

In The Matter Of:
*BEFORE THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL*

January 19, 2019

*Sharon Hill Court Reporting
4021 Robinwood Cr.
Bryant, AR 72022
(501) 680-0888*

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BEFORE THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

JANUARY 15, 2019
8:30 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

DR. IVY PFEFFER	Chairperson/Deputy Commissioner
MR. MIKE WILSON	Attorney & Education Advocate
MS. TOYCE NEWTON	Past State Board of Ed. Member
DR. NACCAMAN WILLIAMS	Past State Board of Ed. Member
MR. PHIL BALDWIN	CEO, Citizens Bank
MR. GREG ROGERS	ADE Asst. Commissioner - Fiscal and Admin. Services
DR. ANGELA KREMERS	Deputy Director - Career & Technical Education/ Ark. Dept. of Career Ed.

ADE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. MARY CLAIRE HYATT	ADE Specialist
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ALSO APPEARING:

MR. REGINALD BALLARD	Public School Program Coordinator
MS. KELLY McLAUGHLIN	Public School Program Advisor
MS. VIRGINIA PERRY	Public School Program Advisor
MR. FREDDIE SCOTT	Operations Manager

LOCATION:

Arkansas Department of Education
- Auditorium
#4 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas

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A-3: COVENANT KEEPERS CHARTER SCHOOL

EXHIBIT ONE (1)

Friendship Education Foundation - Presentation

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Good morning. Good morning, everyone. Ladies and Gentlemen, the January 15, 2019 meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is called to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the ADE Auditorium. I would ask at this time if you can check your electronic devices and silence them.

The Charter Authorizing Panel oversees the authorization, renewal, revision, and revocation of charters. Legislation allows for individuals outside the Department to serve on the Panel -- and as you see, we have a combination of ADE employees and outside people on our panel. Today, I want to introduce to you I guess a new line-up that we have:

I am Ivy Pfeffer, the Chair of the Panel;

We have Greg Rogers, ADE Assistant Commissioner for Fiscal and Administrative Services;

Dr. Angela Kremers, Deputy Director for Career and Technical Education at the Department of Career Education;

We have Mike Wilson, an education advocate and attorney;

Dr. Naccaman Williams, a former State Board of Education member;

Toyce Newton, also a former State Board of

1 Education member;

2 And our newest member is Phil Baldwin, who is
3 CEO of Citizens Bank.

4 And I'm going to give Mr. Baldwin just a minute
5 to introduce himself, if he would like. And we want
6 to welcome him to our panel today.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Well, I'm proud to be on the Panel
8 and to serve with my fellow panel members. Madam
9 Chairman, thank you for your leadership. I have --
10 I've been in Arkansas forever. I've known Dr.
11 Williams for 30 or 40 years.

12 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, uh-huh.

13 MR. BALDWIN: Toyce for almost that long.

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

15 MR. BALDWIN: And I look forward to meeting
16 everybody else. I'm passionate for education. I've
17 been married for 38 years and have three children and
18 almost five grandchildren -- four and one on the way.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We look forward to having
21 you serve here with us.

22 It's my goal -- as Chair, it's my goal to
23 facilitate a fair and responsible hearing. I will
24 request that each person speaking please state your
25 name and title for the record and also to speak

1 clearly in the microphone for the benefit of the
2 Panel, the audience, and our viewing audience. This
3 entire meeting is being live-streamed and recorded.

4 We always want to thank Ms. Sharon Hill, our
5 court reporter; she will be providing a transcript of
6 this meeting and it will also be posted on the ADE
7 website.

8 So before we actually begin, in looking at the
9 agenda, I think we've had some adjustments to the
10 agenda and I just want to confirm so that the Panel
11 is all on the same page as far as the agenda. But we
12 do have an item that has been pulled; is that
13 correct?

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

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And I want to make
16 sure that is item number five; is that correct?

17 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Panel, that
19 item was pulled prior to the meeting, so that also
20 gives you an idea.

21 And also I would like for us -- or would like to
22 go ahead and ask for the Panel's consideration that
23 we can recess from about 10:30 this morning until
24 about 1:00, in order to allow us and our agency
25 personnel to be able to participate in watching the

1 inauguration event, and the Governor's address at
2 12:30. So depending on where we are in the agenda,
3 we could take a recess from about 10:30 to 1:00. So
4 I would ask for -- later on we can make a motion to
5 recess. Sound okay?

6 MR. WILSON: Can we watch it here?

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We can watch it here.
8 Yes. Dan is going to have it live-streamed. We'll
9 be able to watch it here -- have a lunch break and
10 watch his address.

11 Okay. All right. Well, if everything is good,
12 let's go ahead and move forward with the Consent
13 Agenda.

14 CONSENT AGENDA

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We have minutes from the
16 December 18th and 19th Charter Authorizing Panel
17 meetings. If I could get a motion to approve the
18 Consent Agenda?

19 MR. WILSON: So moved.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We have a motion and a
22 second.

23 All in favor?

24 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. That motion passes.

1 A-1: 2019 OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And at this time we'll
3 move on to our Action Agenda, and we will have -- Mr.
4 Ballard is going to be presenting that to us.

5 MR. BALLARD: Good morning, Panel. Reginald
6 Ballard, Arkansas Department of Education.

7 Our first item on the agenda is the 2019 Open-
8 Enrollment Charter Application. The 2019 Open-
9 Enrollment Charter School Application includes
10 revisions to existing prompts, as suggested by
11 various stakeholders. Approval is requested to make
12 the application publicly available.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Panel, do you have
14 any questions related to the timeline or the -- so
15 the first item we're looking at is the timeline;
16 correct?

17 MR. BALLARD: The open-enrollment -- yes. There
18 are a series of documents that are included inside
19 the agenda. The first one, I believe, is the
20 timeline, and then it goes into the application
21 itself, as well as some of our supporting documents
22 and prompts that we require charter schools to fill
23 out before going through our review process.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. One -- Panel
25 Members, are there any questions about this that you

1 have?

2 DR. WILLIAMS: No questions on my part. No.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No.

4 One question that I had -- and I probably should
5 know this, but I wanted to check. The mandatory
6 applicant workshop, is that something that has been
7 in place prior?

8 MR. BALLARD: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And is that
10 workshop -- is that a face-to-face workshop or are
11 there allowances if something were to occur that an
12 applicant couldn't for there to be, you know, like a
13 --

14 MR. BALLARD: A Zoom?

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- virtual Zoom? Uh-huh.

16 MR. BALLARD: I believe that it's been face-to-
17 face in the past. But if the Panel would like, we
18 could offer a Zoom.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I just didn't know if that
20 had ever presented a problem for an applicant, as far
21 as we know, in having that mandatory face-to-face, if
22 it's just scheduled for one time. And I wanted to
23 ask -- it looks like we have someone who may --

24 MR. BALLARD: Okay. Yeah. So we do allow for
25 virtual.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right.

2 Anything -- anybody else have a question?

3 DR. WILLIAMS: And this meets all the timeline
4 requirements that we have as for getting a charter
5 application before us?

6 MR. BALLARD: Yes.

7 DR. WILLIAMS: In other words, if a school is
8 interested in applying, their first application hits
9 the system when? I'm looking at the timeline here.
10 Oh, due by April the 25th. If they're looking to
11 open the school in let's just say 2020, then April
12 the 25th would be the -- is when the applications are
13 due?

14 MR. BALLARD: That's when the application is
15 due. And then they would go into our process --

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

17 MR. BALLARD: -- and we would -- we have a
18 series of review.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Okay. Thank you. I
20 have no other questions.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Do you have any?

22 MR. ROGERS: I don't have any.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. If there are no
24 questions, do we have a motion to approve the updated
25 timeline and application?

1 MS. NEWTON: So moved.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I have a motion. Is there
3 a second?

4 MR. WILSON: Second.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: A motion and second.

6 All those in favor say "aye."

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you very
9 much.

10 A-2: 2019 DISTRICT CONVERSION CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. Item number 2.
12 Do you want to go ahead?

13 MR. BALLARD: Yeah. So, item number 2 is the
14 2019 District Conversion Charter School Application.
15 The 2019 District Conversion Charter School
16 Application includes revisions to existing prompts as
17 well, as suggested by various stakeholders. Approval
18 is requested to make the application publicly
19 available.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Panel, any questions on
21 the district conversion application?

22 DR. WILLIAMS: None.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No questions?

24 All right. If there are no questions, I would
25 entertain a motion.

1 DR. WILLIAMS: So moved.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

3 MR. WILSON: Second.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So we have a motion to
5 approve; is that correct?

6 Motion to approve item number 2.

7 All those in favor say "aye."

8 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. Thank
10 you and we appreciate the Department's work, the
11 staff work on updating those. And I know each year
12 the process gets a little better and technology
13 things worked out. So we appreciate that.

14 A-3: REQUEST FOR OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL:
15 COVENANT KEEPERS CHARTER SCHOOL

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we will go ahead
17 and move on to item Number 3, which is the Request
18 for an Open-Enrollment Charter School Renewal of the
19 Covenant Keepers Charter School. And we have Ms.
20 Hyatt. You are recognized.

21 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas
22 Department of Education.

23 I thought I would go over the renewal procedures
24 just since you did most of them last month and since
25 we have a new member.

1 So this is a renewal that was tabled from last
2 month that you'll be hearing this month. So every
3 person, with the exception of the attorneys
4 representing the parties, that plans to testify or
5 speak need to be sworn before the renewal hearing
6 begins. The charter school or applicant will have 20
7 minutes. This is a unique situation in that there
8 are kind of two different parties. So those two
9 parties will share the 20 minutes in order to present
10 to you their case for renewal. Anyone that's opposed
11 to the renewal will also split 20 minutes between
12 whoever has signed up in opposition. And then the
13 applicant will have an additional 5 minutes to
14 respond to any opposition. You, of course, Dr.
15 Pfeffer, can allow additional time as you see fit to
16 answer any questions. Following the presentation,
17 the Panel may ask questions of the applicant and then
18 vote on the matter.

19 So the question today is to renew or not to
20 renew the application for Covenant Keepers. And I
21 think we have someone from Friendship who will speak
22 first and then, following that, a representative from
23 Covenant Keepers.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So can we have all
25 representatives of the charter and anyone speaking in

1 opposition please stand to receive the oath? Okay.
2 If you'll raise your right hand. Do you swear or
3 affirm that the testimony you're about to give shall
4 be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
5 truth?

6 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So I have -- for
8 school presenters I have Joe Harris from Friendship
9 and -- to start with, and then -- so you will speak.
10 And if you have others who are going to speak during
11 this initial time, if they'll state their name for
12 the record prior to speaking I can recognize others.

13 All right. So we -- as Ms. Claire said, you
14 will be speaking; then we will also hear from Dr.
15 Tatum.

16 Was Dr. Tatum sworn in?

17 DR. TATUM: No.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll do that at
19 the time she's going to speak.

20 So, okay. All right. Mr. Harris, I'm going to
21 go ahead and start the time and we will have 20
22 minutes total for the presentation. Okay.

23 MR. HARRIS: Okay. Thank you.

24 Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Joe
25 Harris; I'm the Chief Operating Officer for

1 Friendship Education Foundation.

2 The Friendship Education Foundation is a
3 nonprofit charter management organization which has
4 entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the
5 governing board of Covenant Keepers. We began our
6 work to support the management of the school on July
7 21, 2018, the beginning of this 2018 school year. It
8 was understood in the MOU that we would oversee the
9 day-to-day management of the school from July through
10 the end of the 2018-2019 school year, which ends on
11 June 30th.

12 In the short time that we have taken -- overseen
13 the mandates that this commission issued to Covenant
14 Keepers, we have instructed -- which instructed the
15 school leader to resign, replace the school's board
16 of trustees, and put in place tighter financial
17 controls, I'm pleased to report that we have
18 accomplished the mandates of this commission. The
19 school leader resigned on 9/29 -- Dr. Valerie Tatum;
20 a hundred percent of the board has resigned as of
21 12/31/18; and we instituted new financial procedures
22 of which segregation -- a new segregation of duty
23 process that includes clear systems for checks and
24 balances in the financial management of the school.

25 Friendship -- since Friendship has taken over

1 the management of the school, we've hired a new
2 school leader. Her name is Lauren Chapman, and she
3 stands beside me. We've continued to work with the
4 school's bookkeeper and an independent accounting
5 firm to manage the day-to-day books of the school.
6 The school now is operating with a balanced operating
7 budget that supports the education, instruction and
8 operation needs of the school. We also have
9 completed a comprehensive school effectiveness plan
10 that is guiding the leadership, instruction and
11 culture of the school. We've hired three new
12 fulltime Latino Spanish-speaking staff, two of which
13 are ESL teachers and the third is a behavioral
14 specialist. In a school with over 73% of its
15 students speaking Spanish as their first language, we
16 have worked to insure that the school is able to
17 address the language barriers, academic and cultural
18 needs of the Spanish-speaking students at the school.
19 All of this was done since we took over the school in
20 July.

21 Friendship will continue its management of the
22 school through the end of this school year, 2018-
23 2019, which ends June 30th.

24 This is all brings me to why I stand before you
25 today. At the last Charter Authorizing Panel board

1 meeting in December, representatives of both City of
2 Fire and Friendship asked this body to delay its
3 decision to renew and transfer the charter from CK to
4 Friendship until the next meeting, which brings us
5 here today. We asked then for additional time
6 because at the CK and Friendship -- at that time CK
7 and Friendship had not agreed upon a process and the
8 terms of such a charter transfer. At that time we
9 believed that we could work together in good faith to
10 have a signed agreement outlining the terms,
11 structure and future obligations of each party, in
12 which Friendship would assume the location and
13 continued operations of the school for future years.
14 That was all spelled out in the charter agreement.

15 It is with great difficulty that I must say to
16 this panel that we've not entered into any such
17 agreement to transfer the charter. The reason for
18 the breakdown was chiefly due to slow response and a
19 delay in City of Fire producing documentation to
20 support additional debt that was included in a debt
21 schedule presented to Friendship, obligations that
22 would be expected for Friendship to assume after the
23 charter was transferred. This information was just
24 presented to Friendship on January 9th. This delay
25 by City of Fire to produce supporting documentation

1 just a week before today made it impossible for
2 Friendship to verify the more than \$127,000 in new
3 claimed debt added to the debt schedule presented to
4 us last week.

5 As a result of our inability to agree on the
6 terms of such a charter transfer agreement,
7 Friendship will continue to operate the school
8 through the end of this school year, regardless of
9 whether or not this panel decides to either revoke or
10 non-renew City of Fire's charter. Whatever the
11 decision handed down today, Friendship will continue
12 to fulfill the terms of the Memorandum of
13 Understanding to which we are currently managing the
14 school.

15 In closing, should this body vote not to renew
16 Covenant Keepers Charter and the decision is made to
17 close at the end of this school year, Friendship will
18 assist in any school closure activities mandated by
19 the Arkansas Department of Education. Friendship
20 would also be amenable to any other options that
21 could result in Friendship or another entity to
22 occupy the current school building and keep the
23 school open. A school in south/southwest area of
24 Little Rock, where none of -- the neighborhood
25 schools that CK's current students would be forced to

1 attend are all performing under a D performance
2 grade.

3 I would like to now turn over the podium to the
4 board members of City of Fire to discuss with this
5 panel their desire to either seek a renewal or
6 nonrenewal of their charter. Thank you for your time
7 today.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I'm going to pause
9 the time for just a minute. Thank you, Mr. Harris.

10 And, Ms. Hyatt, I need just to get some
11 clarification here. Okay. So we just heard the
12 presentation from Mr. Harris that basically indicates
13 that the application we have in front of us, which
14 would be the transfer to Friendship -- from Covenant
15 Keepers to Friendship, that's not going to be going
16 forward based on his presentation. Is that correct?

17 MS. HYATT: Yes, ma'am.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So then -- and as
19 he stated, he would like to turn it over to Covenant
20 Keepers to talk with us about what they would see as
21 next steps. So is it appropriate to go ahead and
22 listen to the next -- at this time go ahead and
23 listen to Covenant Keepers or is there something that
24 we need to do in between?

25 MS. HYATT: So I think you can go ahead and

1 listen to City of Fire/Covenant Keepers and anything
2 they want to present in terms of their renewal. And
3 Ms. Perry can come up if she's got additional things
4 to add. But it's my understanding that all of the
5 renewal documentation that we have received in terms
6 of a renewal application and any supporting
7 information is really based on Friendship coming in
8 and kind of taking over the school. So now that
9 that's not going to happen, the information that you
10 have in terms of the renewal application and
11 supporting documentation is really deficient. But
12 Covenant Keepers/City of Fire may have additional
13 information to present to you today. I'm not a
14 hundred-percent sure what they had planned to ask
15 for. So I would recommend that you allow them to
16 speak in the remaining 20 minutes and just kind of
17 follow the hearing procedure --

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

19 MS. HYATT: -- and see.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you. I just
21 want to make sure we're -- everyone is understanding
22 the process that we're going through.

23 Okay. So at this time do we have someone from
24 Covenant Keepers/City of Fire Ministries?

25 All right. Okay. Do you swear or affirm that

1 the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the
2 whole truth and nothing but the truth?

3 DR. TATUM: I do.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you. Please
5 state your name for the record, and you are
6 recognized.

7 DR. TATUM: I'm Valerie Tatum with City of Fire
8 Community Development. You all know every year my
9 voice just goes out during this time. So I'm Valerie
10 Tatum. I'm retired at this point. I was the founder
11 and director of Covenant Keepers Charter School.

12 First of all, I think it's with due respect that
13 we apologize for being here at this place. When I
14 retired October 1 -- 9/29, my goal was not to stand
15 here anymore to do this. I made the choice in 2015
16 with APSRC to start transferring me out of Covenant
17 Keepers as I wanted to get into local government, and
18 that's still my aspiration.

19 I do want to say that we entered a MOU which was
20 worked through with APSRC; there's been some glitches
21 with that. Then we worked through a school
22 transition report; it's been some issues with that.

23 I heard Mr. Harris say that the debt was just
24 given to him January 9th. That's not what we do. We
25 have an attorney onboard that we started having

1 conversations with, Mr. David Jones, right before the
2 Thanksgiving holidays. I would say now the reason
3 we're standing here today -- Dr. Valerie Tatum -- and
4 I shouldn't be standing here. Friendship mentioned
5 in a school transition plan they were going to renew
6 the school. That was my reason for leaving. Another
7 problem, we submitted the debt. I want our attorney
8 to speak on times and date. Finally, we even had
9 huge conversations with Friendship during the
10 Christmas break.

11 So, for one, I'm concerned because I'm standing
12 here, because it's not my responsibility to renew the
13 school. That's been given over to Friendship and
14 they said they were going to do it. The debt has
15 been presented. So my question is: why am I standing
16 here to renew the school? I want this to be a
17 disclaimer: City of Fire Community Development, we
18 don't want the school. Our job was to transfer so we
19 can continue to support -- we could continue to keep
20 a niche out there in southwest Little Rock. I've
21 promised that for over 15 years. Now we're here at
22 the place of renewal or nonrenewal.

23 So to my point, as late as Sunday the attorney
24 and members of City of Fire Community Development
25 talked to Mr. Harris. He said he would let us know

1 something by noon Monday. I got a call -- Mr. Tatum
2 got an email; I got a call from Virginia Perry
3 saying, "Dr. Tatum, we have received a letter from
4 Friendship to say they are not interested in renewing
5 the school." But we were told by noon they would get
6 back with us.

7 So I say this -- I put the disclaimer out: we
8 don't want the school. But we have individuals here
9 that could possibly move the school forward, because
10 I would hate all of City of Fire Community
11 Development's work, the performance, the niche, and
12 the things that we've done for that community to just
13 be all lost. That's my reason for standing here
14 today, because I don't want that school to close.
15 Someone needs to be out there running it, and
16 Friendship said they would run it. So I'm confused
17 again why I'm standing here today on false pretense
18 of them renewing the school.

19 And I need -- I would like for Scott Smith to
20 speak as well because I think there's -- we started
21 the conversation and I don't know where APSRC is in
22 this.

23 I'm standing just confused here. You see I
24 don't have paper. I'm not ready to present because
25 this is not my place to do that. Thank you.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you, Dr.
2 Tatum.

3 Okay. I think Ms. Hyatt is stepping out. We've
4 heard from the applicant. And check and see, is
5 there anyone to speak in opposition?

6 MS. HYATT: No.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: There is no one. Okay.

8 So at this time I think it would be appropriate
9 to open it up for Panel questions.

10 Panel Members, you may have some questions for
11 both Mr. Harris and Dr. Tatum. And so I will -- I
12 guess I'll just start and see who -- on this end, do
13 you want to start with any questions, Dr. Williams?

14 DR. WILLIAMS: Oh, absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Mr. Harris, please. You know, as
17 I listen, it looks like you all have done a lot of
18 good things for the school, especially as for
19 separation of duties and some proper policies and so-
20 forth in place. The debt seems to be the linchpin
21 here, if I'm listening closely. How much is the
22 total debt, and what type of debt is it such that you
23 all are not able to absorb it within the transfer?

24 MR. HARRIS: Sure. What we have is when we
25 drafted the charter transfer agreement we asked for a

1 number of documents. First and foremost was to
2 really get a clear picture of what was owed to the
3 school. At that time, that debt included two items.
4 It included rent, backdated rent in the amount of
5 \$43,000; it also included outstanding bills to
6 Denman, Hamilton and Associates, which are the
7 independent accountants. That's the debt schedule we
8 got at the beginning of the terms of this agreement.
9 At our last meeting, right before we were to meet, we
10 were presented with a new debt schedule. That was at
11 the last meeting here. That included additional debt
12 that totaled \$80,000 -- an additional \$80,000, on top
13 of the \$40,000 and \$14,000. It was not until last
14 week, January 6th, were we presented with a new debt
15 schedule that included \$127,000 additional dollars.
16 We asked for supporting documents and we got
17 supporting documents -- but the supporting documents
18 really put us in an awkward position because we
19 didn't have sufficient time to do our due diligence.
20 And what we did have before us led us to believe that
21 there were more additional questions that needed to
22 be answered by ADE, as well as City of Fire.

23 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. And usually when you do
24 a transfer there's usually some debt, you know.

25 MR. HARRIS: Uh-huh.

1 DR. WILLIAMS: Typically, there's always some
2 debt with a school and that debt is usually able to
3 absorb and, you know, just pay it out of your per-
4 pupil expenditures or whatever your revenue stream
5 would be. Are you saying that this -- I was just
6 trying to do some quick addition here, because we're
7 looking at about 266,000k --

8 MR. HARRIS: Yes.

9 DR. WILLIAMS: -- something roughly like that.
10 Are you all saying that's too much debt to absorb or
11 are you concerned that there may be additional debt?
12 What exactly is the linchpin here?

13 MR. HARRIS: Sure. The first debt schedule had
14 two pieces of debt: one was rent and the other one
15 was outstanding invoices or payables to the
16 accounting firm. We did our due diligence. Those
17 are legitimate debts.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

19 MR. HARRIS: When we -- before we met, we went
20 to -- went through the efforts to pay down that debt.
21 We paid Denman, Hamilton their entire \$14,000. Then
22 we paid half of the outstanding balance of the rent,
23 with a goal of paying the additional rent off through
24 the -- within the next three to four months. So we
25 were working to pay off all of the legitimate debts

1 that we had in front of us at the time that we began
2 this agreement.

3 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Uh-huh. And so, the
4 additional \$127,000 is kind of the piece that -- no
5 plan to address that debt and so-forth?

6 MR. HARRIS: Well, we wanted clarification of
7 what that debt was. We did research on the -- what
8 was presented to us reflected that this debt was from
9 2016. We initially went -- the first step was to go
10 back to the audit, the 2016 audit. It was our
11 belief, based on what -- the information we had just
12 received, that that debt on the 2016 schedule was
13 reported as a donation. We asked -- and I asked this
14 just last Friday if there was proof of it either
15 being a donation or a loan. To date, we have not
16 received any verification of that. Now what I do
17 know and what we found out is there's a difference in
18 the process. If this were a legitimate loan, there
19 would've needed to been a loan agreement in place
20 with the board. And then I'm not sure what the
21 threshold is, but the State or ADE would've needed to
22 approve that loan -- a loan. We did not receive
23 proof of either.

24 And the other part is the donation. If this was
25 categorized as a donation, then donations are not

1 expected to be returned.

2 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. So we're at a point
3 where basically there is no clarification of what
4 this is, basically?

5 MR. HARRIS: Well, we've been told two stories.

6 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

7 MR. HARRIS: One that it's a donation and one
8 that it's a loan.

9 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

10 MR. BALDWIN: May I ask a question?

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes, go ahead.

12 MR. BALDWIN: Who is the loan donation from? Do
13 you know who the --

14 MR. HARRIS: City of Fire to Covenant Keepers.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Questions on this
16 side?

17 MR. ROGERS: Not right now.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Newton?

19 MS. NEWTON: I have a question probably for you,
20 Dr. Pfeffer, or someone from the Charter Authorizing
21 organization. What -- is there a procedure in place
22 to track this type of debt and whether or not it's
23 resolved or dissolved at some point? Because it
24 could -- you know, as it is today, it seems
25 problematic that, first of all, we can't identify --

1 or maybe we can after discussion or explanation --
2 whether or not it was a loan or whether or not it was
3 a gift. But it would seem to be very confusing and
4 problematic if there's not a way to track accounting.
5 Phil probably would know this a lot better than I
6 would, as a banker, of what it is, how it is, what
7 the obligation of the charter is. Say, for instance,
8 if the City of Fire made a donation as opposed to a
9 loan, that's just their donation. Or if there
10 weren't conditions -- so I'm trying to find out what
11 the obligation of the Arkansas Department of
12 Education is to track this type of donation or the
13 money or -- and how it goes out, and back and forth.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And Mr. Rogers is probably
15 one to speak as far as financial oversight from
16 school districts. But you also have the issue of how
17 things are reported into the eFinance system. And
18 so, you know, from a Department of Ed. standpoint it
19 would be very difficult to monitor things, you know,
20 if they're not reported, and we can only go with a
21 lot of that. So I'll let -- Mr. Rogers, did you want
22 to address her question?

23 MR. ROGERS: Were you about to address it?

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Or Ms. Hyatt?

25 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas

1 Department of Education.

2 So just a couple of notes on your concern. So
3 in the charter school rules, as well as in the law,
4 if there is a loan that totals a certain amount of
5 money or is not going to be repaid in a year such
6 that it would constitute a debt of the school, there
7 is a requirement that the charter ask for permission
8 from the Commissioner to incur that debt. It's my
9 understanding that that process was not followed in
10 this case. So typically that's how we monitor that,
11 is that the Commissioner receives a request from the
12 charter school, reviews whatever the debt is, and
13 then makes a decision as to whether to approve the
14 charter school to incur that debt or deny, which
15 would mean that the charter school could not incur
16 that debt. I don't believe that that happened in
17 this case.

18 In terms of how we would monitor it going
19 forward, if you chose to renew, you could add that as
20 some sort of requirement of the renewal. If you
21 choose not to renew, in the charter school rules and
22 also in the law there's very clear procedures that
23 direct the Department of Education within 15 days to
24 begin working with the school that was non-renewed to
25 review finances, look at the vendors, start going

1 through their finances to see what they have, who
2 they need to pay, what outstanding debt there is and
3 that kind of stuff.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Any follow-up?

5 Mr. Wilson, question?

6 MR. WILSON: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chairman.
7 And maybe Ms. Hyatt can help us out -- help me out
8 with this too. It seems that, you know, Friendship
9 wants to continue to operate the school at least
10 through the end of the Memorandum of Understanding,
11 which I guess would be summer of '19. If Friendship
12 wants to assume the charter, and City of Fire is
13 willing to give it up, it looks to me like we can
14 figure out a way to do that. I understand that
15 Friendship does not want to assume that outstanding
16 debt. City of Fire would have to figure out some way
17 to satisfy it, if it's a debt.

18 So my thought is to -- you know, if Friendship
19 is in there operating the school, let them apply for
20 a new charter, if they want to; revoke City of Fire,
21 leave it -- and leave the debt where it is with City
22 of Fire. I don't know how else to do it. I don't
23 know whether we can do it.

24 MS. HYATT: I'm getting my steps in today. So
25 one option that you do have -- and, you know, there's

1 not a request from Friendship right now. But should
2 you non-renew or revoke Covenant Keepers, of course
3 any school, including Friendship, could have the
4 opportunity to come in and either, next application
5 cycle, ask for a new charter to occupy the same space
6 or come and ask for an amendment request to add a
7 license to their current charter to occupy that
8 space. So that is a possibility should there be a
9 request. Right now we don't have that kind of
10 request, but it's not outside the realm of
11 possibilities for the future.

12 DR. WILLIAMS: For clarity's sake, I've got one.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes. And then Dr. Kremers
14 after you.

15 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you. I'm sorry.

16 For clarity's sake, if I heard correctly -- and
17 I want to be corrected if I'm wrong -- City of Fire
18 does not want the school?

19 DR. TATUM: Correct.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: Correct. Okay. And Friendship
21 with the debt does not want the school. I mean, with
22 the debt is what --

23 MR. HARRIS: We believe our first job is to be
24 good stewards of finances. This is for our school.
25 We would be assuming debt that was unclear.

1 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

2 MR. HARRIS: And it's our understanding that
3 were that debt to be repaid by the charter management
4 organization or the school itself it would open us to
5 an external audit. And given the documentation that
6 we have, we don't believe that we could defend that
7 as a legitimate debt against the school. However,
8 Friendship is -- and if this -- no one wants to see
9 this school close.

10 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

11 MR. HARRIS: And we entered into the Memorandum
12 of Understanding believing that we could make some
13 significant difference and apply for the renewal. We
14 have done that. We've put in new measures. We're
15 already seeing growth in academic gains; we're also
16 seeing a reduction in truancy. So we believe that we
17 have the ability, the talent to really keep the
18 school open.

19 We've not asked formally, but we are supportive
20 of the school remaining open with Friendship or some
21 other entity managing the school. But Friendship
22 would be interested in continuing the school without
23 the debt.

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Absolutely. I guess my point for
25 me and the rest of the Panel would be -- I'm trying

1 to determine whether renewal is even an option if
2 there is no one requesting a renewal?

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Right. And that's what I
4 wanted to clarify. I mean, basically where we are
5 today is we have a renewal application, and that
6 renewal application is that the charter be
7 transferred to Friendship, and Friendship would move
8 on at the end of this school year as the management
9 organization over Covenant Keepers. So I think we
10 hear what you're saying, but at the same time, based
11 on what we have today, you are not moving forward
12 with this application for renewal?

13 MR. HARRIS: Yes, with our request now at this
14 time.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

16 MR. HARRIS: You know, we entered this with the
17 same intentions, which is to insure that this school
18 remains open.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But if we do not move
20 forward with this renewal request, then the question
21 is what happens at the conclusion of the 18-19 school
22 year. So I think that's kind of where --

23 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- where we are right now.

25 And, Dr. Kremers, you did have a question, so --

1 DR. KREMERS: I was just going to note that
2 there was a transition plan document and within that
3 there was a transition plan called Summary, and none
4 of the debt mentioned is within that. That was from
5 October of '18. So I didn't know if you shared that
6 with the other group, if they had the opportunity to
7 review and give feedback back in October when you did
8 the transition plan. But that's kind of my question.
9 And from the transition plan cost summary, I know it
10 was mentioned some of the debt is back rent and some
11 of the budget was over \$65,000 plus an additional
12 \$150,000 toward facility funding.

13 MR. HARRIS: Sure.

14 DR. KREMERS: So I'm just kind of -- you know,
15 that raises a flag of why there's back rent when
16 there was adequate facility funding as well. So
17 there's just a lot of concerns in addition to the
18 renewal issue even being on the table.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Can we get Ms. Tatum to -- just
20 to give us a little feedback here? I just want to
21 make sure that we get both sides.

22 DR. TATUM: Thank you. When you go back and you
23 look at the 2016 audit, you will see on the audit
24 trail some of those were donations. We have given
25 the documentation that's on that audit trail that

1 shows those were not donations in my transition out.
2 If you go back and you look at the transition plan,
3 to your point, Friendship received \$150,000 for just
4 meeting Covenant Keepers; \$140,000 was for a grant
5 that APSRC -- for Ms. Chapman's salary. It's in the
6 transition plan. We've yet to get that money.
7 \$65,000 is money that we worked with the Department,
8 the Charter School Office, to get the facilities
9 funding. Also, my salary in there left \$112,000. I
10 stand here today saying it is money that paid that
11 debt. Ms. Chapman has been placed in my place as the
12 salary, when there's money at the top of the
13 transition plan that shows \$140,000. The money that
14 the back-rent -- \$65,000 would take care of that and
15 have some worked out. We've been working with
16 Greater Second Baptist Church.

17 I stand here today, we have not received any of
18 the money -- and some of that money is donations but
19 -- and I would like for our attorney to speak. The
20 checks and the documentation that was given, it's all
21 accounted for. City of Fire Community and our local
22 board -- back in 2010, I got in big trouble in
23 breaking the law giving the school money to save it.
24 I wouldn't repeat that dumb mistake twice. I was
25 told to go and establish a line of credit. We did,

1 for about \$98,000. The Department -- we were
2 supposed to be closing, Mr. Rogers. So guess what
3 Hope Credit Union did? "Valerie, I think y'all are
4 closing. We have to pull that back," that \$98,000
5 that we were supposed to get. So guess what, City of
6 Fire -- we had to keep the school going and this is
7 why we are here today.

8 So there's money there. Keep in mind I've done
9 the budget before; I know what the budget looks like
10 at Covenant Keepers. I set it this year before
11 leaving to insure that the debt and things could be
12 paid according to plan. We were going to report that
13 money to the Arkansas Department of Education. I
14 started transitioning out and started working with
15 the Department and APSRC, and this is where it landed
16 us today. So, Board, it's money there in the budget.
17 Friendship said they were going to give us the money.
18 My salary there was \$120,000; Ms. Chapman is getting
19 that salary. I don't understand why there's no
20 money.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Panel, do you have
22 other questions?

23 MS. NEWTON: I do. I have concern -- not only a
24 question, a concern. But it seems to be to the
25 advantage of Covenant Keepers to work this out --

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DR. TATUM: (Nodding head up and down.)

MS. NEWTON: -- given the fact that we may have the option today of revoking or renewing the charter or continuation. In the event that it's revoked, then you stand -- City of Fire stands to hold all the obligations for the debt, as I understand it. I may be wrong. So it just seems that whatever could be -- Mr. Harris, on your end you say, you know, "we're asking for documents," and it seems reasonable that you would. And it also seems reasonable that the City of Fire, on the other hand, based on the fact that they may have to assume all the debt, if I'm understanding correctly -- and I may not understand Department policy -- but it's a compromise to both entities. And it seems like the City of Fire and the nonprofit -- and understanding nonprofits as I do -- would be saddled with some debt that it would be impossible -- unless a benefactor showed up and just gifted it. So I just can't see to the extent that we -- if there's a possibility of this arrangement or transition being worked out, it would be to the benefit of City of Fire, I think. That's just my perception. And if it's revoked, you have the option to come in without debt and apply for it. So I don't know whether that's a question, comment, or just my

1 rambling.

2 MR. HARRIS: It's a thought; it's a good one.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Can I follow-up, Madam Chair?

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes, Mr. Baldwin. And
6 then Mr. Rogers.

7 MR. BALDWIN: The situation we're in now, it's
8 hard to see an outcome for it because all the pieces
9 aren't in place. Would it help you -- and I don't
10 even know if this is -- if this can be done. But if
11 there is more time could you all get together and
12 come back with an agreement and a plan or is that --
13 has the time lapsed and are you set where you're at
14 right now?

15 MR. TATUM: May I speak as the City of Fire
16 board member, the president?

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Just a moment.
18 We're going to answer this question and I will see if
19 there's -- if there are -- if there's anyone that has
20 not gotten to speak who should be speaking.

21 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas
22 Department of Education.

23 I'll also let Friendship respond, but I just
24 wanted to note a concern just from the Department
25 perspective about pushing this any further. So if

1 the renewal does not move forward, all of the
2 students that are there will need to find -- either
3 go back to their home district, find another school
4 to go to, another charter school. We start running
5 into school choice application deadlines, other open-
6 enrollment charter school lotteries happening. And
7 in the -- for the benefit of the students, I would
8 just caution the board to think thoroughly about how
9 pushing it another month -- so if we heard it in
10 February, it would go before the State Board and not
11 be final until March. We're just pushing it really
12 close for the students who need to find other places
13 to go. And we did already push it one month to allow
14 additional time for them to get together.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah. And so, Ms. Hyatt,
16 I think there have been a number of complex issues
17 raised here. And thinking through on decisions -- I
18 mean, the decision today -- under normal
19 circumstances we would be reviewing an application
20 and deciding whether or not to approve the
21 application, which would be for renewal or whether or
22 not to revoke or, you know, always tabling a
23 decision. With this here though basically the
24 renewal application is moot if Friendship says they
25 do not want to move forward with the renewal. Is

1 that correct?

2 MS. HYATT: Yes. It's my opinion that because
3 the renewal application, all the information -- the
4 application was based on Friendship taking over the
5 school -- that if Friendship no longer wishes to move
6 forward, and City of Fire says they don't want the
7 school and has not presented additional renewal
8 information, that essentially you no longer have a
9 renewal application in front of you, such that
10 they've essentially non-renewed themselves. It would
11 be the same as if a renewal cycle came up and you
12 never received a renewal application. Therefore, I
13 don't even think that this board would have to vote
14 to non-renew because the parties have non-renewed
15 themselves by Friendship withdrawing their part of
16 the application and City of Fire not wishing to move
17 forward.

18 And at this point it's so far past the deadline
19 for the renewal application that trying to get a
20 renewal application together I think would be
21 problematic, just considering the fact that
22 Friendship has the benefit of working with this
23 school for almost a year before submitting their
24 renewal application.

25 So those are just some concerns. But it is my

1 opinion that really you don't have a renewal
2 application in front of you at this point, unless
3 Friendship changes its position.

4 MS. NEWTON: Given the fact that City of Fire
5 has indicated that they are finished with the school,
6 you know, so it's not a win-win or lose -- you know,
7 it's just a situation that it will be dissolved one
8 way or the other. So if Friendship doesn't choose to
9 continue to transition, then it's gone, because City
10 of Fire has indicated that they're not going to come
11 in to, you know, continue their operation.

12 MS. HYATT: That's correct. So basically if --
13 since both the parties have said they don't wish to
14 move forward with the renewal, then the school would
15 continue operating through June 30th of this school
16 year, and then would be closed. Immediately, the
17 Department would begin the procedures that go along
18 with nonrenewal or revocation to begin looking at the
19 things we talked about before, the debts and that
20 kind of stuff, and working with the school to get
21 notices out to teachers, students, and that kind of
22 stuff. Of course, that could change if someone came
23 in next month and asked for a license or something
24 like that. But moving from today I would say we will
25 just begin the nonrenewal procedures and begin

1 issuing notices to vendors and students and following
2 Section 7 of the charter school rules, if you wanted
3 to look at what they are.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson?

5 MR. WILSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

6 Ms. Hyatt, suppose that this panel votes to
7 revoke City of Fire, period, today. Can Friendship
8 come in -- Friendship has other charter schools
9 operating. Can they come in tomorrow and ask for a
10 license to continue their operation there?

11 MS. HYATT: So Friendship or any other school --

12 MR. WILSON: Sure.

13 MS. HYATT: -- has the ability to come in and
14 request an amendment to add a license to an existing
15 charter and could use that school, that building as
16 the basis of that. We've seen that with other
17 charter schools that have absorbed other charter
18 schools, and that's not an issue at all. I think we
19 would have to talk about timeline; so we'd have to
20 make sure it didn't start before June 30th and that
21 kind of stuff. But that's all stuff we could work
22 out with anyone who wanted to do that. And so if
23 someone does wish to do that, they can do that at
24 their option.

25 MR. WILSON: Okay.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And there have been
2 a couple of questions related to APSRC and the work
3 they've done. So if -- Mr. Scott Smith, if you could
4 also assist us with this. I know your organization
5 has tried to work on an arrangement so that the
6 continuity would continue at this school.

7 MR. SMITH: Madam Chair, Members of the Panel --
8 Scott Smith with Arkansas Public School Resource
9 Center.

10 As some members of the Panel might remember,
11 this began many months ago when Covenant Keepers was
12 basically before the Panel in what's often referred
13 to as a show-cause status. There was an arrangement
14 worked out at the end of that where Ms. Tatum agreed,
15 on behalf of Covenant Keepers, to a transition in
16 leadership and to change the board governance of the
17 school going forward, and we agreed to try and assist
18 in that process. For several months we tried to find
19 various charter organizations that might be
20 interested in working with the school. We finally
21 came to Friendship who said they would be interested,
22 set up meetings with Valerie and Joe, and began
23 working on an assignment agreement. In the middle of
24 that there was an MOU from management services which
25 allowed Ms. Tatum to step out of the leadership role.

1 We did not draft that MOU; that was drafted by
2 Friendship.

3 There's been some things referred to as far as
4 grant dollars in there. Those were never guaranteed.
5 They may come to fruition, but that was a competitive
6 grant process. We were not a party to that
7 agreement.

8 We drafted this assignment agreement which is a
9 provision in the rules and regs that allowed for a
10 voluntary assignment of a charter from one entity to
11 another, and virtually were there; we came to this
12 debt issue. And the debt issue specifically -- there
13 are other components to it, but one specific
14 component was it appears that some members of the
15 City of Fire board personally incurred a loan or some
16 obligations and those funds were provided to the
17 school in some format. And whether that's considered
18 a proper public debt or a private debt of the school
19 became the snag or the issue in that assignment
20 agreement. The concern from Friendship's perspective
21 was can you use whatever public funds are remaining
22 in the account to pay that debt; if it's a private
23 debt, will that set them up for an audit issue going
24 forward. So that became the problem with the
25 assignment agreement. That's when we were here

1 before you last time and were trying to reach some
2 kind of resolution on that. At that point in time
3 the parties with me here asked for an extension for
4 30 days to try and see if we could resolve this
5 issue. There are some legitimate questions as to
6 what that debt is or whether it's public debt or
7 private debt. It could be viewed in one format or
8 another. It seemed that -- it looked like there may
9 not be a possible resolution with regards to the
10 assignment agreement.

11 We subsequently drafted a proposed agreement
12 that would allow for the official revocation of the
13 charter and that Friendship would simultaneously file
14 a petition amending their charter to ask to basically
15 assume the school. Okay. The reason we drafted that
16 petition was there -- if you go through the
17 revocation process, there's a receivership process in
18 that -- where the State takes over the financial
19 control of the schools and the State walks you
20 through the debt. And whatever funds -- legitimate
21 funds are in the school, those funds are then applied
22 to whatever the legitimate debt of the school is and
23 that that would clear out those issues to the extent
24 -- as Covenant Keepers is saying today -- that
25 there's plenty of funds there and that the debts are

1 legitimate, then that would walk those issues
2 through. To the extent that that's not true, those
3 issues would be dealt with in that process. It also
4 would create a clean break for Friendship going
5 forward so that none of those issues would attach to
6 Friendship moving forward.

7 It's my understanding we were not part of the
8 conversations that there may have been some failure
9 to communicate -- I think you're hearing some of that
10 -- after that agreement was submitted. Whatever that
11 is or isn't, we don't know. But that's how we get to
12 where we are today, in part.

13 There were other issues raised, something about
14 990 forms and the IRS; those may or may not have been
15 resolved. But that was the primary issue that was at
16 play. And we -- our conversations primarily have
17 been with Mr. Jones or Mr. Harris, and that's been
18 the extent of our involvement as of late in this
19 process.

20 So that's where we were and what we've tried to
21 do to assist.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Panel, do you
23 have questions for Mr. Smith?

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. If -- I'm trying to put two
25 pieces together now. Since the -- there's basically

1 a nonrenewal of this charter before us; I mean, it's
2 going to non-renew itself. Does the State -- does
3 the same financial review by the State take place as
4 you noted? If there's a revocation of the charter,
5 does the State step in and -- for -- and then go
6 through the same process of assigning debt?

7 MR. ROGERS: We don't assign the debt. And by
8 the -- so if the State steps in -- if there's a
9 nonrenewal or revocation, then we do step in. But
10 our first obligation is to make sure all the federal
11 taxes are paid, all salary taxes, all those are paid.
12 And then we go down with what debt is remaining with
13 funds we have remaining that we know of at the time;
14 we begin those payments until the funds for the
15 school are exhausted.

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Would you all -- in a
17 case like this, do you all have a process to
18 determine whether a debt is a legitimate debt or not?

19 MR. ROGERS: We would do the same thing that
20 Friendship is having to do right now -- go through
21 the process of trying to figure out what the debt
22 was, what it was used for, how it was obtained. The
23 same things that they're asking we would have to ask
24 those questions if it was --

25 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. But once you all -- it's a

1 difference between you all making the determination
2 and Friendship making that determination.

3 MR. ROGERS: Yes, it would be.

4 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Okay. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any other questions for
6 Mr. Smith?

7 MR. SMITH: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Hyatt, has
9 anyone signed up for public comment that has not had
10 a chance to speak?

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

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No public comment. Okay.

13 So at this time, Panel, I think we have asked
14 questions; we've gotten a picture of where we are.

15 MS. NEWTON: The gentleman from City of Fire
16 wanted to --

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.
18 You had not signed up for public comment; is
19 that accurate?

20 MR. TATUM: Yes, that is accurate.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I will go ahead --
22 I will go ahead and allow you the public comment
23 time, which --

24 Is that three minutes, Ms. Hyatt?

25 MS. HYATT: Yes.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Three minutes.

2 MR. TATUM: I am Mr. Tatum on the board -- City
3 of Fire Development board. We have come in contact
4 with a party that would love to make that transition
5 also. I remember last time we were here someone said
6 if you don't want Friendship to do it -- we do have
7 someone, and we have someone here that would like to
8 speak as far as getting the charter and transferring
9 it and also doing a renewal also. So that's what's
10 on the agenda.

11 And also with Friendship we're having a lot of I
12 guess relational issues, and we're -- we really have
13 to concentrate on making sure we have those resolved
14 as we move forward. So I don't want these students
15 to have any type of repercussions from the
16 relationship between Friendship and Covenant Keepers.
17 Okay. And I do have someone who said that they would
18 like to speak as far as making the transitional
19 movement.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think though my concern
21 with having someone speak about a transition is that
22 this is the first that we're hearing of it, and we're
23 not going to be able to make a decision today as far
24 as if there's new interest for a new entity to come
25 in.

1 And so, Ms. Hyatt, I think I need your guidance
2 here.

3 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas
4 Department of Education.

5 So I'll go back to what I said before, which is
6 that the application cycle for renewal has come and
7 gone. We did receive a renewal application. That
8 renewal application no longer exists because
9 Friendship has indicated that they don't wish to move
10 forward with it; City of Fire has indicated that they
11 don't wish to move forward with it. Any new entity
12 would not have submitted a renewal application and at
13 this point that deadline has come and gone. They are
14 in the same position as any other school might be,
15 that they would still have the opportunity to come
16 and ask for a new charter school in that same
17 building, serving that same population. But at this
18 point I think having a new entity come before you
19 today and ask to move forward with a renewal, when we
20 haven't received any renewal application, supporting
21 documentation, information about the board of
22 directors, no finances, I think that would be
23 improper.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And so, Panel, I
25 think at this time we need to go ahead and move

1 forward with a decision as far as it relates to the
2 application we have in front of us today, which is a
3 renewal application that is no longer being asked to
4 be renewed by the entity that was --

5 DR. WILLIAMS: I was going to say, what do we
6 do?

7 MS. HYATT: Yeah. So it would be my preference,
8 since you don't have a renewal application in front
9 of you, just for clarity that you do vote to accept
10 the voluntary nonrenewal of the school so that we do
11 have something for the State Board to look at when
12 they review and just for clarity for all the parties
13 involved. But I want to be clear that you do not
14 have a renewal application in front of you right now
15 as all the parties of the renewal application have
16 indicated they don't wish to move forward. So I
17 think the proper motion would be to accept the
18 voluntary nonrenewal or not to accept the voluntary
19 nonrenewal, in which case we might have some
20 discussion about what that would look like. So --

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

22 DR. KREMERS: I move that we accept the
23 voluntary nonrenewal.

24 MR. WILSON: Second.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I have a motion and

1 a second.

2 All those in favor say "aye."

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

5 Okay. So the Panel has made the decision to
6 accept the voluntary nonrenewal of Covenant Keepers.

7 Do we need to discuss next steps now?

8 MS. HYATT: Have you all received the voting
9 sheet?

10 MR. ROGERS: Yes.

11 DR. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

12 MS. HYATT: Can you -- if you have the voting
13 sheets, can you just write your notes in as you
14 usually would and then give the feedback to the
15 parties? And does the new panel member have the
16 voting sheet?

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

18 MS. NEWTON: I don't have the voting sheet.
19 I'll make a note, if that's okay.

20 MS. HYATT: Okay.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We may be working on two
22 different Google sheets here. I don't know where Ms.
23 McLaughlin is, but I think there's -- yeah, we've got
24 A-1, Covenant Keepers, and then A-3. Yeah, we've got
25 two different Google sheets. I'm going to go ahead

1 and ask the Panel to go ahead and relay their
2 information and we'll have to transfer all of this.

3 MS. HYATT: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But it will be on public
5 record.

6 MS. HYATT: We can -- yeah, we can make sure
7 that we get it all on the same document.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

9 MS. HYATT: I apologize for that issue.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. So I'll
11 go ahead and let each panel member state their
12 reasons for their vote. And so what we do is you
13 just -- Mr. Baldwin, is just tell how you voted and
14 what your reason is.

15 DR. WILLIAMS: Let us go first and put him on
16 the end; that way --

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: That's true. That's true.
18 We'll let -- I'll let Dr. Williams read his first.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Due to the withdrawal of
20 the application to renew by Friendship, there's not a
21 renewal application before the Panel. I should have
22 started off by saying I voted for the motion. And
23 the reason I voted for the motion is: due to
24 withdrawal of the application to renew by Friendship,
25 there is not a renewal application before the Panel.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers.

2 DR. KREMERS: I voted for the motion. Renewing
3 the application -- renewal application was withdrawn,
4 making this a voluntary nonrenewal.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. Baldwin.

6 MR. BALDWIN: I voted for the motion to not
7 renew the application.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. For the reasons --

9 MR. BALDWIN: For the reasons --

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- as stated. Okay. Mr.
11 Rogers.

12 MR. ROGERS: I voted for the motion because
13 Friendship pulled their renewal -- application for
14 renewal.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Newton.

16 MS. NEWTON: I voted for the motion. There's no
17 willing and eligible applicant to accept transition
18 of the existing charter.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. Wilson.

20 MR. WILSON: I voted for the motion to accept
21 City of Fire's nonrenewal at its own request.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Okay. And is there
23 any other decisions that the Department needs to make
24 at this time -- not the Department -- the Panel needs
25 to consider at this time?

1 MS. HYATT: No, ma'am. So, and this is all laid
2 out in Section 7 of the charter school rules for your
3 own -- if you want to go and review it later. But
4 basically no later than 15 days after this Panel
5 voted to non-renew, or accepted a voluntary non-
6 renewal, it lays out the duties of the Department to
7 begin the dissolution of the charter. The State
8 Board of Education will review this at its next
9 meeting. But these directions in the charter rules
10 do begin 15 days from today. So we'll start doing
11 that and working towards the dissolution of the
12 charter.

13 MR. ROGERS: I would like to make a
14 recommendation that Friendship and ADE start working
15 today about getting that resolved so we have all that
16 together by the time the State Board comes together.

17 MR. WILSON: Good.

18 MR. ROGERS: So looking at -- I'd like to get an
19 accounting of the all the state funds, all the
20 federal funds, everything that we've gotten going up
21 till now, go ahead and get that started today.

22 MS. HYATT: Yes, sir.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

24 A-4: REQUEST FOR OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL AMENDMENT:
25 eSTEM PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We will move on to
2 the next item on our action agenda which is a Request
3 for Open-Enrollment Charter School -- an amendment
4 for eStem Public Charter Schools.

5 Mr. Ballard, you are recognized.

6 MR. BALLARD: Reginald Ballard, Arkansas
7 Department of Education.

8 The request for open-enrollment charter school
9 amendment for eStem Public Charter Schools -- on
10 December 10, 2007, the State Board of Education
11 approved the application for eStem Public Charter
12 Schools. The charter is approved to serve students
13 in grades K-12 with a maximum enrollment of 3,844.
14 Representatives of eStem Charter -- eStem Public
15 Charter Schools are appearing before the Charter
16 Authorizing Panel to request an amendment of their
17 current charter.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Would all
19 representatives of the charter and anyone speaking in
20 opposition please stand to receive the oath? Do you
21 swear or affirm that the testimony you will give is
22 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

23 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. You are -- you may
25 come forward, and if you'll state your name for the

1 record you will be recognized.

2 DR. BACON: John Bacon, Chief Executive Officer
3 for eStem Public Charter School.

4 I'll be brief. As you all know, the last few
5 months a lot of work has been done in transitioning
6 charter waivers from the old accreditation standards
7 to the new standards. I really appreciate the work
8 you all have done. I know eStem's name has appeared
9 twice before you, October and December. It was
10 brought to our attention that we needed to come one
11 more time because there were several areas from our
12 original waivers that were granted where maybe we had
13 a waiver from the accreditation standards but needed
14 waivers from state law and ADE rules just to complete
15 and fully effectuate the waivers.

16 So what you have are four areas where we --
17 these are all waiver areas we've held since December
18 of 2007. We're not asking for any changes to that,
19 just trying to clean up based on guidance we received
20 from ADE that needed to be done.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And you did say all
22 of these were ones that you've held since the
23 inception?

24 MR. BACON: Uh-huh. These are all areas where
25 we have --

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

2 MR. BACON: -- had waivers from the beginning.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right.

4 Panel Members, as you look over these do you
5 have any questions?

6 DR. WILLIAMS: No.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. If -- I would just
8 like to ask if anyone from the Department of Ed. --
9 has there been anything -- any of our Department
10 folks that need to clarify or --

11 MS. HYATT: No.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think Ms. Hyatt has
13 worked with our standards and systems support team.

14 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas
15 Department of Education.

16 What Dr. Bacon said is exactly right. These --
17 when eStem and I and the Charter Unit were working
18 through the Standards for Accreditation transfer from
19 the old to the new -- as a lot of other schools and
20 districts have been in this position where we noticed
21 that waivers were not fully effectuated -- we
22 reviewed these with them and actually made the
23 recommendation that they needed to request these
24 waivers, either because the waiver that they had was
25 for an old law that had since moved places, changing

1 where it was in the Arkansas code, or because they
2 just didn't have all the provisions. But we did work
3 with them to make sure all of those services are
4 being provided and that kids are receiving the
5 instruction; it's just in a way that doesn't
6 necessarily align with exactly what the law or the
7 rule says. But I don't think anyone has concerns.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you very
9 much.

10 If there are no questions at this time, I would
11 entertain a motion.

12 MR. ROGERS: I move that we approve the
13 amendment request.

14 MS. NEWTON: I second.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We have a motion
16 and a second that we approve the amendment request.

17 All those in favor say "aye."

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

20 Okay. Thank you very much.

21 And we will record our decision. This would be
22 A-4 on the Google sheets.

23 [A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE]

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll go ahead and
25 state our reasons.

1 Mr. Wilson.

2 MR. WILSON: Madam Chairman, I voted for the
3 motion so that eStem would conform its waivers to
4 maintain its excellent program.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

6 MS. NEWTON: I voted for the motion, with the
7 explanation for continuation of requested waivers
8 assist the charter in continuity and consistency.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. Rogers.

10 MR. ROGERS: I voted for. I have no concerns
11 with their amendment request.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. -- Dr.
13 Williams.

14 DR. WILLIAMS: I voted for the motion. This
15 fully effectuates the waivers requested.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers.

17 DR. KREMERS: I voted for the motion to satisfy
18 waivers for the new state standards.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And Mr. Baldwin.

20 MR. BALDWIN: I voted for the motion. The
21 waivers appear appropriately requested and proper.

22 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Action Agenda Item A-5
23 was pulled from the agenda.)

24 A-6: REVIEW HEARING FOR CAPITAL CITY LIGHTHOUSE ACADEMY

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. We are

1 moving on to the next action item, which is item
2 number 6, and this is a review hearing for Capital
3 City Lighthouse Academy.

4 Mr. Ballard, you are recognized to update us on
5 our task here.

6 MR. BALLARD: All right. Reginald Ballard,
7 Arkansas Department of Education.

8 On October 15, 2014, the State Board of
9 Education approved the application for Capital City
10 Lighthouse Academy. The charter is approved to serve
11 students in grades K-12, currently serving grades K-
12 8, with a maximum enrollment of 750. The Charter
13 Authorizing Panel requested representatives of the
14 charter appear before the Panel to address the
15 charter's academic performance. Representatives from
16 -- of City -- of Capital City Lighthouse Academy are
17 appearing before the Charter Authorizing Panel to
18 address the requested issues.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Will all
20 representatives of the charter and anyone speaking in
21 opposition please stand to receive the oath? Okay.
22 If you'll raise your right hand? Do you swear or
23 affirm that the testimony you're about to give shall
24 be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
25 truth?

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(ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And if we can have our presenters come forward. Okay. And you'll have 20 minutes to make your presentation and anyone else who's going to be presenting with you. If you all will state your name and title for the record, I'll recognize you.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, ma'am. Good morning. I'm Lanisha Roberts, the executive director for Lighthouse Charter Schools here in Arkansas.

Capital City opened in 2015, and they currently serve grades K-8 with 220 scholars. We have two academies at Capital City: the K-6 and the 7-8. And we offer a universal feeding program and our school is a recipient of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable grant. And like the local surrounding schools we serve a high-need and low-income population of diverse students.

MS. SHANNON: Good morning. My name is Sarah Shannon and I am the principal at Capital City Lighthouse Charter School. I came to be a part of the Lighthouse family in April of 2018. I'm in my 17th year of education and, I'm going to be honest with you, this is the first time that I really feel like I can make an impact. Many of our scholars --

1 if you look at our educational model, we know that
2 we're rooted in strong curriculum and instructional
3 resources that are aligned with the Common Core --
4 or, excuse me -- that are aligned with the Common
5 Core State Standards, but also a big portion of our
6 instruction comes from our social development. Many
7 of our scholars come to us from other schools that
8 they weren't successful at. For whatever reason some
9 need mental health -- they have mental health issues,
10 behavioral issues, academic issues. So we are really
11 encompassing the whole body of the child whenever
12 they come to us.

13 When I came in April I fell in love with these
14 scholars. We immediately had a bond. They were
15 looking for someone to come in to take their side, to
16 be there, to be their leader, and I feel like that I
17 have been led to be here at Capital City.

18 We also have -- you see the different portions
19 of our social development and then our arts infusion
20 where we incorporate the daily art instruction to
21 bring our educational opportunities for our children
22 to life.

23 At Lighthouse Academies we believe in setting
24 the stage for academic outcomes by becoming -- by
25 making sure that our scholars' social/emotional

1 health is at the forefront of our minds. We've
2 incorporated multiple staff members who are trained
3 in restorative approaches, implement daily rituals,
4 and we partner with behavioral health service
5 providers.

6 Now this is a slide that we are very, very proud
7 of. At Lighthouse we not only focus our time and
8 energy on our general population, we hold ourselves
9 highly accountable to the performance of our students
10 with disabilities.

11 Now this slide represents the ACT Aspire growth
12 for our students with disabilities, and the data
13 shows a higher than average growth in both English
14 Language Arts and math for that population. We
15 attribute that growth to intentional communication
16 between our special education teachers, as well as
17 our general education teachers. We have constant
18 parent communication. And we have intensive focus on
19 those academic deficits for those scholars.

20 MR. OSBORNE: Good morning. My name is John
21 Osborne. I serve as the math curriculum specialist
22 for Capital City Lighthouse Schools.

23 Today I would like to talk to you about the
24 progress that our scholars have shown in ELA, math on
25 two different assessments. I'll be talking about the

1 NWEA national assessment that the scholars take,
2 which is part of our charter goals. I will also be
3 talking to you a little bit today about the ACT
4 Aspire summative assessment which is related to the
5 state test, which is what we want to see in terms of
6 the state of Arkansas seeing how our students are
7 progressing.

8 The first thing I'd like to point out on the
9 NWEA national test is that the way NWEA recognizes
10 growth from a scholar is in one academic year the
11 test expects a scholar to grow by one full year.
12 However, we push our scholars to exceed this goal and
13 we set our goal for the scholars at 1.25 years. That
14 is part of our charter for math and ELA. We want our
15 -- I'm sorry -- for math and reading. We expect our
16 scholars to grow by one-and-a-quarter year in just
17 one full academic year.

18 The first slide you'll see relates to ELA on the
19 ACT Aspire summative test, the state test. So the
20 question you want to pose here is in ELA will
21 scholars grow if they stay with us. Our data shows
22 that yes, over the three years since we have been
23 open scholars are growing and improving their scores
24 on the ELA ACT Aspire summative test. If you look
25 here you'll see that on average we are growing by

1 four-and-a-half scale points on the ELA ACT Aspire
2 summative test over the three-year span. The chart
3 above shows you a cohort. For example, in 2016, our
4 3rd grade scholars averaged a 413 scale score on
5 their ELA summative exam. As we progress, that same
6 3rd grade cohort became 4th graders in 2017 -- again,
7 the blue column, they increased their scale score to
8 416. That same group, that same cohort, now 5th
9 graders in 2018 -- again, the blue column -- once
10 again increased their ELA summative assessment score
11 to 418, showing a clear progression of growth
12 throughout the three years that they are with us at
13 Capital City.

14 We are now going to go back and talk a little
15 bit about the NWEA national test. As you see here,
16 we're talking about the reading growth scores on the
17 NWEA. And you'll notice a clear trend of growth
18 exceeding even the charter goal of 1.25 years. For
19 the 2016 school year and the 2017 school year our
20 scholars exceeded not only one year of growth that
21 NWEA sets forth, but also the 1.25 years that our
22 charter has placed. You will notice there is a
23 discrepancy in the data that is off-trend, which we
24 will discuss later. However, even the three-year
25 average shows us trending upward very close to our

1 charter goal and far surpassing the one year growth
2 expected by NWEA.

3 We're now going to go back to the ACT Aspire,
4 the Arkansas state test, with our focus on math. We
5 just talked about ELA and reading; now I want to
6 discuss math. The question here is will our math
7 teachers get better at using our curriculum? As
8 mentioned earlier, we're using the Eureka curriculum,
9 which is Common Core standard -- state standard-
10 based. Generally, it takes anywhere from three to
11 five years for a new curriculum to become fully
12 embedded and teachers and scholars to become very
13 comfortable with it. The trend here shows that our
14 teachers are improving at using the curriculum and
15 teaching their grade level content. An example would
16 be we are not looking at cohorts, but think of it as
17 in 2016 we have 3rd graders, 4th graders and 5th
18 graders. Those 3rd graders averaged a 410 on their
19 ACT Aspire summative math test. In 2017, we got a
20 new group of 3rd graders. This is still the blue
21 column, but a new group of scholars. This new group
22 of scholars improved their score to 413 on the math
23 ACT summative Aspire exam. Moving forward to 2018,
24 and we're adding a grade each year -- that's why
25 we're increasing the columns. Going to the 2018

1 year, another new group of 3rd graders once again
2 increase their scale score to 414, showing that our
3 teachers are truly getting better at teaching with
4 the Eureka curriculum and are in fact improving the
5 ACT Aspire math summative scale scores for all
6 scholars.

7 The last one, we'll go back to the NWEA. Again,
8 NWEA math -- again, it sets the goal at one year. We
9 push our scholars to exceed at 1.25 years. In one
10 academic year -- in the first two academic years our
11 scholars surpass the NWEA goal, as well as surpassing
12 our charter goal. Once again, we see the same
13 discrepancy as before, which we are going to address.
14 But if we look at the three-year average the trend is
15 still close to our charter goal and still exceeding
16 what's expected by NWEA -- our students surpassing
17 the one-year growth and growing at 1.1 years.

18 MS. SHANNON: Sarah Shannon, principal at
19 Capital City.

20 This is a slide that we're very proud of. I'm
21 excited to share with you today two awards that our
22 school has been given this school year by the
23 University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy.
24 We were awarded one of the best growth schools in ELA
25 for -- we were one of top -- excuse me -- one of 10

1 schools in the state of Arkansas to receive this
2 honor, and ranked 2nd of 5 schools in the Central
3 Region to receive this honor. We also were given the
4 award for Beating the Odds in ELA for our low-income
5 families that we serve. We were one of 10 schools in
6 the state of Arkansas to receive this and we were
7 ranked 3rd of the 10 schools, and ranked 1st, which
8 we are very proud of, in the Central Region to
9 receive this honor. And I'm proud today to have one
10 of those dynamic teachers here with me today that's
11 going to be speaking here in just a little bit to
12 another -- to one of our other programs that we're
13 doing here at Capital City.

14 We are committed very strongly to partnering
15 with our families and making sure that the needs of
16 not just our scholars but our families are also met.
17 If you look at the growth trends here, we are
18 currently excited to be -- to share with you a 92%
19 parent satisfaction rating. So that shows me that
20 our strong partnership together with our parents is
21 having an impact, not just on our students, our
22 families, our teachers, and then the community that
23 we serve here in North Little Rock.

24 MS. ROBERTS: As you saw in previous slides, we
25 did not meet our academic expectations in 2017 and

1 '18. NWEA MAP data revealed this to us early in the
2 2017-18 school year that we were not on track to meet
3 the expected growth and outcomes. We know that this
4 was not okay and this caused us to do some reflective
5 thinking on our next steps. In 2017-18, we
6 experienced some unique challenges. We had
7 leadership and teacher changes that happened mid-
8 school year. As you know, leadership and teacher
9 change can be detrimental to the culture and academic
10 outcomes of the school, and Capital City was a result
11 of this type of impact. 2017-18 was not the norm for
12 us and will not be a repeat year. We have stabilized
13 the school leader, and teachers are showing
14 commitment and growth and they're learning to
15 appropriately execute for our students.

16 It is also important to know that it did not
17 take the school report card grade for us to know that
18 we had to make changes. As early as April of 2018,
19 we began teacher training and a comprehensive
20 analysis of data to determine professional learning
21 needs of the staff. Some of the changes were
22 immediate and some were during the summer months due
23 to budget implications. First and foremost, we knew
24 we had to have teacher and leadership stability in
25 order to get students back on track and to make up

1 ground from where we lost this past year -- and that
2 we have now.

3 Lastly, we knew that we had to double investment
4 in our professional learning of the staff that was
5 ongoing, and that we have now.

6 The planning and research began last school year
7 on the best program that would best serve our
8 scholars. Our leadership team explored personalized
9 learning and how it could best serve the students,
10 and also we looked at the required training that it
11 would take for our staff. We needed a program that
12 was not a one-size-fits-all. After attending
13 professional development opportunities to further
14 explore the possibilities of personalized learning,
15 we then leveraged our partnership with APSRC to
16 assist us with finding schools of successful
17 implementation of personalized learning. They
18 assisted us in setting up our onsite visit to
19 observe, along with speaking to the teachers and the
20 experiences with the implementation. The wow factor
21 for me was hearing how the scholars took ownership of
22 their learning, how they were being able to
23 articulate what they learned, and the safe
24 environment to learn that personalized learning
25 welcomes.

1 As a school we began the application process and
2 dialogue with our assigned Summit coach. We wanted
3 to know what grades we should serve and if it was
4 recommended that the most successful implementation
5 -- it was recommended to us that the most successful
6 implementation would be to only target one grade the
7 first year, and that we did. We identified our
8 incoming 6th grade class based on their limited
9 student engagement, motivation, and just their
10 overall academic performance.

11 Mrs. Shannon, the principal, will share more on
12 the school's professional learning plan that was
13 implemented for the 2018-19 school year. She will
14 speak to the teacher supports and ongoing training
15 being provided and embedded in the day-to-day school
16 program. Mrs. Hart, our Summit teacher, will speak
17 on what is working, the implications of the Summit
18 program to date, student success, and the promising
19 results we are seeing since the implementation.

20 MS. SHANNON: From my first day of working at
21 Capital City I told my teachers we're all lifelong
22 learners. If we don't ourselves understand that we
23 always have room for improvement, how can we teach
24 that to our scholars? So I talked to many of my
25 teachers and said, "We're so blessed with the many

1 opportunities that we have here at Capital City." We
2 have partnered with APSRC. We have a district
3 literacy and math specialist that come to our school
4 at least twice a week; they work one-on-one with
5 teachers. We have meetings, we communicate with each
6 other as -- we set goals and then we follow-up with
7 those teachers. We also have Above and Beyond, the
8 core consultant, Ashley McDonald, who is here with us
9 as well. She works with us on a weekly basis; we're
10 in constant communication. And what I'm seeing now
11 with my teachers is they're coming to me, they're
12 coming to these consultants and saying, "I want
13 more." It's so rewarding to see these teachers
14 saying, "I need help." They're no longer hiding and
15 saying, "I got this." They're coming and saying, "I
16 need help, I need support," and we have that support
17 for them. That is what is so exciting here at
18 Capital City that we have this going on.

19 You can see from our extensive list that we have
20 a strong support base locally, regionally, and
21 nationally that we can reach out to ask, "Hey, we
22 need this. We need your help, we need your support."
23 I've never once asked, "I need support," and not had
24 five people call me, text me, say, "What can I do to
25 help you and your teachers?"

1 MS. HART: Good morning. Anita Hart McNair.
2 I'm the 6th grade Summit teacher and I'm the Title 1
3 literacy interventionist.

4 As previously stated by Ms. Roberts, at the end
5 of the 2017-18 school year Capital City staff was
6 able to do some extensive research on project-based
7 learning platforms and visit local schools to see
8 firsthand the effects this method of teaching has.
9 The decision was made to implement Summit learning in
10 order to personalize student learning and to meet
11 individual student needs.

12 Summit, as I stated, is a personalized,
13 individualized learning platform. Opposed to a
14 student learning the concept of a skill, they're
15 given the opportunity to learn the skill in a way
16 that promotes them to create a project in accordance
17 with that skill. For example, opposed to a student
18 learning what a theme is, they're able to determine
19 the theme of a novel that they've read and then
20 they're able to pitch a TV show that they've created
21 that also encompasses that skill. Our students
22 learning cognitive skills in this manner has allowed
23 them to retain skills that translate across
24 disciplines and subject areas. These skills acquired
25 also correlate with the skills that are tested on the

1 ACT Aspire, as well as the MAP test.

2 Each student is able to receive individualized
3 learning resources allowing for differentiated
4 learning in an inclusive learning environment.
5 Because the students receiving this project-based
6 learning are all on various levels and have different
7 educational needs, the platform allows each student
8 to receive activities, resources, assignments, and
9 even tests that are all catered to their individual
10 needs.

11 One of the greatest assets that I've seen with
12 the Summit platform so far is the sense of
13 empowerment that it has given our students. Last
14 year the students in our 6th grade class were a
15 challenging group of students, both academically as
16 well as culturally. Many of these students were
17 unmotivated and became academically stagnant.
18 However, this year they have already shown tremendous
19 gains. This individualized learning platform has
20 allowed the students an opportunity to take complete
21 ownership of their learning and display a sense of
22 pride in their learning experience that wasn't
23 previously present. For example, students enter our
24 classrooms each day and now they set daily goals
25 regarding what academic goals they're going to work

1 on. This agency has helped students to stay self-
2 motivated, it has improved their behavior, and all of
3 our students are now engaged in their learning.
4 Students have been able to acquire and utilize habits
5 of success that have assisted them to push
6 themselves. They now celebrate their own academic
7 successes, their own social successes, and the
8 successes of their peers. These are the same
9 students that now request feedback on assignments and
10 tests, on weekends, and even during Christmas break.

11 Summit also encourages and promotes an
12 environment that is advantageous for small group
13 instruction and this gives students an opportunity to
14 receive direct instruction and assistance on their
15 particular deficits. Significant growth for students
16 in math and literacy have already been noted since
17 implementation and can be attributed to several
18 factors, such as one-to-one technology because each
19 student has their own assigned Chromebook; so they
20 have their own technology that's at their reach each
21 day. There's also an individualized and
22 differentiated learning environment for each student,
23 and each student is assigned a mentor that guides
24 them socially, as well as academically, that they
25 meet with on a weekly basis.

1 Since implementation, Capital City is already
2 noticing significant gains in our scholars. In
3 literacy, 76% of students have met their projected
4 growth on the winter NWEA. On the ACT Aspire interim
5 math assessment, the 6th grade scholars have -- we
6 have 42% meeting benchmark, which is compared to less
7 than 10% on the previous assessment.

8 Pending final analysis of student achievement
9 data, Capital City intends to expand the
10 participation in grades 4-8 during the 2019-20 school
11 year.

12 MS. SHANNON: Lastly, we have given you our
13 school improvement goals. In our first goal we are
14 working on increasing academic achievement in
15 reading. And you can see in the bulleted points some
16 of the things that we're doing.

17 (THE TIMER RINGS)

18 MS. SHANNON: But we're implementing small group
19 instruction in all of our literacy classrooms
20 throughout the day, as well as --

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I'm sorry to interrupt
22 you, but the 20 minutes is up.

23 MS. SHANNON: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We will see -- is there
25 anyone here to speak in opposition?

1 MS. HYATT: (Shaking head from side to side.)

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. No one is here.

3 You have a remaining 5 minutes, so you can
4 finish up, if you would like, if that's -- if you
5 want to finish up the presentation.

6 MS. SHANNON: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We'll do an additional 5
8 minutes.

9 MS. SHANNON: Okay. As I was saying, we
10 implement small group instruction in all of our
11 literacy classrooms K-8, as well as implementing
12 daily structured RTI for kindergarten through 8th
13 grade students. We also implement all RISE
14 components that are embedded in grades K-6.

15 Our second goal, we're focusing on increasing
16 academic achievement in math. And one of the
17 strongest pieces at this point is we're starting an
18 afterschool tutoring program that we have almost 80
19 scholars that have committed and we have other
20 parents that are asking us "can my other children
21 come and attend this structured program three days a
22 week with us."

23 And then our final goal is increasing our
24 academic achievement in the area of science. We are
25 implementing Project Lead the Way curriculum and

1 we've also increased minutes in the science classes
2 -- in the science block in our upper academy.

3 So I want to thank you all for your time today
4 and appreciate your listening to our school.

5 MS. ROBERTS: While we are not pleased yet with
6 our current results, we do believe that we have taken
7 the appropriate measures and steps to insure that our
8 outcomes are not a replica of 2017-18. Our current
9 student data has shown from fall to winter NWEA MAP
10 testing that we and our scholars are truly growing.
11 We look forward to sharing these growth performance
12 highlights with you at our renewal hearing in the
13 near future. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll go ahead and
15 move to panel questions, and I'll start here with Dr.
16 Williams.

17 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. You know, excellent
18 presentation and I think the big takeaway for me is
19 that things are moving in the right direction. I do
20 want to just state the obvious now is the letter
21 grades for the lower elementary and the upper
22 elementary -- and the lower elementary is an F and
23 the upper elementary -- the upper grades is a D. But
24 I appreciate the presentation and it looks like you
25 all are moving in the right direction, and I'm

1 looking to see what the next trend would be.

2 And I guess the only other piece that I made a
3 note of that really caught my attention -- you talked
4 about the leadership change and the teacher change,
5 because that year was just almost -- it was -- you
6 know, if you look at data, you just kind of -- it's a
7 wake-up call. Could you give me a little bit more
8 information on how that directly affected the kids?
9 Was it just a lack of leadership working with the
10 teachers to meet the needs of the kids, or how --
11 just give me a little bit more about that.

12 MS. ROBERTS: So as it relates to the teacher,
13 she was one of our high-performing teachers the year
14 before, and she taught -- she affected 3rd and 4th
15 grade math --

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

17 MS. ROBERTS: -- and science. So that was a
18 huge loss. But she was terminally ill.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

20 MS. ROBERTS: She tried to make it but she
21 missed a numerous amount of days, until she ended up
22 resigning --

23 DR. WILLIAMS: Right.

24 MS. ROBERTS: -- by January. As for the
25 leadership change, our principal that we had in

1 place, she actually did not come back after Christmas
2 break. She was our second principal, if you will --
3 just to say she was our second principal and the kids
4 had formed a bond with her, loved her. And these
5 kids really thrive on relationships, as well as the
6 parents. So she sent an email and did not return
7 after Christmas break. So that was two major people
8 in our school --

9 DR. WILLIAMS: I can see that.

10 MS. ROBERTS: -- that left. So it really
11 affected the kids. The teachers felt like is anyone
12 going to stay. Right? We need a leader that's going
13 to stay and persist. And so that put us in a
14 position just to have a really rough year as it
15 relates to staff morale, as well as student
16 relationships and trust. So --

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And while you're talking
18 about staffing, if I could go ahead and ask a
19 question related to that. I noticed in your data for
20 17-18 that like 90-something percent of your teachers
21 were inexperienced teachers, according to the data
22 that we had. So that would be teachers who have no
23 more than three years of experience. Can you talk a
24 little bit about what your workforce looks like this
25 year? Did you -- have you seen a change? Were you

1 able to retain teachers --

2 MS. ROBERTS: Yes, ma'am.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- and are you -- can you
4 talk a little bit about that?

5 MS. ROBERTS: Yes, ma'am. We were able to
6 retain teachers. Of course, Ms. Shannon had the
7 opportunity -- you know, we brought her in in April
8 as a school leader.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: April of last year?

10 MS. ROBERTS: 2018.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

12 MS. ROBERTS: So, yes, she was able to spend the
13 rest of the year with us, because we go into June.
14 So she had opportunity to observe the staff that, you
15 know, she wanted to keep -- and we allowed her that
16 opportunity. We didn't lose many teachers, maybe two
17 to three. But in our testing grades we were able to
18 keep the majority of our teachers. So the staff
19 retention is better. We do have some committed
20 staff. We have some that's been there since the
21 school opened. But it was a novice staff, yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers,
23 questions?

24 DR. KREMERS: I commend you on the growth
25 recognition from University of Arkansas on the ELA.

1 What percent of your students is -- are the ELA
2 students?

3 MS. CROWDER: My name is -- let me try to talk.
4 My name is Amanda Crowder; I'm the regional academic
5 director. I'm not sure I understand your question.
6 Are you asking --

7 DR. KREMERS: What percent of your student body
8 are ELA students where you were recognized for the
9 growth, student growth?

10 MS. CROWDER: So that was for our upper academy,
11 for our 7th grade.

12 DR. KREMERS: Okay.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: The ELA would be the
14 English Language Arts, so --

15 DR. KREMERS: Oh, okay.

16 MS. CROWDER: Yeah, it's not --

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Are you asking about ELL,
18 English Language Learners?

19 DR. KREMERS: Okay.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah.

21 DR. KREMERS: Yeah. No.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

23 DR. KREMERS: So that's where you received the
24 recognition for student growth in that area?

25 MS. CROWDER: Yes, for English Language Arts.

1 DR. KREMERS: Okay. Thank you --

2 MS. CROWDER: Yes, ma'am.

3 DR. KREMERS: -- for clarifying that for me.

4 And on the reports -- I apologize -- when you
5 presented the data on growth, the slide 9 -- and this
6 is just more for looking at data and how data is
7 presented. But on slide 9 it's presented as student
8 growth, and I'm just wondering if you're presenting
9 that as percentage points or just a static flat point
10 growth?

11 MR. OSBORNE: So that's a good question. The
12 NWEA, what they do is in the fall the students will
13 take the test and then it will give them a projected
14 growth based on where they were. So an example would
15 be -- I don't know if this is accurate -- a student
16 scores a 180; now they're projected to score a 190 in
17 the spring. If they score a 195, they have grown by
18 a year-and-a-half of what is expected. So it's more
19 -- it would really be a percentage. This number
20 would relate to a percentage of what they were
21 expected to grow, but it would really read 150% or
22 just one-and-a-half years.

23 DR. KREMERS: Okay. So you mentioned the
24 student growth, and I'm just -- I'm curious because
25 the trend is actually decreasing each year. You

1 know, so it's 1.5, 1.4.7. And you said you were
2 going to come back later and clarify some discrepancy
3 in the data, and I don't know if you spoke about
4 that.

5 MR. OSBORNE: Yes, ma'am. So the discrepancy is
6 in the 2017-2018 year where sort of what Ms. Roberts
7 spoke to --

8 DR. KREMERS: Okay.

9 MR. OSBORNE: -- in terms of the 3rd and 4th
10 grade teachers. Those greatly, greatly affected
11 those scores. So that whole turnaround, we kind of
12 see the trend for the 2017-2018 year that that
13 affected the scholars, as well as their scores on the
14 NWEA/ACT Aspire.

15 DR. KREMERS: Okay. So I guess where I'm just
16 disconnecting -- and I apologize for continuing to
17 just ask for clarification -- you're saying growth,
18 but in that chart to me it looks like each year
19 there's a decrease. Even though the average is still
20 1.2 overall growth of 1.2 years, the actual trend per
21 year is declining.

22 MR. OSBORNE: Yes, ma'am. So I do see what
23 you're saying, because it does -- it goes 1.5, 1.4.
24 My thought when I look at this is simply even though
25 it does go down from 2015-2016 to 201-2017, the fact

1 that they're still growing by more than 1.25 years
2 doesn't concern me as much as they did drop a little
3 bit. So I see they grew by one-and-a-half years and
4 then they grew by 1.4 years, which still isn't what
5 we want; we want well past even our 1.25 goal. But
6 the fact to me is they still did surpass their
7 charter goal, which I'm happy about. Even if it was
8 a slight decrease, I'm confident that our trend will
9 continue with the 1.2, 1.3 average above our charter
10 goal.

11 DR. KREMERS: So like for this next -- let's say
12 for 18-19, then you have to have an increase from the
13 .7, then up to the 1.25 to meet your goal. Is that
14 correct?

15 MR. OSBORNE: Yes, ma'am. That's what we would
16 --

17 DR. KREMERS: Which is a little bit more of a
18 jump --

19 MR. OSBORNE: Yes.

20 DR. KREMERS: -- than the average that --

21 MR. OSBORNE: Yes, ma'am.

22 DR. KREMERS: Okay. So that's just kind of the
23 presentation of data as clarification. Okay. Thank
24 you.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

1 MS. GALLAGHER: I'm Sarah Gallagher; I'm the
2 Chief Academic Officer for Lighthouse Academies.

3 I just wanted to clarify that. We don't
4 necessarily look at the 1.5 and 1.4 as a decline.
5 NWEA states -- the way this works for them is that
6 each child would be expected to have a 1.0. Right?
7 Anything above that is considered great progress. We
8 hold ourselves to a higher standard, so we're looking
9 for a year-and-a-quarter or more. So rather than
10 when necessarily looking at 1.5 and 1.4 as a trend
11 line, I would state that those are exceeding our goal
12 and exceeding our goal again. Right? And overall,
13 in the three years just barely missing our goal. In
14 17-18, we have addressed that. We did not meet the
15 goal in that year. We expect of ourselves that this
16 current school year we will again exceed our goal of
17 1.25. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: If I might ask -- because
19 you all are showing the NWEA data here. And in terms
20 of growth in the presentation you didn't talk about
21 the growth as far as the state accountability growth.
22 And there is a disconnect between positive data trend
23 with NWEA and then the state growth, which shows that
24 on average your students are not meeting the growth
25 that would be expected of them. And it's not

1 necessarily measuring a year's worth of growth, but
2 it's what each student acting as their own control
3 would be expected to meet. So can you talk a little
4 bit about where those disconnects might be? Because
5 that I think is something we need to feel confident
6 that your school has a grasp of and it's looking at.
7 So the fact that that wasn't mentioned at all is a
8 little of concern.

9 MS. GALLAGHER: Yes. Thank you for that
10 question. So that is something that we are looking
11 at. One of the areas that we have looked at is
12 special education, and you will find in our special
13 education subset we are actually past the 80% -- or
14 80 points on ESSA in both our lower academy and then
15 our upper academy as well.

16 I'm going to pass it to my local colleagues here
17 to talk a little bit about our work in understanding
18 the state accountability.

19 MS. CROWDER: So one of the things we looked at
20 is NWEA has done a linkage study as to how students
21 perform on NWEA translates to ACT Aspire. One of the
22 things that we have brought forth to our schools this
23 year is that for NWEA a student has to be in the 70th
24 percentile, period, to be able to show growth and
25 proficiency on readiness on the ACT Aspire. That's

1 very hire, because NWEA puts it at 50th. So that's
2 something that we're translating, because we didn't
3 see that amount of growth translated on the ACT
4 Aspire. It's 70th for ELA and 65th for math.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And you mentioned your MAP
6 -- your winter MAP results and that you would discuss
7 it at a later time. Can you just give me a quick
8 snapshot of the -- what you see from the winter MAP
9 results as far as the trajectory or the projection?

10 MS. CROWDER: We're seeing a different trend
11 than we did in 17-18.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

13 MS. CROWDER: We're seeing student -- the growth
14 of the students meeting the 70th percentile or being
15 within the range, because they'll give you 68 --

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Right.

17 MS. CROWDER: -- you know, the range, the
18 percentile increasing in math and ELA. And students
19 moving out of the lowest quartile is changing at
20 Capital City.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: What kind of percent
22 change? Like 10% more? I mean, do you have an idea?
23 If you don't know, then --

24 MS. CROWDER: I don't know it off the top of my
25 head --

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay, that's fine.

2 MS. CROWDER: -- with the different schools.

3 But, yes --

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

5 MS. CROWDER: -- they're showing the most --

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: That's fine if you don't.

7 MS. CROWDER: Okay.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I don't want to surprise
9 you with a question that --

10 MS. ROBERTS: And I also want to address some of
11 your concerns about, you know, the growth as it
12 relates to state testing. We do have -- we find
13 ourselves in an area of like -- it's high mobility in
14 North Little Rock. We have -- we had 106 new
15 students last year out of 202. So if that gives you
16 any kind of picture of, you know, some back-and-forth
17 in between the schools that we get -- we do have that
18 as well. So some of our schools -- I mean, some of
19 our students that tested -- probably like 40 out of
20 99 were brand-new. And this is just off the top of
21 my head, giving you -- I don't know the exact. But
22 we do get a lot of new students and we do deal with
23 very low reading levels as well. So that's another
24 issue and that's the one thing that we really push,
25 like embedding RISE into the ELA class where all the

1 components are there; it's scheduled out when they do
2 each component of the RISE. So we are seeing some
3 gains and students reading more.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I couldn't help but
5 notice on his computer Mr. Rogers has data pulled up
6 on reading levels, I think. So did you want to ask
7 any questions related to that?

8 MR. ROGERS: No. Well, that was just my concern
9 is -- when we were looking at the growth that you
10 have on there, and that's why I appreciate the
11 questions that they were asking. Because the lower
12 academy right now on the ESSA score is only at 14%,
13 and so I -- that's why I had that pulled up. And
14 then also I had your goal one that you have, which
15 actually -- the work on the Arkansas RISE, because
16 that's my biggest concern with the lower academy is
17 14% reading at grade level. Because if they continue
18 staying at only 14% reading at grade level then when
19 you go to your upper there's not going to be any
20 improvement there. And that's what was jumping out
21 at me because I'm looking at that reading growth and
22 I'm looking at the ESSA score and they're not saying
23 the same thing. So that's a little confusing to me
24 there.

25 MR. BALDWIN: Let me ask a non-educator

1 question, and I apologize for asking it. But I'm
2 curious, when you received these grades was it a
3 surprise to get those grades or did you --

4 MS. ROBERTS: No.

5 MR. BALDWIN: -- see that -- you could see it
6 coming that way?

7 MS. ROBERTS: No, sir. It was definitely not a
8 surprise. We looked at the fall and winter NWEA data
9 and we knew that it was trending not in the right
10 direction. So we absolutely --

11 MR. BALDWIN: So you could see it -- you could
12 see it trending the other way?

13 MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes. That's why I said we
14 started planning in April for 19-20, because we knew
15 student investment even on the testing was very low
16 because of the reading. So, no surprise.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Newton, do you have
18 any questions?

19 MS. NEWTON: (Shaking head from side to side.)

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson?

21 MR. WILSON: Nothing.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I'll go back to
23 this end of the table, any additional questions for
24 them?

25 Okay. One other thing that I want to mention --

1 and this is I think just to be sure and -- because I
2 heard a couple of different times -- it's very
3 important that in instruction that we are teaching
4 the academic standards, Arkansas academic standards.
5 And I heard reference to Common Core state standards,
6 and I want to make sure that the standards to which
7 you are teaching are on Arkansas academic standards
8 and you have those clear?

9 MS. SHANNON: Yes, ma'am.

10 MS. ROBERTS: (Nodding head up and down.)

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And sometimes when
12 you're newer I understand, you know, if you've been
13 in a place where Common Core was still taught -- so I
14 wanted to make sure that was clear.

15 Okay. So, Panel, any discussion prior to making
16 a motion?

17 All right. I think we had a thorough
18 presentation; seems like our questions have been
19 answered. So is -- Ms. Hyatt, are there any
20 remaining issues or anyone signed up for public
21 comment that would need to speak? And I guess you
22 need to give us some guidance on what it is we would
23 actually be doing here.

24 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas
25 Department of Education.

1 To my knowledge, no one has signed up for public
2 comment. And I don't believe there are any remaining
3 issues.

4 So since you called Capital City in, Lighthouse,
5 before you kind of to give this review, the things
6 that you can do are make motions to place the school
7 on probation, to add some sort of reporting, or any
8 other type of directive. You can make motions to
9 that effect. You can do nothing, you can -- other
10 than accept this report, if you don't wish to add any
11 of that stuff. And, of course, you know, there's
12 revocation. It doesn't sound like you're there, but
13 just to be correct on the options.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. So,
15 Panel, if -- is there -- you know, unless there are
16 other desires, one of the motions could be to accept
17 the report or to, you know, ask for any additional
18 information if you feel the need to do so. The data
19 are updated and we will have results from this 18-19
20 school year -- hopefully early in the fall, Ms.
21 Coffman?

22 MS. COFFMAN: (Nodding head up and down.)

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Accountability update, you
24 know, in the fall. So there will be -- and when are
25 you actually up for renewal?

1 MS. SHANNON: December.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we would be
3 seeing them again in about a year anyway.

4 DR. WILLIAMS: That was my question.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. So is
6 there anyone who would like to make a motion at this
7 time?

8 MR. WILSON: I move we accept the report,
9 knowing that they'll be back here in December. I
10 think that's a good thing.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

12 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Have a motion and a second
14 to accept the report.

15 All those in favor say "aye."

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

18 Okay. If you will record your responses on the
19 Google doc. And we appreciate you coming today and
20 providing us with this update and wish you all the
21 best in the rest of the school year and a very laser-
22 like focus on those things that you're doing.

23 MS. SHANNON: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

24 MS. HYATT: And I just wanted to give you kind
25 of a time update. It is 10:30, so --

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

2 [A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE]

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Are we still on?

4 Okay. If we want to just start with Mr. Wilson
5 and go down the row, you can just give a quick update
6 on your vote.

7 MR. WILSON: I voted for the motion. I was
8 impressed with the award from the University. I
9 thought that was a good indication of good growth.

10 MS. NEWTON: I voted for the motion, with the
11 reason being the school seems focused and directed
12 toward improving student performance.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Rogers.

14 MR. ROGERS: I voted to accept the motion to
15 accept the report, knowing that there's going to be
16 an opportunity for them to come back next year and
17 show the growth and reading at grade level.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. -- Dr.
19 Williams.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: I support the motion. Academics
21 are trending in the right direction. I am looking
22 forward to receiving an update this fall.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers.

24 DR. KREMERS: I voted to approve the motion to
25 accept the report, with knowledge that significant

1 positive academic trends should be evident in
2 December.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Baldwin.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you. I voted to accept the
5 motion. It appears you all understand the challenges
6 and have a plan to improve those results.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. Thank
8 you, Panel.

9 At this time if we could have a motion to recess
10 until 1:00.

11 MR. WILSON: So moved.

12 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Motion and second.

14 All those in favor?

15 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We will reconvene
17 at 1:00.

18 (OFF THE RECORD - 10:35 A.M.)

19 (BACK ON THE RECORD 12:57 P.M.)

20 A-7: REVIEW HEARING FOR BLYTHEVILLE NEW TECH HIGH SCHOOL

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We're going to resume our
22 meeting. We have one agenda item left. And this is
23 a Review Hearing for Blytheville New Tech High
24 School. And we will recognize Mr. Ballard to put
25 this action item before us.

1 MR. BALLARD: Reginald Ballard, Arkansas
2 Department of Education.

3 Number 7 is a Review Hearing for Blytheville New
4 Tech High School.

5 On January 14, 2013, the State Board of
6 Education approved the application for Blytheville
7 New Tech High School. The charter is approved to
8 serve students in grades 9-12 with a maximum
9 enrollment of 1,000. The Charter Authorizing Panel
10 requested representatives of the charter appear
11 before the Panel to address the charter's academic
12 performance. Representatives of Blytheville New Tech
13 High School are appearing before the Charter
14 Authorizing Panel to address the requested issues.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And for
16 clarification, before we get started, they also have
17 an amendment request; is that correct?

18 MR. BALLARD: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Yes. So we will
20 essentially look at two things. I just want to make
21 sure that I don't mess this up as we get going. We
22 would need to take action on their amendment request,
23 but that amendment request will be heard as part of
24 their response to concerns. Is that correct?

25 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt, Arkansas

1 Department of Education.

2 So you do need to vote on the amendment request
3 separately from any motion you may or may not make
4 about the presentation. I don't know whether they
5 plan to present the amendment request as part of this
6 presentation. It's certainly fine for them to do
7 that. Or they could present it separately, just kind
8 of how they want to do it. But just make sure when
9 you vote that you vote on the amendment request and
10 then if you have additional motions to do them
11 separately.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Very good. Thank
13 you for clarifying.

14 Okay. So will all representatives of the
15 charter and anyone speaking in opposition please
16 stand to receive the oath? If you'll raise your
17 right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the
18 testimony you give will be the truth, the whole truth
19 and nothing but the truth?

20 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you.

22 And we will go ahead and get started with the
23 presentation. And so I will just ask those of you
24 presenting to state your name and title for the
25 record, and you're recognized. So we can begin at

1 this time. You'll have 20 minutes.

2 SUPT. ASHLEY: Okay. Thank you. I won't use
3 the whole 20 minutes; I think I'll share it with
4 everyone else. But good afternoon and thank you very
5 much for allowing us to come and speak before you
6 today. My name is Bobby Ashley; I'm the
7 superintendent of Blytheville Public Schools. I've
8 been superintendent since July 1; prior to that I had
9 been a high school principal for nine years. So I
10 made the move on July 1st and took over the
11 superintendent position.

12 I want to start off today in sharing what
13 Blytheville High School New Tech their vision is.
14 Our vision is to develop learners who will show
15 agency, demonstrate the ability to communicate,
16 collaborate, think critically, and transition into
17 the college and career of their choice. I brought up
18 some key words in our vision and that is communicate,
19 collaborate, think critically. And that is -- was --
20 our whole purpose when we started New Tech was to
21 concentrate on those things because our students,
22 like any other student leaving any other school -- we
23 think those things are critical as far as when they
24 leave our doors.

25 Blytheville High School New Tech, their core

1 beliefs are strategies that BHS New Tech uses
2 benefits our students. And we feel very strongly in
3 that the strategies that we're teaching daily, and
4 have been ever since we've been a charter New Tech
5 school, that we concentrate on the strategies that we
6 are teaching our students. Also, we believe that
7 relationships are essential. Not only are they
8 essential, but we also think they're extremely
9 critical as far as moving forward and us teaching our
10 students. Teamwork is also a huge key in our core
11 beliefs as far as being a New Tech school.

12 We also believe that partnering with the
13 community is something that we do and have been doing
14 and putting a lot more emphasis on it in the last,
15 I'd say, five or six years as far as partnering with
16 the community and getting their voice and their input
17 as far as what we're about.

18 I want to tell you just a little bit about
19 Blytheville High School New Tech and Blytheville. I
20 know most of you probably are very familiar with
21 Blytheville, where we're at. We're, you know, of
22 course, in the northeast corner of Arkansas. And
23 we're in the Delta and we are obviously in a poverty
24 area, as well as other schools are along the Delta.
25 But Blytheville High School is about 600 students

1 that we have 9-12. We're 85 -- around 85% African
2 American and we're 100% free lunch and breakfast.
3 And then also there's a lot of meals that we provide
4 for afterschool programs also. So we not only
5 believe in educating our students, but also we
6 believe that they -- nutritionally they need to be
7 ready to learn in the mornings when we begin to teach
8 them.

9 The survey that our students do -- they do them
10 a couple of times a year and it's through the New
11 Tech organization -- the New Tech model that we use.
12 And what we have found through our surveys -- and
13 they do -- like I said, they do them a couple of
14 times a year -- is that if you'll notice they -- our
15 students year-in/year-out they either agree or
16 strongly agree that they're very proud of the
17 education that they're getting from Blytheville or
18 when they leave Blytheville. They're very, very
19 proud of that and our survey tells us that. They
20 also year-in/year-out also agree and strongly agree
21 that they're ready for the next stage or the next
22 step in their life, because we -- you know, not only
23 do we educate our students, obviously, but we've
24 bought into when they leave us, come that Monday
25 night or that Monday morning after they graduate on

1 that Friday night, that they've got to be ready -- or
2 we've got to set them on a path that's going to --
3 for them to be successful.

4 One of the key things in this here is -- and I
5 want you to understand is about the relationship
6 part. We believe 100% in building the relationship
7 between not only just student-to-student, but
8 student-to-teacher and then also our faculty, our
9 school to the community. So relationships is such a
10 huge, huge part of who we are and what we do.

11 And, of course -- and the reason we're here is
12 because of the F that Blytheville High School New
13 Tech received this past year. Like I said, I've
14 taken over as superintendent on July 1 and I had been
15 the principal for the past nine years. So this F
16 happened under my leadership as far as being the high
17 school principal at that time. I can tell you this
18 here, the day -- like I said, July 2nd actually was
19 my first day of being superintendent because that was
20 a Monday. The first thing I had done was schedule
21 meetings all day long with different departments and
22 different groups, and my first meeting was at 8:30
23 that morning. And about 8:35 is when Ms. Cooke, who
24 will be talking to you here in a little bit, she laid
25 down the test scores; she had printed them out. They

1 were given to us that day. And it literally made me
2 sick for me to look and see that we had received an
3 F. So I was going to not only now talk about the F
4 that we had received as me being principal that
5 Friday, but now this Monday has rolled around and now
6 this is an F that -- but then something, Board, that
7 we do -- we're not going to shy away from it.

8 We're -- you're going to be hearing here in just
9 a little bit things that we're -- we've put in place
10 that we think still will work, but they may need
11 tweaked a little bit, but also things that we're
12 going to be doing. We did hire obviously someone to
13 replace me who we're very proud of, and he'll get to
14 speak to you here in a little bit.

15 But the F does not define us but the F, it does
16 say a lot. So there's work to be done and I can
17 assure you, as superintendent, we're going to put
18 everything we have into changing that F.

19 So I'll close it with that.

20 MS. COOKE: Good morning. I'm Sally Cooke; I'm
21 the curriculum director for the district. And I want
22 to speak just briefly to a question that was posed in
23 the letter that we got regarding this hearing, and it
24 was around our knowledge of ESSA and how we got those
25 scores, that information. And I want to share that

1 those barriers are not excuses for us, but we have to
2 acknowledge the barriers in order to address them and
3 make adjustments within those things that are in
4 front of us.

5 As we looked deeply at our ESSA scores and our
6 report, we found several barriers -- not things that
7 had been completely hidden, but that we hadn't
8 addressed completely. One of those was including
9 specifically the fact that the systems that we had in
10 place that were needed to track each indicator were
11 not fully in place. Those things were there. We
12 were aware, but we were not completely tracking all
13 of those things. And so we know that could have
14 improved our scores, and we've already made those
15 adjustments.

16 One big area of concern was just that core
17 instructional gap that has to happen when you get the
18 scores that we got to receive that F. And that
19 occurs partially with the barrier of the high teacher
20 turnover, which has been something that we've dealt
21 with -- and we'll obviously be able to expand upon
22 that during the question session. But we know that
23 there is a need to do a lot more to provide that
24 foundational and content support for all of those
25 teachers, and you're going to see a lot of those

1 things, how we're going to address those barriers as
2 the rest of this presentation goes on. And we can
3 address them more individually as we speak later.

4 MR. SWENSON: Good afternoon. My name is
5 Matthew Swenson; I'm the new principal of Blytheville
6 High School. This will be my first year at
7 Blytheville High School. I'm coming to you
8 previously from Cross County High School as the
9 assistant principal and the director of college and
10 career access there -- which it's also a New Tech
11 school, Cross County High School.

12 I want to start out today with a quote, like one
13 of my favorite quotes: "Every system is perfectly
14 designed to achieve exactly the results that it
15 gets." And so I want -- as we go into this
16 presentation, and as owning myself as the leader of
17 the building that last year had an F, I want you to
18 understand that we understand that the reason we got
19 or achieved these results is because of our systems,
20 and the way that we're going to move forward is the
21 refinement of those systems. And so you're going to
22 hear about that in our presentation today.

23 You know, my wife and I are originally from
24 Wisconsin, and we were heading back for Christmas,
25 and we were telling a story. I don't remember the

1 story. Don't tell my wife I wasn't listening; I
2 promise, she's not watching the livestream. But she
3 made a comment there, something along the lines of
4 "what can you do" -- that phrase we often hear, what
5 can we do, with a shrug of the shoulders. And so I
6 wonder sometimes a board like yourself if you think
7 that's maybe what we're saying or thinking as a
8 school. We do have a school where we have high
9 amounts of situations of poverty, and we might just
10 be saying "what can we do." But I want to promise
11 you that what we're actually doing is saying "what
12 can we do" -- and even more than that, we're saying
13 "what can we do" with a real sense of urgency.
14 Because we realize that there needs to be a heavy
15 amount of urgency to make sure our students are being
16 served each and every day and that we don't see
17 results like the one we did on this report card.

18 Additionally, I want to make it clear that as a
19 school we're not in the business of throwing
20 spaghetti at a wall and hoping that some noodles will
21 stick, and that we have a process for our refinement.
22 And we'll talk more about that process here in a
23 second.

24 And so we are a New Tech school. That means a
25 variety of things. One of the things that it means

1 though is that we're a learning organization, first
2 and foremost; that growth and learning is at the
3 heart of everything we do, along with our purpose.
4 And so if you look at this graphic from the New Tech
5 Network you can see that the purpose is at the center
6 of everything that we do. And you heard from Mr.
7 Ashley our purpose really being our vision.

8 Further, we use the Cycle of Inquiry with the
9 New Tech Network, starting with data, moving into
10 analysis, and then into strategy with a singular
11 focus around the things that we're trying to improve.
12 And so data analysis strategy -- quick sprints.
13 We're not waiting till the end of the school year to
14 make these adjustments. This is something that's
15 happening throughout the school year.

16 And we're also learning by doing. And so,
17 sometimes you can fall in that analysis/paralysis
18 where you're just diving into everything. We're
19 really moving in by trying some things and then
20 refining throughout time.

21 And so, again, not throwing spaghetti at a wall,
22 I want to talk about the three main focuses that
23 we've been working on, and these are things that
24 we've either enhanced or that we've added as
25 something new. The first one is Tier 1 instruction,

1 improving in Tier 1 instruction; the second one is a
2 focus on college and career, especially around
3 access; and the third one is a culture of excellence
4 and collaboration. And I'd like to dive into each of
5 those.

6 And so our first focus is to improve Tier 1
7 instruction through instructional coaching, using the
8 TESS rubric and the Six A's rubric for high quality
9 project design. And so we're doing that in a variety
10 of ways. But the main way that we're doing it is
11 through setting up a system -- a sustainable system
12 to make sure that new teachers, and even some other
13 teachers, are being supported this year currently.
14 And so if you look at the model we're currently
15 using, we have the superintendent who's supporting
16 the principal, and then the principal who's
17 supporting the instructional facilitators and the
18 AP's, and weekly regular conversations around
19 instruction. This is one way to build relationships,
20 but another way to just talk about what's going on in
21 classrooms. And then the assistant principals and
22 the IF's are supporting two classroom teachers or
23 more directly. And what we're talking about there is
24 not just they support them and check in every once-
25 in-awhile; we're talking about weekly observations

1 with weekly support happening -- a post-conference
2 after that. And so I might go into a classroom and
3 notice that there's not a scaffolding of questions,
4 and so I might think about some strategies or
5 resources or do a model for that teacher and then
6 come in next week and see what they've accomplished,
7 and then move on to the next thing. And myself, as
8 the principal, I am supporting two teachers directly
9 that way as well. Besides other walk-throughs and
10 normal things that principals and AP's do, this is
11 something we've added extra. And we're looking for
12 next year to add a mentor teacher program where
13 teachers are given a little bit of extra time in
14 their day, that are really performing well, to
15 support other classroom teachers, and they would get
16 support directly from the instructional facilitators.
17 So it makes Blytheville High School a place where
18 everybody is growing all the time, and that's our
19 hope.

20 The second thing we want to do is we want to
21 build sustainable systems to insure that all students
22 have choices throughout their lives -- college,
23 career. And when we say college we're talking two-
24 year, four-year, vocational, the military, whatever
25 students decide they want to do. But we want them to

1 have a portfolio of options that they can open upon
2 graduation so they can then pick which one they want
3 to go towards. We do that through the Aware,
4 Eligible, Prepared framework provided by the New Tech
5 Network -- Aware, making sure kids know what's out
6 there, providing them the experiences and
7 opportunities to see what's out there in the world;
8 Eligible, making sure they don't miss those deadlines
9 or those pieces that they're going to need to do what
10 they want after high school; and then Prepared, which
11 is really that focus again on Tier 1 instruction --
12 to make sure they're ready to engage in those next
13 steps is what we mean by college and career ready.

14 The third thing is that we want to develop and
15 cultivate a culture of collaboration excellence where
16 we understand that our student culture will be
17 defined by our adult culture. So, first and
18 foremost, every -- or 90% of our teachers are in
19 daily collaborations with other teachers in similar
20 content, and weekly they're meeting with
21 instructional facilitators for new learning. And so
22 that could be around planning or Tier 1 instruction.
23 We have built a long-range plan and teachers are
24 getting that new learning each week in something we
25 call Learn and Grow, very similar to other PLC

1 models.

2 The second thing -- and this is one thing I
3 really wanted to do in the first semester as the
4 principal -- is we had a lot of committees and teams;
5 I really wanted us to define how those committees and
6 teams work together and what is the purpose of each
7 of those committees and teams. And so that
8 collaboration piece is that it's not just a singular
9 leader making decisions; we make them together in a
10 lot of ways -- and so how do they work together and
11 how do we make sure we're all driving towards our
12 vision. And so we came up with our organizational
13 graphic to really define what that looks like for us.

14 The last way -- and this is something that's
15 unique to being a New Tech school -- is that we're
16 driving kids towards excellence and those soft
17 skills. And so these are school-wide learning
18 outcomes: knowledge and thinking, agency,
19 collaboration, written communication, oral
20 communication. And for each of these there's a
21 grade-banded rubric that teachers can use, and
22 students are assessed on every rubric in every class.
23 And so it's not just the speech teacher's job to give
24 feedback on oral communication or it's not just the
25 English teacher's job to assign writing; that's

1 happening across the board at Blytheville High
2 School, a good New Tech school.

3 And so Tier 1 instruction, college and career,
4 and a culture of excellence and collaboration is what
5 we think is going to take us to the next level. But
6 we're not leaving out the fact that Ms. Cooke
7 mentioned that we weren't doing as much as we could
8 to track our ESSA indicators. And so a checkmark
9 here -- these are our different ESSA indicators --
10 indicates that we're currently developing or have
11 developed a way for us to track our ESSA indicators,
12 not just at the end of this school year but
13 throughout the year, because we know you can't
14 improve upon what you can't measure. And so we are
15 working on building those systems, or have built the
16 systems for many of them, so we can track where our
17 students are at and where we're at as a school.

18 And at this time, if it's okay with the Panel, I
19 do want to pass it over to our instructional
20 facilitator, Robin Sneed, and she's going to present
21 our new goals.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Please identify yourself
23 for the record.

24 MS. SNEED: I am Robin Sneed, and I am the
25 instructional facilitator for Blytheville High

1 School.

2 Mr. Swenson spoke earlier to a sense of urgency.
3 So what can we do?

4 Our newly-formed instructional support team
5 works in a continuous cycle of inquiry so that we can
6 test fast, fail fast, and adjust fast because our
7 students deserve an equitable education.

8 When Sally and I came before the board last
9 December we heard what Dr. Hernandez said about our
10 goals being too lofty. So we come before you today
11 to present our revised goals.

12 For the second semester of last year we were in
13 a state of transition. We spent the first semester
14 of this school year working with our new
15 superintendent and new principal to revise goals
16 based upon your feedback and feedback from our
17 stakeholders.

18 Our first three goals are aligned to our first
19 focus: Tier 1 instruction. We want to narrow the
20 achievement gap in the areas of ELA, math, and
21 science by improving our ELA and math scores by at
22 least three percentage points and our science scores
23 by at least two percentage points each year until BHS
24 New Tech students are scoring at or above state
25 average.

1 For our second focus, college and career
2 readiness, we have two goals: one to increase our
3 graduation rate by one percentage point each year
4 until the school reaches the state average; the
5 second, to increase enrollment in two, four-year,
6 technical, or military by two percentage points each
7 year.

8 Our last goal is related to our third focus,
9 culture of excellence and collaboration. We feel
10 that school connectedness is important, culture is
11 important, and relationships matter. So we want to
12 use the New Tech Network's School Success rubric and
13 the student school culture survey that Mr. Ashley
14 presented earlier to measure our school culture.

15 We believe that these goals are directly aligned
16 to our focuses and to our vision, and that we will --
17 they will get us to the next level.

18 At this time I will turn it over to our school
19 board president, Ms. Tobey Johnson.

20 MS. JOHNSON: Good afternoon. I'm Tobey Johnson
21 and I'm the school board president.

22 While I'm very, very proud of this position, the
23 pride I feel in the fact that I served the
24 Blytheville School District for 27 years as a
25 classroom teacher gives me even more pride than the

1 position that I serve now. I knew that when I
2 retired -- and believe me, folks, if you haven't been
3 there yet, you'll know when it's time -- you'll know.

4 (THE TIMER RINGS)

5 MS. JOHNSON: When I retired I knew I couldn't
6 walk away from the school. This was such a big part
7 of my life, I couldn't walk away from my kids and I
8 couldn't walk away from the school. So that's why
9 I'm here now.

10 I'd like to also introduce in the audience Mr.
11 Desmond Hammett; he is here as the school board --

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I just want to say
13 we've reached the end of the 20 minute presentation.
14 I don't think -- if there's nobody here in
15 opposition, then you do have an additional 5 minutes.

16 MS. HYATT: (Shaking head from side to side.)

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So you're fine there. I
18 just wanted to make sure if there were others that
19 you knew you were into your last 5 minutes.

20 So, okay. I'm sorry.

21 MS. JOHNSON: Okay. I'd like to introduce two
22 of our board members that are here in support: Mr.
23 Desmond Hammett; in the back Ms. Barbara Wells.

24 I've listened to our board actually for the last
25 two days practicing what they were going to say to

1 you and knowing the passion that they have. Please
2 understand as a board member, as all of them in
3 leadership positions, we're extremely, extremely
4 disappointed in our test score. I looked back when I
5 was a teacher 10 years ago, we didn't have New Tech;
6 we didn't have those things. And I was a traditional
7 teacher. Had we have had the things that New Tech
8 stands for we wouldn't be standing here before you
9 now. I think this is what they're focusing on and
10 that's what we're focusing on as a board.

11 We believe wholeheartedly in the New Tech
12 program. I am so impressed with what our leaders are
13 doing, what our teachers are doing, what our
14 administrators are doing, what our students are
15 doing. They're working towards their future and
16 that's what we want for our kids.

17 As a board we believe in our people. We believe
18 that all of us are accountable for those scores, not
19 just the kids. With the dedication that we've got
20 through Blytheville High School we're going to
21 succeed. We're going to succeed. We're just kind of
22 like an elevator that's on the bottom floor -- it's
23 got nowhere to go but up. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. You have about
25 three minutes left, if y'all want to close with any

1 statements. Or if you're ready, we'll go ahead and
2 start questions.

3 MR. SWENSON: That would be great.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you all for
5 your presentation.

6 All right. So, Panel, we'll go ahead and I will
7 start this time with Mr. Rogers to see if you want to
8 start with any questions.

9 MR. ROGERS: Okay. So I guess where I want to
10 start is with the reading at grade level. I mean,
11 it's at 9.5, but you're at 82% on time for credits.
12 So I'm a little confused how you can have kids at 82%
13 on time for credits but they're only reading at --
14 only 10% -- less than 10% of your school is at -- on
15 -- at reading level.

16 The other thing that I have concerns about is
17 the waivers that you have for Professional
18 Development, Teacher Licensure, Guidance Counseling,
19 and Planning Periods -- I'd like to know how y'all
20 are using those waivers. Because if we're going the
21 wrong way in the school and you have those waivers --
22 if there was a revocation of the New Tech school
23 you'd still be a high school, but you just wouldn't
24 have the waivers, and would that help. So that's
25 what I'm kind of going through in my mind right now.

1 MS. COOKE: In regard to the waivers, first --
2 since that's the last thing you said that's the first
3 thing on my mind. I will tell you that many of the
4 things that we have used those waivers for have
5 helped promote what we felt like our kids in
6 Blytheville, Arkansas needed. For instance, the
7 counselor -- it's not that we don't have a counselor
8 or we don't have a certified counselor. But we
9 wanted to take, at the time that we asked for it, a
10 very strong career coach who could come in and work
11 one-on-one with every student, help them see and
12 believe in who they are and where they could go, and
13 move them forward towards those dreams -- help them
14 build those dreams, help guide them through
15 scholarship applications, ACT prep, actually helping
16 them know starting in 9th grade where is it that I
17 need to go, what do I need to do. So we reconfigured
18 what that would look like. We still have other
19 licensed counselors on staff, but the career coach
20 aspect was so strong and it came in through some of
21 the things that had happened. We already had a
22 career coach. And so that's where those waivers come
23 in.

24 As far as the teachers go, I will tell you that
25 we face the same problem that states across the

1 United States face, and that's the teacher shortage.
2 With the waivers and the ability to hire people who
3 have a bachelor's degree and some background in that
4 education, we've been able to take people that are
5 good, solid people from our community that have an
6 investment in our kids, that have an investment in
7 Blytheville, Arkansas, that know our kids and
8 understand their backgrounds, who will come and who
9 will hopefully train and stay with us because of that
10 waiver -- that probably is one of the most critical
11 pieces for us because our teacher turnover has been
12 so large. We've lost 14 to 16 a year in that high
13 school regularly -- a high of 23 that left us one
14 year. And so if you can imagine over time, over the
15 last 10 years losing that many people, we're building
16 from the foundation up. So we're re-teaching. We're
17 actually teaching teachers how to manage a classroom.
18 We're teaching the pedagogy. We're teaching them --
19 we're they're ed-prep program in addition to
20 supporting them in the very difficult journey of
21 being a first year teacher in a school district. So
22 we're doing all those kinds of things. So those
23 waivers have allowed us to be choosey about who we
24 pick and not just someone who happened to have a
25 degree, but we knew absolutely could not fit in

1 Blytheville, Arkansas, and would not relate to our
2 students, would not relate to our community, and
3 probably would not succeed in our building. So they
4 have been very critical.

5 MR. ROGERS: So what's your turnover now?

6 MS. COOKE: Our turnover this last year, we
7 absorbed 12 teachers at the high school. We have
8 reduced -- we have declined enrollment. But our
9 turnover district-wide has been reduced dramatically.
10 I think we had a total in the district of 20
11 teachers. In fact, we did not have to turn over --

12 In your building -- I want to ask Mr. Ashley how
13 many we turned over --

14 SUPT. ASHLEY: Last year it was 13 teachers.

15 MS. COOKE: Yes. We absorbed 13. So we're not
16 having to rehire like we were. We're not having to
17 re-train.

18 MR. ROGERS: And then about the waiver for
19 Professional Development?

20 MS. COOKE: Oh, the waiver on Professional
21 Development, I can address that very quickly. That
22 is just to offer us other options in the way that we
23 do our professional learning. We don't call it
24 professional development; we call it professional
25 learning, because every time we do that it's an

1 opportunity for people to learn. We actually -- even
2 though the state reduced the required amount to 36,
3 we provide on contract up to -- the time up to 60
4 hours in-house, because we feel like the needs of
5 those that teach in our district, and especially at
6 our high school, are so much greater. And especially
7 with the younger people that are coming in that don't
8 have that background, we have to provide them with
9 all those things I mentioned earlier. So we need
10 more time. We're actually probably providing more --
11 in fact, I know we are. We're providing up to 60
12 hours on campus of support for those people, just a
13 wide variety of things that we're doing with them.

14 And then the other question was?

15 MR. ROGERS: I mean, and I just -- I guess I'm
16 still confused. I hear -- I mean, you're doing all
17 this, but it's -- still, when I look at the reading
18 at grade level, that's just --

19 MS. COOKE: It's disheartening.

20 MR. ROGERS: It's horrible.

21 MS. COOKE: And it's not just disheartening;
22 it's embarrassing. But I will say this as the
23 district curriculum person, we knew when we saw our
24 scores a few years ago -- and they weren't good then
25 -- we knew that we had a problem, and it wasn't

1 starting in 9th grade. So what I can tell you that
2 we have done -- and I know this is about Blytheville
3 High School and their charter -- but we have stopped
4 and we've gone down to kindergarten and we've applied
5 for the Solution Tree PLC grant. We have begun a
6 systems approach in our district and we have revamped
7 our curriculum. We're working towards that
8 guaranteed viable curriculum from kindergarten all
9 the way up. We're filling in those gaps. So our
10 primary school K-1 and 2 are participating actively
11 with that PLC grant, so they're completely revamping
12 the standards. And they as a group are coming
13 together and collaborating on what they know are
14 essential standards. We're working on the learning
15 targets. I'm taking that information to the other
16 buildings as well, so it's not in isolation just
17 because we have that grant in that one building.
18 Everyone has embraced that need. We know that the
19 things that have to happen to improve the core
20 instruction are really covered in so many of the
21 things the Department of Ed. has provided. In fact,
22 I could go through so many different pieces of
23 support, and that may be something you want at a
24 different point but -- the department is offering.
25 But it's those kinds of things -- providing a

1 wraparound approach, providing critical reading
2 classes to support those kids who are not reading
3 well, helping them get those skills and intervention
4 time, even up through the high school level, because
5 we know they're not there.

6 We also know there's an issue with motivation
7 with taking the tests. And one of the areas that we
8 discussed in our presentation was test fatigue and
9 students who were just to the point where it wasn't
10 important to them. And so we have to make I guess
11 another effort at making sure that the students
12 understand the importance of these exams. They may
13 score well and they're getting ACT scores, they're
14 getting college entrance exams -- and you could look
15 at some of our data around how many of our kids who
16 were getting the ACT scores to enter college -- well,
17 that doesn't make sense that they would still be at
18 that grade level, basic reading, if they can get
19 those other things. So a lot of it we feel like is
20 just that understanding of the importance of that
21 test to our school and our district sometimes for our
22 kids, helping them believe in that purpose.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: If I can ask a couple of
24 follow-up questions to things you said --

25 MS. COOKE: Yes.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Do you give interim
2 assessments at the high school?

3 MS. COOKE: We are working with the NWEA MAP
4 system this year for our interim assessments. If you
5 -- I know we spoke to this in the past, that we were
6 testing our kids to death.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

8 MS. COOKE: Our kids really did have test
9 fatigue. We were guilty of taking all of the advice
10 that someone would give us -- and instead of picking
11 and choosing the best piece, we took a little of this
12 and a little of that, and it fatigued our teachers
13 and our students. So right now, we have streamlined
14 that -- and that's one thing we've done this year is
15 NWEA. And they've already received one set of
16 results in November; we'll test again the 28th of
17 this month, and we're hoping to be able to see some
18 improvement within that timeframe.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So the results should be
20 showing you some projections --

21 MS. COOKE: Yes, ma'am.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- for the ACT or SAT?

23 MS. COOKE: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

25 MS. COOKE: And it's very much more aligned, the

1 NWEA. We feel like it's very much more aligned to
2 the ACT Aspire.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But you've only tested --
4 you have not yet given the second time -- the second
5 assessment?

6 MS. COOKE: No, ma'am. We have not given the
7 second assessment.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

9 MS. COOKE: So we don't have any baseline data
10 for that.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So that'll be something
12 that would give you some good information?

13 MS. COOKE: That's correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: You talked a lot about
15 your staffing in the core instruction. And just
16 looking back at some of your workforce data, I mean,
17 your attrition rate in '17-18 was a little over 50% I
18 think is what it was showing on My School Info. So
19 that's a big chunk, and realizing then that you are
20 relying heavily on your waivers as far as those
21 teachers that you employ. And we you even said in
22 many cases you become their preparation program, plus
23 their support system, plus their development into
24 stronger teachers.

25 MS. COOKE: Yes.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So I'm wondering if the
2 partnership with New Tech Network -- and thinking
3 about just the foundational core instruction pieces,
4 is that partnership with New Tech -- is that
5 something that stretches the capacity of your
6 teachers? Is that something that pulls away a focus
7 maybe from the more foundational things? Because
8 another thought that came to my mind when Mr. Rogers
9 was asking some questions was around the reading and
10 the requirement for all of our secondary teachers to
11 have the awareness of the Science of Reading. And so
12 just thinking through all of that, where's that
13 foundational approach going to come as you really get
14 back to that core instruction?

15 MS. COOKE: Two pieces on that -- and, Matt, you
16 may want to jump in. But I will say that with the
17 Science of Reading, obviously that online for most of
18 our teachers for the high school is the awareness
19 piece and they have begun those modules. We truly
20 believe that that piece across the state is going to
21 improve reading scores all the way up from
22 kindergarten through 12th growth, and that piece is
23 vital for our teachers to understand that they too
24 are part of that process. So we'll be guiding them
25 -- and I'm going to be assisting them with those

1 modules, even though they have that on-hand. But
2 I'll be able to take what I'm learning with the K-2
3 RISE, the 3-6 RISE, and all of the other things to
4 come up and support those teachers with that.

5 I will also say that the New Tech piece itself
6 -- and I'm going to let Mr. Swenson, because he's got
7 such a strong background in New Tech, speak to this
8 part. But I will tell you that when we are looking
9 at -- and we've got our high reliability schools
10 books this week, and so we started digging in as a
11 team on those. Looking at what we see in high
12 reliability schools, looking at what we see in the
13 Professional Learning Community grant, that
14 overarching support piece, New Tech has been there
15 for us on that. It has helped us create a
16 collaborative culture; it has helped us have that
17 focus on learning, that results orientation.

18 One thing that we've seen though, as we talked
19 about Mr. Ashley and what he came in and brought for
20 us through his principalship, was providing the
21 culture and the foundation to have our kids want to
22 be at school, to provide that opportunity for them to
23 feel safe in that environment, to feel like this is a
24 place where I can succeed; somebody cares about me
25 here. We want this to happen. And so his entire

1 focus was setting up those systems, setting the
2 foundation in place. And now Mr. Swenson comes in
3 with this very strong background in New Tech and also
4 in academics. And so I'm going to let him speak a
5 little bit to that piece because I think he can share
6 some of those things.

7 MS. NEWTON: Dr. Pfeffer, could I ask another
8 question and he might answer all of them?

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

10 MR. SWENSON: Yes, ma'am, whatever you want.

11 MS. NEWTON: As far as looking back at the New
12 Tech model and re-thinking, if you could go back,
13 would you still buy into this New Tech philosophy or
14 their program of conversion as it relates to another
15 approach for the students, based on the difficulties
16 they're having? So I'm wondering if New Tech was
17 actually a better fit than something else would've
18 been. That's just curiosity.

19 And the other side of it is I'd like to know if
20 the New Tech company or the New Tech entity, are
21 there any sanctions that they would put in place
22 based on the struggles that you're having and the
23 grade that you have been presented with through the
24 ESSA? And so is it any point in time that they --
25 just like we would have some questions and have an

1 accounting, is it New Tech's responsibility at any
2 point -- or the expectation that they would come in
3 and say, you know, you're either doing fine, you're
4 making good progress, or this just doesn't seem to be
5 the fit? Because as I understand it, there's a
6 significant investment of dollars on the district's
7 part to get into the New Tech system and get your
8 school equipped and technology equipped and all of
9 that.

10 So those -- that could be --

11 MR. SWENSON: Absolutely.

12 MS. NEWTON: -- possibly some of the same --

13 MR. SWENSON: You'll have to let me know if I
14 answer your -- all the questions or if I miss one.

15 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

16 MR. SWENSON: I can speak to a couple of
17 different things.

18 The first thing is I am a New Tech guy. That's
19 why I chose to come to this school. So when you
20 think about the New Tech Network it's really the four
21 design pillars. So it's that technology piece that
22 enables kids to do things; it's the outcomes that
23 matter, when I talk about those school-wide learning
24 outcomes; it's the teaching that engages, which is
25 kind of to your question; and then a culture that

1 empowers. And so while there is a large upstart cost
2 to New Tech, the actual continuation of New Tech is
3 much less for a district -- and we were just diving
4 into that, what it was for Blytheville. I knew what
5 it was for Cross County. But to get up and going
6 with one-to-one and those different pieces it costs a
7 good amount, but then it becomes less as you -- we're
8 in something called continuation as a school, which
9 just means we get support from New Tech. But we
10 don't have someone coming, you know, those 10 days
11 that you might need when you first start a school or
12 start transitioning.

13 The second thing is New Tech is different in the
14 sense that New Tech doesn't run our school;
15 Blytheville School District does. We just partner
16 with New Tech and work with them. And so,
17 historically speaking, New Tech, as far as I know,
18 has never told a district you can no longer be part
19 of the network. There's a strong focus of equity in
20 the New Tech Network, and so they wouldn't be
21 satisfied with the results, just as much as we are.
22 Because it's great, you know, kids can give a
23 presentation, but they've also got to read, write,
24 think, do math -- like these things really, really
25 matter, and so they wouldn't be satisfied with the

1 results. We're lucky to have a really good
2 relationship with the New Tech Network, which we've
3 used this last semester as really a way for us to do
4 some resetting and some basic practice in the Network
5 when you think about those four design pillars.

6 And then additionally, when it comes to core
7 practice, that's why we have the instructional
8 support team. That's why I formed that team this
9 year. Because if you think about TESS or TAPP or
10 what Danielson kind of wrote, when you think about
11 PDL you're just thinking about the high end of really
12 great instruction. And so we've got to scaffold you
13 into that, and we have been doing that with our
14 teachers. So nothing -- when you're doing PDL -- and
15 I was a pretty good PDL practitioner and I trained
16 teachers in project-based learning -- you still have
17 to have great questioning and academic feedback; you
18 still have to have a great assessment; you still have
19 to know how to write a great objective. These things
20 don't go away because of project-based learning. I
21 think it just more enhances what we're already doing.
22 And when we think about a student population with
23 many of our students coming from situations of
24 poverty or maybe having some apathy toward school,
25 the reason we love New Tech is because we've got to

1 do the things that really matter -- but we've also
2 got to make it really matter to our kids. And so
3 what the Network asks us to do is to connect the
4 schoolwork to the community, to connect the
5 schoolwork to business and industry, and to connect
6 our schoolwork to the broader life that they want to
7 build for themselves.

8 So that's the goal. And I think sometimes it
9 can get bogged down as something that takes a ton of
10 energy, but I think what actually happens in a really
11 great New Tech school is it just kind of -- there's a
12 synergy around the best practice and the next
13 practice.

14 I hope that answered some of your questions.
15 Sometimes I have a way about me of just -- I get
16 passionate.

17 MS. NEWTON: (Nodding head up and down.)

18 MR. SWENSON: Thank you.

19 MS. NEWTON: Well, I guess Mr. Ashley would be
20 the person to answer whether you could again.

21 SUPT. ASHLEY: I'm sorry. Ask that again.

22 MS. NEWTON: The question of whether or not
23 you'd start down this road again or would you choose
24 to look at some alternative -- is this getting you to
25 where you want to go, as far as you want to get

1 there?

2 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, ma'am. Because it covers so
3 many things other than I know just the F, but the
4 things that it does for our kids and our kids when
5 they're walking out the door, you know, obviously the
6 ability to collaborate, to build agency. But to
7 answer your question -- yes, ma'am, we would.

8 Now obviously I wasn't the superintendent. I
9 was part of that decision because I was the high
10 school principal at the time. I was not the final
11 decision as far as making that. But, yes, ma'am, if
12 I had been superintendent then -- yes, ma'am -- I
13 would've still invested in it.

14 And let me say this here: the startup funds for
15 those -- there was money also that helped us through
16 the New Tech grant that we got in the initial part.
17 But obviously the cost now is minimal, compared to
18 what it was, the startup, because of obviously all
19 the purchasing of the computers and things -- the
20 things like that. But it is a process that we're
21 still moving forward.

22 And let me say this here too: I know Mr. Swenson
23 is probably not going to toot his horn as much as I
24 would -- and, of course, I find myself, you know, in
25 a difficult situation here because of being the high

1 school principal and talking about the F and that --
2 but now I'm the superintendent of the school with the
3 F. But hiring someone with a New Tech background to
4 come to your school is -- we were quite lucky in that
5 because there are not just a million New Tech schools
6 out there. But Mr. Swenson's connections in the New
7 Tech Network is nationwide and the things that he's
8 going to be able to do with -- under his leadership
9 has definitely sold me and it's also sold our
10 committee here that's with us today.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

12 MS. SNEED: If I may, I'd like to also address
13 the question.

14 I was a teacher in the classroom when we began
15 the New Tech model. And the difference that I saw in
16 my students as 9th graders versus where they ended up
17 as 12th graders -- the first group that went all the
18 way through the New Tech model -- and walked across
19 that stage and the confidence that they had in
20 themselves, I would absolutely do it all over again.

21 Before that 2006 -- that first graduating class
22 of New Tech, our students were getting around
23 \$900,000 -- and we really celebrated the year they
24 got about a million dollars worth of scholarship
25 offers. The first graduating class received \$2.1

1 million in scholarships -- the first graduating New
2 Tech class. Our second was about \$2.3 million in
3 scholarship offers. And last year our students with
4 fewer -- with fewer students in that graduating
5 class, about 30 fewer than the previous year,
6 received over \$4 million in scholarship offers.

7 We have been told -- the industry that told us
8 -- that gave an industry scholarship told us not to
9 tell their name, but they did let us know that our
10 students, when they came in for the interviews that
11 they did for area students for these scholarships,
12 our students interviewed better than all of the
13 surrounding districts. So we're very proud of our
14 students and we're very proud of our model.

15 I also wanted to address the reading. Our
16 students do have a reading deficit and we are
17 addressing that. As Sally spoke, we are looking at
18 -- we are all participating in the Science of Reading
19 on IDEAS. But not only that, we do -- our teachers
20 have collaboration every day and we're working
21 through the modules together, through collaboration,
22 and we're pausing and talking about so how can we
23 take this and apply it in our classrooms. And so
24 it's not just listen to it on IDEAS and take the
25 quiz; it's how are we going to apply it and we're

1 holding each other accountable for that.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I'm going to go ahead and
3 -- I've got some other panel members with some
4 questions.

5 MS. SNEED: Okay. Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So if we can -- then we
7 can kind of follow back up.

8 MS. SNEED: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Williams, what is your
10 question?

11 DR. WILLIAMS: What's the -- I hear a disconnect
12 and I can't quite put my finger on it. What year are
13 we in with New Tech High?

14 SUPT. SNEED: Sixth year.

15 DR. WILLIAMS: And as I listen to you talk about
16 the scholarships that the students are receiving, I'm
17 not connecting that with the grade that I see.

18 MS. SNEED: Okay. I'm sorry. So we started
19 with New Tech with the -- I was talking about the 9th
20 grade --

21 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

22 MS. SNEED: -- that started and that had New
23 Tech for four years.

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. Okay.

25 MS. SNEED: So they first graduated in 2016.

1 That was the first class that we had had with four
2 years of New Tech.

3 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. So in looking at the
4 letter grade for the last two years, and I listened
5 to the New Tech process -- and this is a great
6 process, I'll give you that -- but what I'm not
7 hearing is what's going on in the classroom. You
8 know, that's what -- I'm a former math teacher too.
9 Okay. So I'm hearing all the other things to get
10 them ready to go out, to interview well and do some
11 other things and so-forth -- but the grades are
12 results of teaching and learning. So what's
13 happening in the classroom to improve the teaching
14 and learning process?

15 MS. SNEED: Okay. So, first, I'd like to talk
16 about -- as Sally mentioned earlier, that barrier of
17 the teacher turnover -- so I said I was one of the --
18 I was one of the founding New Tech teachers. So when
19 I look back at that first picture of all of us who
20 went to teacher residency with a year -- we were
21 planning to become a New Tech school, and we could --
22 the number of people who are still there -- there are
23 three, myself included, and I get to teach one class.
24 So we are teaching teachers how to be teachers, we're
25 teaching classroom management, and we're teaching

1 them to model at the same time. So are we where we
2 want to be with implementation? We're not. But
3 we're getting there. With that collaboration that
4 we've built into the schedule to help support those
5 new teachers we're getting there.

6 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. What about the teaching of
7 the curriculum itself?

8 MS. SNEED: So all of our projects are based on
9 the standards. We start with the standards. It's
10 basic backwards lesson design -- and Mr. Swenson
11 could probably answer this better than I can. But
12 teachers start with a project planning toolkit with
13 the standards, and then we look at what authentic
14 application can students do or perform in order to be
15 able to show us that they meet these standards. And
16 we've launched -- instead of lecture/quiz,
17 lecture/quiz, lecture/quiz, possibly a project at the
18 end, the students start out knowing this is what I'm
19 going to do and this is how I'm going to take what
20 we're learning and apply it to a real world
21 situation.

22 But Mr. Swenson --

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah. And I --

24 MS. SNEED: --explains this so much better than
25 I can.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think Dr. --

2 MS. SNEED: I could show you, but I can't
3 explain it.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think Dr. Williams is
5 asking kind of the same line of questioning that I
6 did. If -- when you have the rate of turnover, when
7 you have all those new teachers who are learning how
8 to teach, trying to teach them how to teach content
9 well based on project-based learning, when -- that
10 can be challenging in itself. So I think that the
11 assurances we need are is that capacity there, is
12 that support there. And as he alluded to before, you
13 -- that's kind of how you've set up the model to have
14 mentor teachers working with new teachers. But
15 again, I think that's just where we're having some
16 discomfort as to -- with a focus on New Tech, given
17 your teaching workforce, how viable is it that it's
18 going to be successful -- and successful in the
19 everyday classroom core instruction. So I think
20 that's where our two concerns really --

21 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- are prevalent.

23 Do you want to add on that question or kind of

24 --

25 DR. KREMERS: I think it really kind of goes

1 along with it. I'm kind of going back through the
2 whole history kind of piece of it. So authorized in
3 2013, academic distress 2015; so within two years
4 there was academic distress. And then removed from
5 academic distress in 2017, and now back after they
6 were removed. So over the six years they've already
7 been on academic distress; they're back in that same
8 situation at this point. So the strategies with this
9 model, I think it kind of begs the question of even
10 though the model -- whether we're saying the model
11 nationwide is good, no good, not our thing to say
12 necessarily -- but is it the right model for the
13 students they're serving? And over a six-year
14 period, with being already on academic distress
15 before, and now again in that situation, it seems
16 like it may not be the right model for the students
17 they're serving.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: I hope I can hear the answer to
19 your question. I don't know.

20 MS. DeFORD: Good afternoon. My name is Casey
21 DeFord and I'm district support. One thing I did
22 want to allude to was the support that our teachers
23 are getting, knowing that many of them are
24 nontraditional pathway or first-year teachers. So
25 Robin did speak about the experience that they have

1 in collaboration. But along with that, once a week
2 they have something on Mondays called Learn and Grow.
3 In the Learn and Grow time that they have, that's
4 when they're going through the unpacking of
5 standards, and the theme of the first semester was
6 planning. So how are we planning units, how are we
7 understanding what we're teaching kids so that we
8 know what to expect out of them. But with that, the
9 things such as classroom management, there is a
10 Monday PD that's offered every single week and that's
11 based off of Teach Like a Champion techniques, which
12 we know will work in any classroom setting, whether
13 it be PBL, PRBL, or a traditional classroom setting.
14 And through that I work with teachers individually
15 and in groups to actually role play and go through
16 scenarios. With that, we go into teachers'
17 classrooms, knowing our teachers of high-need support
18 so that they're not just getting observed on the
19 observation schedule that exists, they're getting
20 observed sometimes daily, sometimes multiple times
21 per week, or once a week. And they're getting that
22 immediate feedback and modeling so that they know how
23 to immediately improve instruction, because we know
24 that's what's best for kids.

25 With that, we did talk about position

1 absorption, why teachers are leaving the district.
2 We do exit surveys to see what are we missing, why
3 are people leaving Blytheville, Arkansas. And what
4 we noticed in our results was many people are
5 retiring, so they're going out of the profession --
6 hopefully not because of their experience, but just
7 because of age; and then they're going on to -- we do
8 have -- Teach for America was a large population of
9 our teacher group, Arkansas Teaching Corp, so they
10 are going to those post-grad opportunities. But
11 we're not losing many teachers to neighboring school
12 districts. And because of the absorption, we haven't
13 had to hire as many new teachers, giving us the
14 ability to work with the instructional team model,
15 which you saw, to really target our high-need
16 teachers weekly so that they're growing at a rapid
17 rate, because we know that's what students need.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Do you have a
20 question?

21 MR. BALDWIN: Yes, a little bit different
22 question. Looking at your revised goals for ELA and
23 math, you're saying you're going to increase that
24 performance by 3% and hit the state average at a
25 certain point in time -- and in science it's 2%. I

1 was curious how you came up with those percentages --
2 and specifically, what are you going to do different?
3 Because those are fairly high percentages on an
4 annual basis. What are you going to do different to
5 do that high percent?

6 MS. DeFORD: Yes, sir. I'm actually going to
7 turn it to Robin Sneed and Matthew Swenson to answer
8 those two questions.

9 MR. SWENSON: First, I just want to --
10 Blytheville High School, a New Tech School, is not on
11 academic distress. So I just wanted to get that on
12 the record. We did get an F, but we're not
13 designated by ADE as on academic distress.

14 DR. KREMERS: No. That shows that it was back
15 -- you appeared before the Board and had to give a
16 progress report in September of '15, and removed from
17 academic distress in February of 2017, according to
18 the background information.

19 MR. SWENSON: Okay. Yeah.

20 When we looked at our -- and we were developing
21 these goals, we were using our NWEA data as a way for
22 us to kind of gauge what we think -- where we can
23 move out students. We knew this was the first
24 assessment; we knew what we saw on the ACT Aspire
25 summative. And we also know that -- I think someone

1 mentioned we're on a level where we're not -- where
2 we want to be. We can't go anywhere but up at this
3 point. And so we thought those percentages were
4 reasonable, especially compared to our old goals.
5 And so 2 to 3 percent, we think that's something we
6 can do for our kids. And I think the best way we're
7 going to do it is -- and we know this from the
8 research is -- the teacher in the classroom is what
9 matters. And so we're doing that through -- and I
10 hate to keep coming back to it, but the instructional
11 support team, because we want teachers to stay
12 because they want to be part of something bigger than
13 themselves. And we think -- or I think teachers will
14 stay if they are growing, and I know that's why I
15 stayed past my commitment at Cross County. I was a
16 Teach for America teacher myself, and that's why I
17 moved to Blytheville High School, and I think that's
18 true for most educators. We want to grow. And so I
19 think that's it, folks; if we can build this system
20 of growth where everyone is growing, this culture of
21 growth, we can do it.

22 And I have to disagree, respectfully though -- I
23 have a lot of respect for the Panel -- I don't think
24 New Tech is the problem. I think we do have to be
25 careful that we're not over-extending ourselves. But

1 our kids need a personalized approach to learning.
2 Our kids need to be engaged in the content. And if
3 we can do this right, that's how we're going to do
4 it. And I wasn't here the last six years when they
5 were New Tech, so I can't speak to those six years.
6 But I can speak to the building I'm going to walk
7 back in tomorrow morning and I can say we're moving
8 in the right direction. I know words is what you
9 guys get all the time from everybody, but I can tell
10 you from someone who's done this at Cross County I
11 feel like we're moving in the right direction. But
12 we didn't get here in six months, and it's not going
13 to -- you know, it's not going to come out in six
14 months and it's going to take time. But we've got a
15 good community and a good group of kids and teachers
16 who care and leaders who are working -- willing to
17 work their butts off. And so that was not -- I know
18 your question was about the test and I went off, but
19 --

20 DR. WILLIAMS: Well, I actually think -- I
21 understand. When I look at your old goals and I look
22 at your new goals, your new goals are more realistic
23 than your old goals, for sure. I mean, that's the --
24 so you're moving in the right direction.

25 MR. SWENSON: We feel like we can accomplish

1 those goals --

2 DR. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

3 MR. SWENSON: -- every single year.

4 DR. WILLIAMS: Here's what my concern is still
5 though: have you all looked at augmented instruction
6 for students? When you talk about having students to
7 -- you're using a method -- I'm looking at it from we
8 want to give the students real world experience of
9 how to use math, for example. And if they don't have
10 the basic math that they need to have, it's going to
11 be hard for them to see themselves doing it in the
12 real world. So there is an inherent disconnect
13 unless they have a certain level of math to be able
14 to engage at that level. I'm concerned about that
15 basic level of math, as a math teacher. I know they
16 have to have something to work with, to build off of.
17 I'm not sure -- and I hear you talk about the
18 teachers and so-forth; that's good. You're preparing
19 the teachers to teach the math. But where are the
20 kids with their math?

21 MS. SNEED: So we have been giving pre- and
22 post-assessments and those things don't go away just
23 because --

24 DR. WILLIAMS: Right.

25 MS. SNEED: -- we're doing project-based and

1 problem-based learning.

2 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

3 MS. SNEED: And one thing that the math
4 department really, really talked about last year was
5 the foundation skills. They're not the only ones,
6 but the math department specifically. And so we have
7 identified these are the foundational skills that our
8 students are missing, and they're direct teaching
9 that --

10 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

11 MS. SNEED: -- alongside of teaching the grade
12 level content.

13 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

14 MS. SNEED: And also to speak to your question
15 about can we get there, we have -- and how are we
16 going to get there -- we have identified specific
17 target students in each -- for each assessment,
18 looking at their assessment scores and those that
19 were very close last year and very close on the NWEA,
20 not just using the old data but new data as well and
21 said okay -- so, for example, in reading we had 30
22 students last year to meet the readiness benchmark.
23 This year, based on the number of students that we
24 currently have, we need -- to meet our percentage
25 goal we need 40 students. So that's 10 additional

1 students. So we have looked at those that are close
2 and we have targeted more than 10. But we have
3 targeted students and said if these can make it --
4 and so we're looking specifically at their reports
5 from NWEA and the skills that they're missing and
6 we're making sure that we are including that
7 intervention, Tier 2 intervention within the
8 classroom.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think it would be
10 important to note here though that under ESSA moving
11 all students is --

12 MS. SNEED: Yes, absolutely.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- the goal. I mean, and
14 for too long under No Child Left Behind we lived in
15 the world of bubble kids, where we counted them and
16 just wanted to move this group right here. I just --
17 I want to go on record in saying the goal should be
18 we're going to move all kids from where they are to
19 that next level. Under the ESSA school index, you're
20 rewarded for -- "rewarded for" moving all kids to
21 whatever level, but taking caution not to identify a
22 group that's going to get the intervention. It has
23 to be about moving all kids. So I just -- I think --

24 MS. SNEED: And we absolutely believe that and
25 we are giving all students -- we're looking at a

1 group level. So we can pull group interventions with
2 NWEA and we can pull individual interventions as
3 well. So we have targeted those students that are
4 close to the readiness benchmark, but we are also
5 making sure that all students are getting the
6 intervention to the level that they need.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think you're going
8 to have a valuable tool when you get that second
9 interim assessment where those students are going to
10 be able to see a projection as far as where they
11 would likely be on a ACT Aspire or even an ACT or an
12 SAT. That provides them with some really good
13 information to take ownership of that. So it ought
14 to be about every student being able to see where
15 they are --

16 MS. SNEED: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- and starting to think
18 through where they would be. So I think --

19 MS. SNEED: We are -- all of our students
20 already -- we know what their projected scores should
21 be. And our students will receive that projected
22 score, and then a mini data conference with their
23 teacher and possibly with me or Casey as well,
24 individually, to look at here's where I'm at, here's
25 where I want to be next time, so what am I going to

1 do, and put the responsibility on the student as
2 well.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think everything you
4 all are describing -- and you're describing so many
5 positive things -- and some of the things I'm going
6 through in my mind is what would you not do or not be
7 able to do if you were not a conversion charter? And
8 we've probably discussed this before, but -- I mean,
9 when you really look at it and you look at the six
10 years and the history -- I think back in 2013 -- is
11 that right, Dr. Kremers, when you were first --

12 DR. KREMERS: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think there was a time
14 when, you know, you couldn't do some of the things
15 you're doing without flexibility of being a district
16 conversion charter. What would you do differently if
17 you were not?

18 MS. COOKE: I think one of the things that we
19 see that we would not be able to do would be the
20 innovative part, and knowing that we have that option
21 to innovate to do some of the types of things that we
22 hope, as Mr. Swenson comes in, that he will help us
23 align. As we said, Mr. Ashley built that foundation
24 with that culture and we're ready to go to the next
25 level now with a different leader, as Mr. Ashley

1 assumes the leadership up above. So the things that
2 our kids deserve in Blytheville are the things that
3 will engage our student population. That might not
4 happen in a traditional setting without those
5 options. We feel like there are some things out
6 there that we want to keep open in front of us,
7 especially some of the things that we talked about
8 around, you know, the specific waivers, around the
9 counselors and things like that that we have. And I
10 think that piece in itself is critical. We realize
11 there are a lot of things that we probably could do,
12 but for our kids -- I'll tell you this: the belief in
13 themselves and the belief in who Blytheville High
14 School -- or what Blytheville High School is and who
15 they are as part of Blytheville High School, if this
16 was removed it's a personal -- it's a personal thing
17 for them, it's a personal thing for our community.
18 And for them to feel like they didn't have that
19 option of being in a charter -- we have the KIPP
20 school next door, we have school choice where we've
21 had a lot of flight from our district to several
22 districts that are close-by of many of our kids. It
23 would be one more thing that we could -- would not be
24 able to hold our kids -- not hold them captive, but
25 hold their attention in the belief that, hey, you can

1 be right here and you too can succeed; you right here
2 in this town have all the options you need. And you
3 don't need to get on a bus and ride someplace else;
4 you can do it right here. So I think almost it's the
5 feeling, the option to innovate, the pride that comes
6 with that is going to be a big piece of that.

7 And I wanted Ms. DeFord to just explain also, if
8 you have a moment, just a little bit more about the
9 targeting of those students with the NWEA. And I
10 will say this: if we have the opportunity to expand
11 our work with Solution Tree at our high school, we
12 feel like that piece of identifying those essential
13 standards and that deep, deep learning and work on
14 the core instruction would also be another way we
15 could really support the foundational work with our
16 teachers that would take that work to another level.
17 And so that's something we're looking at very
18 heavily, whether I have to recreate it myself without
19 help or whether we have the benefit of being able to
20 work through them as well through a grant.

21 MS. DeFORD: Just briefly I wanted to discuss,
22 we did switch to NWEA this year and part of that was
23 because we -- like we talked about, we do have newer
24 teachers and data is another thing that teachers get
25 to learn in the profession. So with NWEA being more

1 aligned to ACT Aspire and the ACT, our teachers are
2 able to access data, and data that's not just saying
3 "oh, you're proficient" or "you're ready," but
4 specific skill-based data -- what skills are they
5 missing, what skills are they mastering. From there
6 it actually gives you a platform to group your
7 students and see who needs intervention when.
8 Oftentimes, we think very big picture about
9 intervention when really, if you as the teacher know
10 what skills students are struggling with,
11 intervention can happen within the classroom setting
12 too. You don't need a specific time to do it. Even
13 though we have it, you can embed it into your
14 classroom instruction. And then, lastly, it guides
15 us. So the resources that it's giving, the guides
16 it's giving to make it user-friendly for not just
17 students but their parents, as well as teachers who
18 are new to the profession, it kind of gives us three
19 things that really drive that. When we spoke to
20 students and told them, you know, this test is going
21 to help predict what you're going to get on the ACT,
22 immediately the investment was higher, more so than
23 it was when we were using Renaissance Learning. So
24 we're noticing just more investment because it's a
25 more real-world thing for them. The results are

1 tangible and people can understand them at an easier
2 rate than having to dissect the data and then go
3 through what that entire process is also.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

5 MS. COOKE: And I will just say this one last
6 comment, the investment in the ACT and not just the
7 ACT Aspire. Our kids have still not made that
8 connection from the ACT Aspire and the importance of
9 what that looks like and each year what that means
10 compared to the actual ACT, walking them into college
11 -- and that's where we're still having a disconnect
12 with some of our students. So we've got to make them
13 understand the importance of that -- the exams, all
14 the way through, and not just the one that gives them
15 an entrance into a college or career.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers.

17 DR. KREMERS: So we know the reading scores are
18 a significant challenge. Are your students able to
19 have a single class period during the day with just
20 English or English Language without being embedded,
21 without being blended with another subject?

22 MR. SWENSON: I'd say for 85% of our students
23 that's true, that there will be an English class
24 standalone. And for many of our 9th and 10th graders
25 they're additionally taking a critical reading class

1 if they showed on that ACT Aspire summative that they
2 are not reading close to grade level. And so we've
3 selected those students to be part of that critical
4 reading class. I would argue though -- as someone
5 who taught or co-taught an English class for a number
6 of years, I actually would argue that it's more
7 beneficial to the students because of the amount of
8 time. I taught a social studies/English class with
9 11th grade American -- we called it 11th grade
10 American Studies and I was able to spend an hour-and-
11 a-half as the English teacher with my kids. Because,
12 remember, in PDL one piece of content is the car and
13 the other is the driver. And so everything we did we
14 did it through the lens of social studies but we were
15 writing and reading way more than you would in 47
16 minutes in a standalone English class. And so as
17 someone who's done it, I think that hour-and-a-half,
18 if it's done right and done at a high quality, can be
19 a game-changer for kids. I mean, my kids were
20 writing every day, research papers multiple times a
21 quarter; we read multiple novels, articles. I mean,
22 you can just do so much more with that more -- with
23 that additional time.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Additional
25 questions on this side?

1 Okay. Additional questions?

2 Mr. Wilson.

3 MR. WILSON: Yes. Perhaps some one of you-all
4 can educate me on this. You indicated that there
5 were some NWEA tests that were done or finished in
6 November, and I think those are treated as interim
7 assessments. Is that the right term? What -- can
8 you tell yet, now, today, whether those -- that
9 testing or those assessments showed any growth over
10 the previous period or pointed you in the right
11 direction of where you think you need to go?

12 MS. SNEED: So we have not done --

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Can you make sure you're
14 in the microphone please?

15 MS. SNEED: Sorry.

16 The growth assessment will be on January 28th,
17 so we'll be able to see growth at that time. We do
18 have a correlation between -- or a correlation chart
19 between how they're performing on the NWEA and how
20 they performed on the ACT. And so we can see -- what
21 we are seeing is that the NWEA is much more aligned
22 to their performance than even the ACT Aspire interim
23 assessments were. And I believe that's because the
24 NWEA actually gets up to a DOK 3.

25 MR. WILSON: So, in January, when the second

1 interim testing is done, you have a comparison
2 between that and November?

3 MS. SNEED: Yes. Yes.

4 Did I answer your question?

5 MR. WILSON: Well, yeah, I understand the
6 comparison, but it doesn't tell us where we're headed
7 or going. It might at the end of January.

8 MS. SNEED: Yes.

9 MR. WILSON: Not yet.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: They've just done --
11 they've not administered two different assess -- the
12 second assessment so far this year.

13 MS. SNEED: Because the assessment is new to us
14 and we didn't get to give the first assessment until
15 November because of transitioning from the old
16 assessment to the new assessment.

17 MR. WILSON: Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Rogers, do you have a
19 question?

20 MR. ROGERS: Yeah, two more.

21 Mr. Ashley, I have two more -- I think two more
22 questions. So since 2016, FY2016, you've lost 238
23 students.

24 SUPT. ASHLEY: Okay.

25 MR. ROGERS: And in that same time, you've seen

1 your unrestricted fund balance decline from 5.7 to
2 projected closing at 1.5 this year. So not only do
3 you have a struggling New Tech school, but you're
4 also declining in fund balance and losing students.
5 So with the challenges of having this New Tech school
6 on you with the low reading score and the F grade,
7 also the financial responsibility, how can you assure
8 me that you're going to get to the success of the New
9 Tech where it needs to be with these other challenges
10 going on?

11 SUPT. ASHLEY: Well, the other challenges
12 obviously are something that we've been dealing with
13 now for years because of declining enrollment. The
14 declining balance is -- like I said, just since July
15 have I been privy to the in-depth knowledge of all
16 the funds and where they've spent. But that's been
17 our biggest problem as far as loss of students. I
18 know I've been there -- this is my tenth year, and
19 district-wide we've lost 1,050 kids just in the 10
20 years that I've been there. So, you know, you're
21 going to see a decline in our balances and our money
22 because of funding, obviously.

23 MR. ROGERS: And I guess that's part of my
24 concern is that this school has got -- obviously got
25 challenges going on there, that you need to address

1 those challenges. But how -- and I guess I'm worried
2 about meeting the overall needs of the entire school
3 district, as well as this school, when you're losing
4 kids and fund balance.

5 SUPT. ASHLEY: Well, the financial end of it I
6 can say this here -- what we're doing is very closely
7 monitoring our money by the fact of how many teachers
8 that we have. We're not going to be overstaffed.
9 That is something that I've brought in.

10 MS. COOKE: I was just going to say you've asked
11 several times regarding the New Tech part of it. If
12 New Tech went away, we're talking about maybe \$30,000
13 in support that we're getting, which is such --

14 MR. ROGERS: And I wasn't doing it as New Tech
15 going away. I'm just saying --

16 MS. COOKE: Right. But what I'm saying is, you
17 know --

18 MR. ROGERS: But I'm --

19 MS. COOKE: -- that's not the impact
20 financially. It's not the New Tech part that's
21 impacting us financially I guess is what I wanted to
22 make clear. But --

23 MR. ROGERS: There's obviously some things going
24 to have to go with New Tech. You're going to have to
25 use your teachers -- pay to try to get teachers to

1 stay there; you're going to have to look at some kind
2 of financial to get them to stay, as well as getting
3 them to buy into the New Tech method. You have all
4 these different challenges. All I'm trying to say is
5 we've already listed several challenges that you are
6 having with New Tech --

7 MS. COOKE: Yes, sir.

8 MR. ROGERS: -- on top of now you're losing
9 students, with the financial situation. So I'm just
10 struggling --

11 MS. COOKE: I see your line of reasoning very
12 well.

13 MR. ROGERS: Yeah.

14 MS. COOKE: I think it's a very, very realistic
15 line of reasoning. My thought around the New Tech
16 piece itself is if it's \$30,000 that's not even a
17 salary for one teacher. So that one thing, having
18 their support as a network, is probably not the thing
19 that's going to move us fiscally one way or the
20 other. And even to support it, the Network, the
21 technology piece is something that we would have to
22 have just for the state assessments, regardless of
23 whether we were New Tech. So I guess that -- I just
24 wanted to clarify that. But I do understand your
25 line of questioning on that.

1 SUPT. ASHLEY: Like just this past year we paid
2 for it out of our 10.03 grant, and, of course, we had
3 to complete that amount. And then, of course, the
4 rest of it we would -- now would be paying out of
5 Title 1. But that is money that's going to be
6 allotted for it to be able to -- I don't want to use
7 the word "survive," because it's a very viable model
8 that we're using in the district. I guess I'm trying
9 to tie in kind of --

10 MR. ROGERS: And that's -- I guess that's where
11 I'm struggling too, is how are you going to -- and 30
12 -- I'm not -- but give the resources to your high
13 school as well as to your other schools, because your
14 other schools are -- have a D at the middle school
15 too.

16 SUPT. ASHLEY: Right.

17 MR. ROGERS: And so you've got to work on that
18 one too, because the reading isn't much better at
19 that one. I think it was 25% reading at grade level
20 there. So you're having a whole lot of different
21 things go on with this school district, as well as
22 the New Tech that you've got going in here. And I'm
23 not trying to beat up, saying you need to get away.
24 But I'm just saying that there's a lot of challenges
25 that you're looking at. And then when I look at

1 financially, the situation you're having, I'm just
2 wondering how you're going to juggle all of it
3 together, tie it all together, wherever you want --
4 however you -- metaphor you want to use. But --

5 SUPT. ASHLEY: Well, I mean, what we do yearly
6 is we look at our budget. I mean, not anything
7 different than we would do if we didn't have it.
8 Because we financially budget the money that we know
9 we're going to get and then we allot it out to the
10 programs that we have in place -- and, of course, New
11 Tech is one of those programs. It is -- I mean, when
12 we're dealing with our full budget I look at that as
13 kind of a drop in the bucket as far as what we pay
14 for it and the -- to be a member of -- Arkansas
15 member of -- or use the New Tech model.

16 MS. COOKE: And I will add just for your
17 clarification, because --

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Can you get -- speak in
19 the microphone?

20 MS. COOKE: Yes, I'm sorry. Yes.

21 I'll just add -- the only reason I'm jumping in
22 on that at all is that my history with our former
23 superintendent, I know that we've come here regularly
24 and asked for fiscal advice and actually had all of
25 our books laid open and said, "Here's where we are.

1 What do you think?" And so Mr. Ashley, that was one
2 of the very first things that he did when he came as
3 the new superintendent, is say, "Here we are. We
4 know we're a declining enrollment school and we know
5 there are things that are hitting us. Here's where
6 we are. Make sure that we are hitting" -- that's one
7 of the reasons we have absorbed so many teachers,
8 because we knew we had to do that to keep moving.

9 So I just wanted to make that clear. That's
10 where my connection to that comes in.

11 SUPT. ASHLEY: Right. And let me say -- and I
12 know I said, you know, I became superintendent July
13 1st. But this is my third superintendency, so I'm
14 familiar with budgets. I mean, I'm not the master of
15 it, but I think I'm pretty good. I'm definitely not
16 going to let this district get in fiscal distress
17 because of this program or any other program. You
18 know, again, we go back to, you know, the loss of
19 students. Yes, sir, Mr. Rogers; that's a huge thing.
20 And I wish we could stop the bleeding on that --

21 MD. BALDWIN: Let me -- let me --

22 SUPT. ASHLEY: -- and I think we can.

23 MR. BALDWIN: Let me jump in and ask. Loss of
24 students is causing fiscal challenges that you have?

25 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, sir.

1 MR. BALDWIN: And I guess the students are
2 leaving because they're looking for education
3 alternatives elsewhere. Does New Tech -- is it a
4 program that is supposed to attract students back to
5 the district?

6 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, sir. I think so. I think
7 in its full glory I think that's what it's going to
8 do.

9 MR. BALDWIN: Does it do that right now?

10 SUPT. ASHLEY: I think it has done it. I think
11 we've probably kept -- it's kept more students. It's
12 kept more students from leaving, because they did
13 have the opportunity -- because they did -- you know,
14 there is a KIPP school in our district.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Panel, I think
16 we've asked a pretty exhaustive list of questions.
17 And unless somebody has an additional question that
18 they need clarification on, I think if we have any
19 discussion we could do that at this time.

20 SUPT. ASHLEY: Dr. Pfeffer, can I ask -- Mr.
21 Rogers, did I answer your question? I'm sorry. I
22 don't feel like I did.

23 MR. ROGERS: Yeah. But it is -- I guess it's
24 one of the many concerns I have with the school
25 district --

1 SUPT. ASHLEY: Right.

2 MR. ROGERS: -- losing -- and the declining fund
3 balance, as well as the F grade at the high school.
4 I mean, there's a lot of concerns that I have with it
5 and that was one of them. So I was just wanting to
6 get your thoughts on addressing that.

7 SUPT. ASHLEY: Well, I can say this -- because
8 we do have our challenges, there's no question about
9 it. You know, where we are, we're not in a growing
10 area. There's other factors for our kids that we
11 start dealing with daily as soon as they walk into
12 the door. But I can tell you this here: I've been
13 there for 10 years -- Blytheville is worth fighting
14 for. Blytheville is a good school, good people, and
15 I would go to bat, and so would these people, any day
16 of the week for Blytheville. So, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Just a couple of
18 things that I was going to discuss with the Panel,
19 because I had checked with a couple of our folks who
20 have been working in the district just to get their
21 perspectives as far as things going on. And one of
22 the -- a couple of things that they noted that
23 they've seen changes this year. And I think, you
24 know, when you -- when we look at the historical data
25 from this school, and realizing what's brought them

1 was their letter grade from the '17-18 school year,
2 that's what brought them here. But looking at what
3 is different moving forward it might be worth just
4 kind of noting that, you know, they have made changes
5 structurally within this school. You've got someone
6 with New Tech experience now leading the work.
7 You've got -- they have looked at several of their
8 initiatives. And I think the person we -- that works
9 for us talked about kind of an initiative purge,
10 really focusing in on -- and I think Ms. Cooke
11 alluded to they were trying to do so many things
12 there for awhile and they're becoming more
13 streamlined and focused with that.

14 I think too that the goal revision, you know,
15 that we've noted today, they have come back with
16 those revised goals that are ambitious, but at the
17 same time are more aligned and realistic.

18 As far as the concerns on the reading, which
19 those are very serious, the work -- early work with
20 the elementary, our people have noted their work with
21 RISE and also the PLC process, you know, that those
22 are things that are setting them up for the right
23 trajectory for the future.

24 So I did want to bring those things out, that
25 those were noted by some of our ADE staff who have

1 been there.

2 I didn't know if any of you had anything else
3 that you wanted to discuss before we move into any
4 kind of decision base?

5 DR. WILLIAMS: Two comments. The first comment
6 is that, you know, with declining enrollment they're
7 doing -- I made a note that early on that they
8 absorbed those 13 positions. I mean, that's pretty
9 much all you can do when you have declining
10 enrollment is to -- instead of hiring new people as
11 the money decreases, that's where it's -- I used to
12 visit a lot of schools; that's where they would get
13 in trouble at -- they would lose teachers and then
14 hire teachers, although the enrollment was declining.
15 So they seem to be absorbing that, doing what they're
16 supposed to do to address that issue and working with
17 the Department.

18 Also, I have to give them credit for their
19 commitment to the New Tech Network. I mean -- I
20 mean, we pushed them a little bit and they pushed
21 back. So, I mean, that's what you have to be. You
22 have to believe in what you're doing, and I see that
23 they do. So I'm still worried about making sure the
24 fundamentals are connected there, but overall I don't
25 have a problem with the program if you all believe in

1 it the way you do.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But we would expect change
3 in student outcomes.

4 DR. WILLIAMS: Oh, we expect to see those scores
5 change now. I mean, that's -- uh-huh.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Other comments or
7 discussion?

8 MR. ROGERS: I just -- I did agree that when
9 they first started talking that I felt like it was
10 just trying to do too many things in too many
11 different ways -- and that's the feeling I got -- but
12 trying to -- and the -- you know, I've said enough
13 about the reading score. But that's what I had --
14 that's what I felt like with it. So I guess, you
15 know, at this point I hope that we are more focused
16 on what we are trying and we can see the scores going
17 up.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: Reading is fundamental.

19 MR. ROGERS: Yes, sir.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: So they have to -- I mean, we
21 expect to see some changes there.

22 MR. ROGERS: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Hyatt, if you can tell
24 me if my line of thinking is correct as we move into
25 a decision-making phase. I know we have the revised

1 goals, but would it make more sense first to decide
2 on the actual report, if we want to accept the
3 report, if we want to take any different action first
4 and then after that the next step? Would that be
5 appropriate?

6 MS. HYATT: I think that's probably a good idea
7 is to -- you know, we laid out the options earlier
8 today. But you can put them on probation with
9 different types of, you know, requests around that
10 probation; you can just accept the report; you have
11 revocation -- just whatever it is that you want to
12 do. I would do that first, like you said, before
13 moving on to the amendment requests.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Panel, if
15 there's not any further discussion --

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Quick question.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: When do they come back to us
19 again? When are they up for renewal or --

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: 2021, I believe.

21 DR. WILLIAMS: 2021. So we do have two years
22 before we see them again. I think we do need to see
23 them sometime next year, next fall or something. Can
24 we do it without probation? I just want to get a
25 yearly report. Now if probation is necessary, that's

1 fine too. But we need to be able to see some
2 progress along the way. We can't wait till, you know
3 --

4 MS. HYATT: So I think without them voluntarily
5 agreeing to come back at a certain time next year --

6 MR. SWENSON: We volunteer.

7 MS. COOKE: We volunteer.

8 MS. DeFORD: We volunteer.

9 MS. HYATT: And you might want to set parameters
10 of that, what information you want to see and when
11 you want to see it. And if they will voluntarily
12 agree to that, I think you can do it without
13 probationary status. But I would encourage you to
14 lay out what it is you want to see from them now or
15 maybe in the next month's meeting so that they can be
16 prepared for that.

17 And one of the things I forgot to mention -- and
18 I'm happy to work with them on this too -- is during
19 the conversation about their professional development
20 waiver I realized that the professional development
21 waiver as they are using it is not fully effectuated.
22 And so there will be a need for them to request an
23 additional waiver there. And I'm happy to work with
24 them or with their attorney to get that figured out.
25 But I just thought I would make note of that.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

2 MR. WILSON: Madam Chairman --

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes, sir.

4 MR. WILSON: -- I noticed on the information
5 sent to us before the hearing, apparently the charter
6 -- Blytheville's charter was renewed in '17, for
7 three years.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

9 MR. WILSON: That would make it expire in
10 December of '20?

11 MS. HYATT: June 30, 2020.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Oh, okay.

13 MS. HYATT: So, which would mean -- if it
14 expired June 30, 2020, it would follow the regular
15 schedule. You would hear them in December of 2019.

16 DR. WILLIAMS: In December of this year.

17 MR. WILSON: Yeah.

18 MR. ROGERS: No.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No. I believe --

20 MS. HYATT: Let me get Kelly up here because she
21 has the information.

22 MS. McLAUGHLIN: So if they came in 2017,
23 according to our background sheet we show that they
24 -- their contract is expiring on June 30, 2021, which
25 is because schools come in the fall before their

1 contract expires on June 30th of the following year.
2 So they will not be in this next cycle; they will be
3 in the upcoming cycle.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah.

5 MR. ROGERS: The 2020, they would come December
6 2020?

7 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Yes. In 2020 for -- in the
8 fall --

9 MR. ROGERS: Right.

10 MS. McLAUGHLIN: -- for the renewal application
11 in December.

12 DR. WILLIAMS: So I think they're going to
13 volunteer to come in the fall of 2019.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

15 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Yes. And if you guys will
16 decide what you would like for them to provide, I
17 will be happy to record and get that to them.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So is that
19 something that should come in the form of a motion,
20 or if they just go ahead today and agree to come back
21 at a certain time next year we could work that out in
22 terms of an agreement?

23 MS. HYATT: Yes. If you'll -- if you and the
24 applicant -- or I guess they're not applying for
25 anything -- if you and Blytheville New Tech will

1 agree to when you're going to meet, and either that
2 you will provide the information closer to the time
3 or if you want to put that information out now, just
4 some more detail I think the better in terms of
5 making sure we're all on the same page, in agreement.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Mr. Ashley, is that
7 something then that you all would go ahead and commit
8 to at this time?

9 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, ma'am. And what was that
10 date?

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think that's what we
12 need to determine, if it would be -- I guess probably
13 maybe December of next year would be -- November --

14 SUPT. ASHLEY: December of '19?

15 DR. WILLIAMS: This year.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes. We are in 2019.

17 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, ma'am. We would agree.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

19 SUPT. ASHLEY: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And, I mean, since we do
21 renewal hearings in December anyway we know that
22 there will be a meeting at that time.

23 MS. HYATT: Yes, ma'am.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Would that be appropriate?

25 MS. HYATT: Yes, ma'am. That's what I was going

1 to say is you'll already hear all of the renewals in
2 2019, so I don't think it would be an issue just to
3 add --

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: The report.

5 MS. HYATT: -- this onto that already scheduled
6 meeting.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And, Panel, I mean,
8 they could provide us with a report similar to what
9 they did today, including, you know, those --

10 DR. WILLIAMS: The NWEA. And I'd like to see a
11 progression where the first score was, the next one,
12 and --

13 MR. ROGERS: Me too.

14 DR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Along with --

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Will you all have given
16 both assessments by December of next -- of 2019?

17 MR. SWENSON: When's the -- is it like the 15th
18 of December?

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: It's usually the -- yeah,
20 it's mid-December.

21 MR. SWENSON: Yeah. (inaudible, not at the
22 microphone)

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: You will have given two
24 interim assessments at that time?

25 MR. SWENSON: Yeah.

1 MS. DeFORD: We will be able to see that.

2 MR. SWENSON: We'll make it work.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Does that sound
4 good to the Panel then, they're agreeing to do that,
5 so we have --

6 Okay. All right. So with that discussion, at
7 this time I will entertain a motion as far as what
8 we've heard today and whether or not you feel that
9 there's any action to take.

10 DR. WILLIAMS: So how do we -- or do we codify
11 that in a motion on the agreement, or is that not
12 necessary? If it's not necessary, then we're just
13 accepting the report?

14 MS. HYATT: I think you -- since you've just
15 agreed to it and it's -- they're voluntarily agreeing
16 to come, then it would just be a motion to accept the
17 report, unless you have additional action that you
18 would like to take. But I don't think that you need
19 to make a motion to accept their agreement to come.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: They've agreed on record
22 that they will come in December of next year.

23 DR. WILLIAMS: I move that we accept the report
24 as presented.

25 MR. WILSON: Second.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I have a motion and
2 a second to approve the report as presented.

3 All those in favor say "aye."

4 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

6 Okay. Thank you very much.

7 MR. SWENSON: And the goals?

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We also need to consider
9 the goals that they have presented. And so those
10 goals would be part of the report that they provide
11 for us next year because as we've discussed, it is
12 very important to look at the ESSA school index and
13 the accountability information, but it's also very
14 important what their goals are too as far as specific
15 to those schools.

16 So at this time I would entertain a motion on
17 the goals that they've presented today, revised
18 goals.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: On the goals -- or it's just a
20 waiver request? It looks like it's listed as a
21 waiver. I'm not quite sure.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Amendment request.

23 DR. WILLIAMS: It's an amendment request.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: The amendment request to
25 revise their goals.

1 DR. WILLIAMS: I move that we approve the
2 amendment request to revise their goals.

3 MR. WILSON: Second.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I have a motion and
5 a second to approve the amendment request for the
6 revised goals.

7 All those in favor?

8 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?
10 Okay. Thank you.

11 And we're going to record our responses.

12 Are we recording just the amendment or --

13 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I do have a blank voting sheet
14 if you want to -- or use the amendment request on the
15 second or --

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We probably need to have
17 two separate documents. Okay.

18 So if you will use Form A-7 and also the blank
19 form. And, Ms. McLaughlin, will you type in there
20 that to approve the report is A-7 and the blank
21 document will be to approve the amendment request.

22 [A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE]

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And as we talk -- give our
24 verbal report, if you want to just combine both of
25 your votes into one statement to give them some

1 feedback I think that would be valuable.

2 So we'll start with Mr. Wilson.

3 MR. WILSON: I voted for both motions --
4 actually, one motion?

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah. Both of them.

6 MR. WILSON: I voted for both of them because I
7 think we need more time to allow for the current
8 testing program in order to see growth -- hopefully
9 see growth and have a little better direction on
10 where we go -- where the school goes from here.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Newton.

12 MS. NEWTON: I voted for. And Mr. Wilson sums
13 up my explanation of amendments of the goals that
14 needs to be done so to give direction of improvement
15 in different areas.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Rogers.

17 MR. ROGERS: I voted for both motions. The
18 first one, I accept the report as presented. I do
19 have concerns about the reading at grade level and
20 science achievement, as well as the overall finances
21 of the district.

22 And then for the goals, I voted for those.
23 Amendment of the goals is probably needed, and
24 hopefully they'll help see increase in student
25 performance.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Williams.

2 DR. WILLIAMS: Okey-dokey. I have lost it, so

3 --

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: It really puts -- we all
5 have to be on the same page, literally, here.

6 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. When I switched to the
7 other page I lost my first page.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Uh-huh.

9 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Here's the first motion.
10 I support the motion to accept the report, given that
11 they agreed to provide an updated report in December
12 2019. We acknowledge that there are academic
13 concerns that need to be reviewed. The updated
14 report will inform us on next steps regarding those
15 concerns.

16 And the next one was I support the motion. The
17 amendment seems to be -- the amendment of the goals
18 seems to be more in line with their work.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Kremers.

20 DR. KREMERS: I voted to approve the motion to
21 accept the presentation of current academic status
22 based on the verbal agreement that the school will
23 provide an academic progress update in December
24 showing improvements.

25 And I also approved the motion to approve the

1 amendment of the goals.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. And Mr.
3 Baldwin, do you -- you may -- do you remember what
4 you put in here?

5 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

7 MR. BALDWIN: I voted to -- I voted yes for both
8 motions. I think the goals that you all have changed
9 and established now are more realistic, and I do
10 believe you're going to have some specific action
11 steps to achieve those.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right.

13 Well, thank you very much. I know it's been a
14 long afternoon but we hope that -- we wish you all
15 the best moving forward. So thank you for being
16 here.

17 And, Mr. Ballard, is there anything else that
18 the Panel needs to attend to today?

19 MR. BALLARD: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No. And we have a meeting
21 in February, on February 19th, and we'll be back
22 here.

23 ADJOURNMENT

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So if there are no
25 other items, I'll accept a motion to adjourn.

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MS. NEWTON: So moved.

DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And all those in favor?

(UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT TO ADJOURN)

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We're adjourned.

(The meeting was concluded at 2:35 p.m.)

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A-3: COVENANT KEEPERS CHARTER SCHOOL

EXHIBIT ONE (1)

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