 MS. JOHNSON: Thank you all very much. It was  
6 good to see you and I hope you all are doing well.

7 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Thank you.

8 A-2: CONSIDERATION OF OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL

9 APPLICATION - ARKANSAS AgSTE ACADEMY

10 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Action Item 2, Ms. Hyatt, if  
11 you will address the Panel.

12 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt.

13 AgSTE has decided to withdraw their application  
14 for the charter school in the Harrisburg School  
15 District because -- you placed it on the table last  
16 time, but because they have withdrawn it there's  
17 nothing to take off the table at this point; so there  
18 doesn't need to be a vote. If you have any questions  
19 about that -- I don't think we have a representative  
20 from there today, but I'm sure we could ask them and  
21 get back with you.

22 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Any questions from the panel  
23 members?

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. What are their options now  
25 that they've withdrawn? I'm assuming we would not



1 see them for the remainder of the year. Are they out  
2 for good or they could resubmit at a later time?

3 MS. HYATT: They are free to resubmit in the  
4 next application cycle. I think those applications  
5 are due in the spring/early summer of 2021. I know  
6 that that particular charter school has applied for a  
7 charter before this application cycle, so we may very  
8 well see them again.

9 DR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Any other questions?

11 Ms. Webb, that concludes our agenda?

12 MS. WEBB: It does.

13 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Any last words from any of  
14 our panel members?

15 If not, I'll accept a motion to adjourn.

16 DR. WILLIAMS: So moved.

17 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

18 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: We have a motion by Dr.  
19 Williams and a second by Mr. Baldwin to adjourn.

20 All those in favor?

21 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

22 CHAIRMAN COFFMAN: Meeting adjourned. Thank  
23 you, everyone.

24

25 (The meeting was concluded at 9:41 a.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS    )  
                                       ) ss.  
 COUNTY OF SALINE     )

I, SHARON K. HILL, CCR, a Certified Stenomask Reporter and Notary Public before whom the foregoing proceedings was taken, do hereby certify that the same is a true and correct transcription before the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Charter Authorizing Panel, in Little Rock, Arkansas, on September 15, 2020, that the said proceedings was reduced to typewritten form by me or under my direction and supervision; and that the foregoing pages constitute a true and correct transcription of all proceedings had in said matter.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I have no contract with any parties within this action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial agency, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties to the action.

WITNESS, MY HAND AND SEAL, THIS DATE: September 22, 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 SHARON K. HILL, CCR  
 Certified Court Reporter  
 Certificate No. 670

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	<b>9:41 (1)</b> 32:25 <b>9-1-1 (1)</b> 20:17 <b>915 (3)</b> 7:23;8:5,25 <b>99% (1)</b> 23:5			
<b>2</b>				
<b>2 (1)</b> 31:10 <b>2% (1)</b> 13:16 <b>20 (3)</b> 5:20;6:10,16 <b>2020 (1)</b> 3:3 <b>2021 (1)</b> 32:5 <b>21 (1)</b> 21:20 <b>22% (1)</b> 9:24				
<b>3</b>				
<b>35 (1)</b> 12:15 <b>360 (1)</b> 10:8				
<b>4</b>				
<b>4,000 (2)</b> 5:7;7:22 <b>40 (1)</b> 13:22 <b>4th (1)</b> 16:18				
<b>5</b>				
<b>5 (1)</b> 5:24 <b>500-student (1)</b>				