

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

October 19, 2017

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BEFORE THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

OCTOBER 19, 2017
8:30 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

DR. IVY PFEFFER	Chairperson/Deputy Commissioner
DR. JEREMY OWOH	ADE Asst. Commissioner/ Educator Effectiveness
DR. MIKE HERNANDEZ	State Supt./Office of Coordinated Support and Service
MS. KATHI TURNER	Deputy Director/Career & Technical Ed./Ark. Dept. of Career Ed.
MR. MIKE WILSON	Attorney & Education Advocate
MS. TOYCE NEWTON	Past State Board of Ed. Member
DR. NACCAMAN WILLIAMS	Past State Board of Ed. Member

ADE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. JENNIFER DAVIS	ADE Staff Attorney
MS. COURTNEY SALAS-FORD	ADE Deputy General Counsel

ALSO APPEARING:

MS. ALEXANDRA BOYD	Public School Program Coordinator
MS. KELLY McLAUGHLIN	Public School Program Advisor

LOCATION:

Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
- Auditorium
5301 Northshore Drive
North Little Rock, AR 72118

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Welcome to everyone. I will now call to order the October 19 meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel. If you would, please silence all of your electronic devices. And let's not break any furniture over here while we're getting started here.

I'll introduce the Charter Panel at this time.

The Charter Panel oversees the authorization, renewal, revision and revocation of charters. Recently passed Act 462 of 2017 allows for individuals outside the Department to serve on the Panel. In accordance with the Act and in an effort to increase representation from local stakeholder groups, Commissioner Key named seven members to the Charter Authorizing Panel on August 3, 2017. I am Ivy Pfeffer, the ADE Deputy Commissioner; we also have Dr. Jeremy Owoh, ADE Assistant Commissioner for Educator Effectiveness; Dr. Mike Hernandez, our State Superintendent for the Office of Coordinated Support and Service; Kathi Turner, Deputy Director for Career and Technical Education at the Arkansas Department of Career Education; Mike Wilson, education advocate and attorney in Jacksonville; Dr. Naccaman Williams, former State Board member, of Education; and Toyce

1 Newton, a former State Board of Education member.

2 As chair, it's my goal to facilitate a fair and
3 responsible hearing. I will request that each person
4 speaking please state your name and title for the
5 record. I will ask that you continue to speak
6 clearly into the microphone for the benefit of the
7 Panel, the audience, and our viewing audience. The
8 entire meeting is being live-streamed and recorded,
9 and Ms. Sharon Hill, our court reporter, will be
10 providing a transcript of the meeting and it will be
11 posted on the ADE website.

12 REPORT-1: CHAIR'S REPORT

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: At this time we will begin
14 with any reports, and at this time I do not have any
15 reports. Does any other member have any kind of
16 report to present?

17 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. I had the opportunity to
18 just do a couple of site visits over this past month
19 to two schools. One was the Arkansas Arts Academy
20 and the other one was the New Tech High in Rogers,
21 Arkansas. And it was just good to get back in school
22 to see teachers and kids and it's just good to know
23 that a lot of teaching and learning is going on out
24 there. I won't get into any details since we have a
25 long meeting before us this morning. Thank you.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you very much. And
2 it is always great when we can be in schools, when we
3 get to see that great work going on. So thank you
4 for that report.

5 CONSENT AGENDA

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: If there's no other
7 report, we will move on to the Consent Agenda. Does
8 anyone wish to discuss any items on the Consent
9 Agenda?

10 Okay. If not, I will accept a motion on the
11 Consent Agenda.

12 MR. WILSON: I move for adoption.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We've had a motion
14 to approve the Consent Agenda.

15 DR. OWOH: Second.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Motion and a
17 second.

18 All in favor say "aye."

19 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Any opposed?

21 All right. The Consent Agenda is approved.

22 We will now move to our Action Agenda.

23 MS. BOYD: I'm sorry, Dr. Pfeffer, can you tell
24 me who made the motion?

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson made the motion

1 and Dr. Owoh seconded the motion.

2 MS. BOYD: Thank you.

3 ACTION AGENDA PROCEDURES

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, on the Action
5 Agenda we'll start with Staff Attorney, Ms. Davis.
6 Ms. Davis, if you will come forward and explain this
7 process, the hearing, the voting, and the process of
8 how the Panel will report to the State Board the
9 consideration to review or not review.

10 MS. DAVIS: All right. Good morning. Jennifer
11 Davis, Staff Attorney for the Department. The
12 procedures that you're going to follow will be the
13 same for all agenda items today. It will begin with
14 all persons wishing to provide testimony to you will
15 need to be sworn in, with the exception of any
16 attorneys that may be present. The applicant will
17 then have 20 minutes to make its presentation to you
18 for its application or its amendment, at which point
19 there will also be 20 minutes collectively for any
20 opposition that may want to speak, followed by an
21 additional 5 minutes rebuttal time for the applicant.
22 At that point you can ask any questions of the
23 applicant or the Department that you may have. You
24 can take the matter under advisement or vote on it
25 today. If you vote on it today, you do have a Google

1 doc that's been provided to you, so that way you can
2 note the reasons for your vote. And I would just
3 like to remind you that this is kind of considered a
4 contract negotiation, so anything that the applicant
5 says or agrees to that may differ from the written
6 material that they've provided to you today does
7 become part of any amendment or charter that you
8 grant.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Does anyone have
10 any questions for Ms. Davis?

11 All right. So if not, we will move on into Item
12 1 of the Action Agenda.

13 A-1: REQUEST FOR OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL AMENDMENT:
14 ARKANSAS ARTS ACADEMY

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Boyd, you're
16 recognized.

17 MS. BOYD: Thank you, Dr. Pfeffer. Alexandra
18 Boyd, Director of Charter Schools. On November 13,
19 2000, the State Board of Education approved the
20 application for Arkansas Arts Academy. The charter
21 is approved to serve students in grades K through 12
22 with a maximum enrollment of 1,225. Representatives
23 of Arkansas Arts Academy are appearing before the
24 Panel to request an amendment to the current charter.
25 And here on behalf of the charter we have Mary Ley,

1 who is the superintendent, and Matt Young, who is the
2 principal of the elementary/middle school grades.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Will all
4 representatives from the Arkansas Arts Academy and
5 anyone speaking in opposition please stand to receive
6 the oath? Okay. Do you swear or affirm that the
7 testimony you're about to give shall be the truth,
8 the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

9 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. You may come on
11 forward. You will have 20 minutes to present. So
12 welcome here today.

13 SUPT. LEY: Thank you. Good morning. I'm Mary
14 Ley, superintendent, Arkansas Arts Academy.

15 MR. YOUNG: And I'm Matt Young, the K-8
16 principal, Arkansas Arts Academy.

17 SUPT. LEY: So we're here to ask you -- in 2009,
18 before Matt and I even worked for Arkansas Arts
19 Academy, there were two different charters who came
20 together and now they're all under one roof. One was
21 a K-8 and one was a high school campus. But since
22 then nobody ever looked, they'd just gone on, but we
23 want to unify the school and make it even a better
24 school than we think it already is. And we think --
25 like my responsibility -- or two of my

1 responsibilities is to always provide financial
2 sustainability and also to always drive even better
3 impact in the arts and in the academics, and we --
4 this amendment would do both of those. So right now
5 we have almost 700 students at the K-8 and Matt will
6 be sharing with you the amount of students which is
7 almost overwhelming who want to come to his school.
8 And at the high school, as most of you know, we're
9 rebuilding the high school. It's very exciting. The
10 concrete is poured, the beams are up this week, and
11 when that school is done it will hold more students.
12 We'll be able -- instead of having 250 students,
13 we'll be able to have 600 students at that school.
14 And we'll be able to provide even deeper arts
15 programming, more ceramic studios that we haven't had
16 in the past, more dance studios, more programs to
17 make us at a national level, which is our goal.
18 We're not even being cheesy about it. Between the
19 building and our programming and our new great
20 principal there, we plan on having the best arts
21 school in the nation, nothing less. We want to put
22 Arkansas on the map with the best charter school,
23 best public school, best arts school; that simple.
24 So at the K-8 we have -- one of the problems has been
25 the recruitment at the high school. Even though it's

1 ranked the second best school by US News and World
2 Report for Arkansas because of its academics, we
3 haven't been successfully recruiting. We have taken
4 our own measures with that by hiring the new
5 principal lately that we think will draw the
6 recruitment and the programming at a higher level,
7 and we have taken the steps to re-do our bonds and
8 rebuild this school. But the next step is the K-8
9 has only taken 60 kindergarten students and always
10 kept that number up to 67 to 68 in the middle school
11 numbers. But we've always needed 125 students at the
12 9th-10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade to make it
13 sustainable. But what we have found as we've taken
14 over is that the K-8 used to be not very academically
15 strong, but student strong. The people were dropping
16 students off honestly because they were mad at the
17 public schools, and that's not why we want students
18 to come to our school. We want kids to come to our
19 school because they want the arts and they want the
20 good programs and they want the good academics. Matt
21 has fixed all that, which he will tell you. We're
22 very excited about that. The high school survived
23 because of the K-8 numbers. And the high school
24 though had the best academics in the history -- in
25 the history of this organization. And the academics

1 were so strong that when we would come for renewal
2 you would accept our renewal with hesitation, but
3 because the high school is so strong you kept us
4 going academically where the K-8 wasn't. We have the
5 K-8 academics fixed now. We have the K-8 arts -- we
6 have the arts fixed at the high school now and the
7 academics are strong, but we need more students at
8 the high school -- have more room. So we think the
9 solution is to add 100 kindergarten students, 100 1st
10 grade, 100 3rd grade, and so-forth. If we always
11 have 100 per grade we will have that 1200 number that
12 we need to be always sustainable, not to always ask
13 to borrow money or to get grants to keep us going.
14 We can breathe at night, have all the high-level
15 things we need and be totally sustainable.

16 So we would like to have the K-8 move to the
17 high school. And we also think that that will be
18 better for the 7th and 8th grade because it will
19 provide them more performance opportunities, more
20 mentoring opportunities. And I think opportunities
21 are very important for success in education. When I
22 first started -- this is my 40th year in education.
23 That's crazy; I thought I was only 41. But anyway, I
24 thought it's really exciting to be where I'm at today
25 because of all the experiences I've had. I have

1 learned that when I -- I was kind of a post-hippie
2 child, so I was going to change the world when I
3 started teaching and I was going to change every kid.
4 And then I realized pretty soon that it isn't my
5 place to change anybody, but what my place is is to
6 provide great opportunities. Because I think every
7 time a student -- like I used to live in Colorado
8 before I moved to Arkansas; I would arrange for kids
9 to climb Pike's Peak and then write stories and do
10 art about it, and we'd have all these great
11 experiences. And I would take them fishing and then
12 draw it and write about it. I was an art teacher and
13 I would always do all this integration, which we're
14 doing now. I found out you gave kids opportunities
15 you would see the light come on in their head and
16 you'd see them grow and develop. So I call
17 opportunities "dots." And then the more
18 opportunities you give kids the more dots, the more
19 they connect, and then the change comes within the
20 student. And we believe by bringing the 7th and 8th
21 grade over to high school you give them these dots to
22 drive this change, and the more opportunities that we
23 can give, because it comes with kids getting to
24 perform more and to be with the older children to
25 join them in the opportunities they have.

1 And then I would like Matt to tell you about his
2 problem of more kids wanting to come to his school.
3 It's a great problem to have.

4 MR. YOUNG: Charter Board, thank you so much for
5 allowing us to come before you today.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Young --

7 MR. YOUNG: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- please recognize
9 yourself.

10 MR. YOUNG: Yes. My name is Matt Young. I'm
11 the Arkansas Arts Academy K-8 principal. It's been
12 amazing the last two-and-a-half years to kind of
13 watch our school and how it's grown. You know,
14 today, this morning when I checked my phone, we have
15 a waiting list of 460 kids that want to come join us.
16 And it's hard for me to say no. You know, you have
17 someone that has a passion that wants to come for
18 their child, and that's all of our best blessings in
19 life are our children. You know, for my own
20 children, both of them go to school at the Arts
21 Academy. It's been amazing for my child to be
22 exposed to dance, piano, all these things. I was
23 like, oh, I've got great intentions of doing that,
24 but I don't want to shell out \$100 to put something
25 else in my garage. You know, and maybe that's only

1 my kids, but, man, for them now to get those
2 experiences on a regular basis, to find those
3 passions in life that aren't available in other
4 places -- but we've got other kids that want that
5 opportunity. And for me to say, "You can't come
6 because I don't have room" just feels wrong. You
7 know, it's not their fault. They didn't turn in
8 their form quick enough. You know, I had someone
9 that just started the Friday before October break;
10 she's been waiting two years -- two years to come --
11 and she was so pumped. I don't know how many hugs I
12 got from that girl, and a cupcake, homemade, and it
13 was very good. But the rest of these kids -- we've
14 got to figure out -- we've got 460 kids K-8 that want
15 to come to our school. We've got spots that are
16 going to become available at the high school. How
17 can we help this? Because right now we're trapped in
18 a box. You know, our campus has to be K-8; the high
19 school has to be 9-12. We want to be able to work
20 with our parents, work with our students, work with
21 our teachers and our community to figure out how can
22 we get more kids into our school. You know, is it
23 moving just 8th grade over? Is it moving just 7th
24 grade over, and 8th grade? But right now we don't
25 have that opportunity. Give us the opportunity to

1 help more of these kids come off the list and open
2 these doors for kids. Because the last thing any of
3 us want to do is say, "Hey, you know what, I'm sorry
4 you didn't get to take piano because your -- you
5 didn't have the money or because, you know what, your
6 dad wanted you to play baseball or the drive was too
7 far." So when I look at that list it hurts for me to
8 say these kids are not getting that. So please give
9 us the consideration to allow us the flexibility to
10 move some students to a location where we have space
11 so we can take this group of students and parents
12 that want to come to our campus. Thank you so much
13 for your time.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Boyd, is there
15 anyone here to speak in opposition?

16 MS. BOYD: No, ma'am. No one signed up to speak
17 in opposition.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. You have -- you
19 still have plenty of time from your original 20
20 minutes, but you also have 5 minutes to close. Do
21 you want to add anything else or ready for questions?

22 SUPT. LEY: Well, we have had -- so you know, we
23 did have an all-staff meeting to share with the
24 kindergarten teachers, to the teachers at the high
25 school to see if they would feel okay about this.

1 And we had great overall feelings about it. The two
2 principals are very collaborative and work really
3 well. She would've been here today but she's with
4 the Pea Ridge superintendent figuring out a new flex
5 schedule for our students today and had already
6 arranged that. And we also had a parent meeting. I
7 think about 75 parents showed up, and out of the 75 I
8 think two or three didn't like it but they also had
9 the opportunity to come to my office or use any
10 social media to voice their opinion. I think I
11 received one negative letter and -- but she said no
12 matter what her student would still go to our school.
13 But overall, we've had good support on it.

14 Another reason it would be nice to bring them --
15 we're changing our mascot, so it's a mascot for both
16 schools. We really want to be unified. When those
17 two schools came together I think the former
18 administrators didn't have a very good kum ba ya of
19 relationship and we do now. And we want to be more
20 than just two campuses; we want to be two campuses
21 with one heart and one soul. We have the same
22 mission, we have the same goals, and we're just
23 trying to work out where the issues of having a lot
24 more kids coming and making sure that the high school
25 has enough kids coming to the new school to make it

1 sustainable and offer them the programming I think
2 our 7th and 8th graders can have if they're put with
3 the high school students.

4 And I will say we traveled across the nation to
5 see the best high schools and art schools in the
6 nation. We went to Denver, to Santa Fe and New
7 Orleans and Houston, and most of them are 7-12 or 6-
8 12. So we're modeling them after very successful
9 schools.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Yes, go ahead.

11 MS. BOYD: Dr. Pfeffer, I just want to clarify
12 before y'all get into question-and-answer. They are
13 far away from meeting their cap, so the extra
14 students that they're talking about adding are --
15 they're already approved to add that many students.
16 So I just wanted to clarify that.

17 SUPT. LEY: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll go ahead and
19 start with questions. I think Dr. Hernandez has a
20 question to start.

21 DR. HERNANDEZ: My question may be for Alexandra
22 and Jennifer. So having these two schools that have
23 combined together under a K-12 charter with one cap,
24 is there a reason why they have to ask to modify
25 where grade bands are? And if they are, the follow-

1 up to that is going to be -- or what I heard them say
2 is that they're asking about moving 7th and 8th grade
3 to the high school.

4 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: But will there be flexibility in
6 their thought process to say, "Well, we want to do
7 this grade but we may not want to do that?" So I'm
8 just trying to avoid having them moving back --
9 coming back and forth if they need to make
10 adjustments --

11 MS. BOYD: Yeah.

12 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- for the families' sake.

13 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh. We all appreciate that, Dr.
14 Hernandez. Unfortunately, because their two campuses
15 are not at the same address they have to come and ask
16 for approval because they have to do a desegregation
17 analysis and we have to have that assurance that it's
18 not negatively impacting desegregation. So that's
19 really why they have to come before you. If they
20 were all on one campus or, you know, at the same two
21 buildings basically at the same address, then we
22 wouldn't have to do this.

23 I'm not sure, Ms. Davis, if there's a way to
24 word the motion so that they wouldn't have to come
25 back?

1 MS. DAVIS: If they are asking for flexibility
2 with the 7th and 8th grade only, then the motion
3 could be worded to move one or both of those grades
4 to allow them to do that. So that way, if they
5 determine that 8th grade is more appropriate at this
6 time to move and then maybe later move 7th or keep
7 them separate, that way they would not have to come
8 back. Now if they want to do for expanding it for
9 other grades at that campus, then they would have to
10 come back. But for 7th and 8th grade you could allow
11 them the flexibility in your motion to move one or
12 both at a time when they see fit over the next year
13 or two years or however long.

14 MS. BOYD: Also, if we do it that way I think we
15 need to make it clear that it's a requirement on them
16 to let us know when they move the kids, because we
17 need to know where the kids are.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Do you have any follow-up?

19 DR. HERNANDEZ: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Owoh, do you
21 have a question?

22 DR. OWOH: Yes. Thank you. You mentioned that
23 the academics and the arts program are stronger in
24 your schools. Can you elaborate on what you did to
25 increase the strength of your program?

1 MR. YOUNG: So at the K-8 campus, that's where
2 the questions had come up academically. And,
3 honestly, it was because there was no foundational
4 curriculum. Everybody was operating in isolation;
5 all the teachers were doing their own thing and they
6 were all just finding things, just to be honest. And
7 I'm like, yes, we want creativity; yes, we want arts
8 integration, but we also have to have a foundation
9 that's common. That way, we assure that all the 3rd
10 graders are getting these basic building blocks and
11 they weren't getting that before. So we have worked
12 with the University of Arkansas literacy specialist,
13 David Hanson, to help our literacy program. And then
14 we've also brought in Eureka math, which came in with
15 the State Department. Working with those two
16 programs has been a big blessing for us. And when we
17 look at our ACT Aspire results, comparing last year's
18 to this year's, of the 30 tests -- you know, thinking
19 of all the sub-tests between 3rd and 8th grade, 24 of
20 those 30 areas grew. We even had some grades that
21 grew 20 to 30 percentage points in that growth area.
22 Of the six that did not -- because I'm always one of
23 those people that's like, oh, goodness, what
24 happened. You know, two of them stayed the same and
25 one of those was at an 89 and one of those was at 90

1 percent. And in one grade we had a problem but we
2 did find it was a curriculum problem, so we've gone
3 back and adjusted what we're going to offer for that
4 group of kids this year.

5 DR. OWOH: One last question for now. If it is
6 approved for you to move 7th and 8th, or 8th, what
7 would be the layout of the grades within that high
8 school? Will the 7th graders and/or 8th graders be
9 mixed with the 11th and 12th graders? Will they have
10 classes together? What will be the composition?

11 SUPT. LEY: The core classes will have a central
12 area where 7th and 8th grade are in one area.
13 Because we have -- you know, with the new
14 construction we'll have -- they're all going to be
15 hooked together, but we only have four different
16 buildings. So they'll be mostly in the one building
17 for core classes. And certain art classes, it will
18 depend on their level. Because we'll have -- guitar
19 is a popular class, and we'll have students that can
20 play the guitar almost at a professional level that's
21 a 7th grader and so we'll make an exception and put
22 him in a higher level guitar class where he'll be
23 challenged. But most of the kids might be in a
24 beginning guitar class if they've never had guitar.
25 So there will be some individuality with the arts,

1 depending on their level. But like we have a new
2 animation class; I doubt if all the students have had
3 that before, so all the 7th and 8th grade will be in
4 the same animation class. But there will be
5 exceptions once in awhile where we'll put them in a
6 higher level class so they'll be challenged. But
7 they won't be in the same hallways and the same
8 level.

9 DR. OWOH: And I can appreciate you for placing
10 students based on their individual needs. My only
11 concern would be the intimidation of --

12 SUPT. LEY: Sure.

13 DR. OWOH: -- having a younger student mixed in
14 with older students.

15 SUPT. LEY: I wish you'd come see our school
16 because I know you feel that way. And we have the
17 most beautiful, sensitive -- I don't know -- and I'll
18 give credit to being in the arts and we have a quirky
19 superintendent, some quirky principals and quirky
20 kids, and we celebrate quirkiness. But the beautiful
21 thing about quirkiness is we really have no bullying
22 in our school, not because there's posters everywhere
23 but because kids are so sensitive. They're sensitive
24 kids and they appreciate differences. And if you
25 would -- I always say if you want world peace you

1 should come to see our cafeteria because our kids
2 blend. They don't care what color you are or how
3 much you weigh or whatever; they're all talking about
4 the arts and what they're doing. And there are kids
5 that want to be left alone and read their book and
6 there are other kids that just want to talk. And we
7 have purple hair and blue hair and gothic and, you
8 know, it's just a -- for me, that's what's been so
9 wonderful is to see that there can be peace on earth
10 -- and if it's the arts that do it, then so-be-it.
11 So, pretty cool.

12 DR. OWOH: Good to hear. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Williams, do you have
14 a question?

15 DR. WILLIAMS: More or less just a question and
16 a comment. First of all, I will attest to what Ms.
17 Ley just said. When I was out there at the school,
18 it's just really strange but it looks like all the
19 kids belong there. I mean, from the guys taking
20 classical ballet -- you won't find that in a whole
21 lot of schools -- to the elementary kids, some of
22 them doing performance, some of them working on
23 violin. It's truly a school of the arts. And one of
24 my concerns when I went out there that was alleviated
25 was that -- you know, I'm a math person, so I'm kind

1 of concrete/sequential in my thinking -- was that all
2 this talk about this arts stuff, you know, if the
3 basics are being covered, and that's what Mr. Young
4 alluded to. We addressed -- talked a little bit
5 about that when I was out there, are the foundations
6 in place, and then the infusion of the arts kind of
7 comes on top of that. And I felt that they had met
8 that, that that was taking place and that I was
9 impressed that there were no cliques out there. All
10 the kids are just kind of -- I don't know that
11 "quirky" is the word, but I think they are arts kids
12 and they all belong. They're at a place where
13 they're in their comfort zone.

14 The essence of my question is just basically
15 what you're looking to do, you're expanding the high
16 school; the concrete is being poured, construction is
17 taking place. And you're going to have more space at
18 that facility?

19 SUPT. LEY: Yes.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: And you would like to grow but
21 the elementary, K through 8, is maxed out now?

22 SUPT. LEY: Correct.

23 DR. WILLIAMS: So if you move the 7th and 8th
24 grade to the high school, one, you have the space
25 because you're building more space there, and that

1 way you can also increase your enrollment in the K-6?

2 SUPT. LEY: Uh-huh.

3 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you. I just wanted
4 to kind of simplify what we're looking at here.

5 SUPT. LEY: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll start -- do
7 you have any questions, Ms. Turner?

8 MS. TURNER: No, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Questions?

10 MS. NEWTON: No.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No? Okay. So I just --
12 one question, and I think Dr. Williams did a great
13 job of helping to summarize everything. In making
14 the transition, I know those 7th and 8th grades
15 sometimes with teachers and their specializations and
16 certifications you've got a little more flexibility
17 in those grades 5-8, and as you get into the 7-12
18 sometimes it's a little more specialized. Do you
19 feel confident that in terms of staffing when you
20 make this change, in terms of providing those core
21 academic classes are you able to meet all of those
22 needs with the transition of staff and students?

23 SUPT. LEY: Yes. We've already pulled all the
24 licenses and there's only one Language Arts teacher
25 that would not qualify at this time to go to the high

1 school level. And she really has the highest
2 Language Arts scores in the state, so we would want
3 her to go. But she's already agreed to take the
4 Praxis test to make sure, you know, she -- I think
5 she's taking it this month even to get her
6 qualifications to go to the high school level. But
7 everybody else already had the licensure to do it.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Panel Members, are there
10 any remaining questions?

11 Okay. Ms. Davis, are there any remaining issues
12 with the application itself?

13 MS. DAVIS: No.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No? Okay. And I'm
15 assuming nobody has signed up for public comment?

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

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. If there
18 aren't any questions I will accept a motion at this
19 time on this amendment request.

20 DR. WILLIAMS: I move that the 7th and 8th grade
21 of the Arkansas Arts Academy be allowed to move from
22 the elementary campus to the high school campus over
23 the next -- when it's determined that the facility is
24 ready to receive those students, and also to inform
25 the Department of -- Arkansas Department of Education

1 when the move takes place.

2 DR. OWOH: Second.

3 DR. WILLIAMS: I may need to clean that up.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

5 MS. DAVIS: I would just recommend that it would
6 be the 7th or the 8th grade, so that way if they felt
7 that they needed to move one and maybe not the other.

8 DR. WILLIAMS: And that is my motion.

9 MS. DAVIS: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we have a motion
11 and a second. Dr. Williams, motion, and Dr. Owoh has
12 seconded that motion.

13 All in favor of the motion say "aye."

14 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

16 Okay. Congratulations.

17 SUPT. LEY: Thank you.

18 MR. YOUNG: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Your amendment request has
20 been granted.

21 SUPT. LEY: We appreciate it very much.

22 MR. YOUNG: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. Board Members,
24 if you will please go to the link that was shared
25 with you, we need to record our votes.

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(A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. It looks like --

MR. WILSON: It looks like I haven't done anything. I'm dependent on Alexandra to --

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We'll get your vote recorded here. We'll go ahead and let you state your reason. We'll start with Dr. Hernandez.

DR. HERNANDEZ: I voted for the motion because the school is being responsive to community needs.

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Newton.

MS. NEWTON: I voted for. And I stated that it allows the school more flexibility.

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Owoh.

DR. OWOH: I voted for the motion because it would allow additional students in the community the opportunity to engage in an educational environment that is conducive to their needs and interests.

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Turner.

MS. TURNER: I voted for the motion. It will allow and provide opportunities for more students to be served by this school.

CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Williams.

DR. WILLIAMS: The move will allow students on the waiting list the opportunity to attend the schools.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And Mr. Wilson.

2 MR. WILSON: I voted for the motion for the same
3 reasons as Ms. Turner.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we are complete
5 with that agenda item. Does anyone need to take a
6 break for a minute before we move to Action Item 2?

7 A-2: REQUEST FOR DISTRICT CONVERSION CHARTER SCHOOL AMENDMENT:
8 CROSS COUNTY ELEMENTARY TECHNICAL ACADEMY

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Well, let's go
10 ahead and move forward with our Action Agenda Item 2
11 for the District Conversion Amendment for Cross
12 County Elementary Technology [sic] Academy. And, Ms.
13 Boyd, you are recognized.

14 MS. BOYD: Thank you, Dr. Pfeffer. On January
15 9, 2012, the State Board of Education approved the
16 application for Cross County Elementary Technology
17 Academy. The charter is approved to serve students
18 in grades K-6 with a maximum enrollment of 500.
19 Representatives of the Cross County Elementary
20 Technology Academy are appearing before the Charter
21 Authorizing Panel to request an amendment to their
22 current charter. And I would like to specify that
23 the Panel, before you guys were appointed, during
24 their renewal hearing the Panel requested that they
25 revisit their goals, and that's what they've done and

1 that's what they're bringing before you today.

2 From Cross County we have Mindy Searcy, who is
3 the elementary principal, and Stephen Prince, who is
4 the high school principal.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Will the
6 representatives from Cross County Elementary
7 Technology Academy and anyone speaking in opposition
8 please stand to receive the oath? Okay. If you'll
9 raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that
10 the testimony you're about to give shall be the
11 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

12 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We are ready for
14 you to begin your presentation.

15 MS. SEARCY: Good morning. Thank you for
16 letting us come back.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And if you would go ahead
18 and state your name.

19 MS. SEARCY: Oh, I'm sorry. Mindy Searcy, the
20 elementary principal at Cross County. After
21 attending the ADE's Academic Accountability and
22 Standards for Accreditation webinar and learning
23 about the State's new accountability system under
24 Every Student -- I can't talk, y'all -- after the
25 Every Student Succeeds Act we designed our proposed

1 charter goals. And after sitting down with our new
2 ACT Aspire scores and really digging into those and
3 seeing the improvements that we made, we were able to
4 set a trend for our test data.

5 We would like for our new literacy goal to be
6 that we will increase the percentage of students who
7 are scoring in the ready and exceeding categories by
8 three percentage points each year. After year five
9 of our last year of this charter, we will be at
10 69.99%. If we continue that data and we follow the
11 ESSA goal, after 12 years we will be at 80%. We will
12 exceed that and we will be at 90%.

13 For math we would like for our new math goal to
14 be an increase of 2 percentage points. After year
15 five, that will put us at 76.82% and it will be the
16 same after year 12, we will be at 90%. We believe
17 that these goals will serve our students, our
18 families and our community and at the same time they
19 are rigorous for our students.

20 Mr. Prince is going to talk to you just for a
21 minute to explain why our charter is so important for
22 our high school students.

23 MR. PRINCE: I'm Stephen Prince, the principal
24 of Cross County High School, a New Tech school. Ms.
25 Searcy is -- her academic rigor, with her goals and

1 what she does with her students is outstanding. And
2 with those goals our curriculum practices, she does
3 prepare our students to be better successful when
4 they transfer to us, the high school, as 7th graders.
5 So with our newly partner -- our new partnership with
6 KIPP Delta we have high expectations at the high
7 school. And with her curriculum practices and
8 instruction we are able to better prepare our
9 students to be successful when they come -- so
10 they're successful when they come to us, and then
11 when we are preparing them to be successful in their
12 post-secondary experiences. And so I just wanted to
13 make sure to kind of talk a little bit about that.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, are you
15 finished with your presentation at this time then?

16 MS. SEARCY: (Nodding head up and down.)

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Boyd, is there
18 anyone else that would need to speak?

19 MS. BOYD: No, ma'am.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. You have an
21 additional 5 minutes if you want to say anything or
22 we can go ahead and proceed to questions.

23 MS. SEARCY: We can brag for just a minute.
24 After receiving our second year of ACT Aspire data,
25 we grew 6% in English, 5% in reading, 24% in writing,

1 3% in science, and 9% in math. And that 24%, we give
2 all of the praise and glory to our TAPP strategies
3 that we have, which is when we came in December we
4 really bragged on implementing TAPP and how well that
5 works for our school. And we used a Plan and Write
6 strategy school-wide in writing and we were really
7 excited when that 24% came back.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you for sharing that
9 information with us. That's -- it's always great to
10 hear about those accomplishments and it's even better
11 when you have been intentional and you're able to
12 come back and tell us "this is what we've done and
13 these are the results." So we appreciate you for
14 sharing that.

15 Panel Members, I'll go ahead and start on the
16 end. Ms. Turner, do you have any questions --

17 MS. TURNER: No.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- to start with? No?
19 Ms. Newton, any questions?

20 MS. NEWTON: No.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson?

22 MR. WILSON: No.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Questions over
24 here?

25 No questions. Okay.

1 DR. HERNANDEZ: I do have a question.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Oh, okay. We do have a
3 question. Dr. Hernandez.

4 DR. HERNANDEZ: I do have a question. Do y'all
5 have razors in Cross County, razors, like shaving
6 razors?

7 MS. SEARCY: Yes.

8 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. I was just curious
9 because I saw this guy and I thought -- that was my
10 only question.

11 MS. SEARCY: I agree.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I did not know where that
13 question was going for a minute. I was getting a
14 little worried there.

15 All right. And so just to summarize, you all
16 have looked at the State's ESSA plan and long-term
17 goal and you've set your goal on a trajectory that
18 would exceed that goal where your students over a 12-
19 year period would be reaching 90% who already are
20 exceeding --

21 MS. SEARCY: Uh-huh. Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- expectations. Okay.

23 All right. Well, we appreciate your
24 presentation.

25 And, Panel, if we don't have any questions at

1 this time --

2 Ms. Davis, are there any issues?

3 MS. DAVIS: (Shaking head from side to side.)

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No issues. Okay.

5 So at this time if we're ready for a motion I'll
6 accept a motion.

7 DR. HERNANDEZ: I make a motion to approve the
8 amendment.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I have a motion from Dr.
10 Hernandez to approve the amendment.

11 MS. NEWTON: Second.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Second from Ms. Newton.

13 All those in favor say "aye."

14 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

16 Okay. Congratulations. Your amendment request
17 has been accepted. And if you'll wait just a moment,
18 we'll record our responses and give you feedback.

19 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: While they're typing in
21 their responses, I will just say I know several
22 months ago the Panel questioned you or challenged you
23 to go back and look at your goals. I know that with
24 the -- at that time the ESSA plan had not been
25 finalized and there were a lot of questions

1 surrounding accountability in general, and I do
2 appreciate you all for really digging in and learning
3 more and sitting down and doing this work. Because I
4 know sometimes it may seem like things maybe are just
5 trying to be more difficult, and I think just hearing
6 you today talk it is evident that you've spent some
7 time to really do this. So I appreciate that.

8 Okay. So with our responses -- Dr. Hernandez.

9 DR. HERNANDEZ: I made the motion because the
10 amendment aligns with goals of ESSA and the charter
11 renewal application that was previously approved.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Newton. Oh, I'm sorry
13 -- Ms. Newton.

14 MS. NEWTON: The district's -- I voted yes. And
15 my reason was the district's plan to address
16 accountability around ESSA requirements are in line.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Owoh.

18 DR. OWOH: I voted yes because the request is
19 aligned with the expectations of ESSA and the school
20 team did meet the request of the previous Charter
21 Panel, so --

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Ms. Turner.

23 MS. TURNER: I voted yes. And the amendment
24 provides the district with more focus on improvement
25 and higher expectations for students.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Williams.

2 DR. WILLIAMS: I voted for. The adjustment of
3 the goals increase the expectations of the students
4 and I believe this is a win for the students, their
5 parents and everyone.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson.

7 MR. WILSON: I voted for the motion. I
8 understood -- or understand that the amendment
9 clarifies the goals and sounds like a good thing.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. Thank you all
11 very much.

12 A-3: REQUEST FOR DISTRICT CONVERSION CHARTER SCHOOL: POLK
13 COUNTY VIRTUAL ACADEMY, MENA SCHOOL DISTRICT

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We are -- it's time
15 for Agenda Item 3. Are we ready to move on? It
16 looks like it. So for Action Item 3 we have a
17 Request for a District Conversion Charter School, the
18 Polk County Virtual Academy as part of the Mena
19 School District. Ms. Boyd, you are recognized.

20 MS. BOYD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Polk County
21 Virtual Academy is a proposed district conversion
22 public charter school in the Mena School District.
23 The applicant is requesting to serve students in
24 grades K-12 with a maximum enrollment of 200. ADE
25 staff reviewed the application and concerns were

1 shared with the applicant for response. The
2 application, the ADE evaluation and the applicant's
3 response are included for your review by the Charter
4 Authorizing Panel -- included for review -- I'm sorry
5 -- by the Charter Authorizing Panel.

6 For Polk County Virtual Academy, the first
7 person you'll hear from will be Benny Weston, the
8 superintendent.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Will the
10 representatives from Polk County Virtual Academy and
11 anyone speaking in opposition please stand to receive
12 the oath? Okay. If you'll raise your right hand.
13 Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are
14 about to give shall be the truth, the whole truth and
15 nothing but the truth?

16 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you. Good
18 morning, Mr. Weston. You are recognized to begin
19 your presentation.

20 SUPT. WESTON: Good morning. My name is Benny
21 Weston and I'm the superintendent of Mena Public
22 Schools. My team and I appreciate the opportunity to
23 appear before you today for our proposal for Polk
24 County Virtual Academy.

25 I'm going to start this morning by sharing a

1 condensed version of my Superintendent's Report from
2 my recent board meeting. I will begin by asking a
3 few questions that we ask ourselves: what does the
4 future of education in Mena Public Schools look like?
5 When does the future start -- one year from now, two
6 years, five years, ten years? At what point do we
7 want our students to compete in a worldwide economy
8 using -- utilizing 21st century strategies? Do we
9 continue to offer only traditional education and/or
10 do we become innovative and offer individualized
11 learning plans as ESSA requires? Or do we just sit
12 here until this too shall pass? Our world is
13 changing around us; therefore, we must change our
14 methods of delivery to fit today's workplace, as well
15 as higher ed. Team Mena -- and that's what we call
16 ourselves, Team Mena -- Team Mena is making a
17 wholehearted approach to reach all types and all
18 levels of learners. We realize that we're living in
19 an any-time, any-pace, any-place world of educational
20 opportunities. And if afforded this opportunity for
21 a virtual academy we'll be able to offer another
22 group of learners an alternate method of delivery
23 that meets their needs. If we don't offer it to our
24 students, someone else already is. After all, it has
25 been said if we always do what we've always done

1 we'll always be what we've always been. That might
2 be okay for some folks, but does it give our learners
3 that competitive edge? We're attempting to do
4 something different at Mena Public Schools. We
5 simply have to embrace the idea that it's okay to
6 listen to our students and patrons and allow them to
7 have a voice in their education. One of our blended
8 learning teachers, Ms. Jackson, begins each week with
9 a motivational video in her 9th grade literacy class.
10 The following video that we're about to see was
11 submitted by one of her students for consideration.
12 I hope you can appreciate the message that one
13 student chose to voice.

14 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: A video was shown,
15 which may be viewed on the ADE website.)

16 MS. SHERRER: Good morning. I'm Paulette
17 Sherrer, Federal Programs Coordinator from Mena
18 Public Schools. As we may not agree with every point
19 made in the video we just watched, this is a powerful
20 message from the voice of one of our learners. Our
21 students are 100 percent of our future. Our vision
22 is to help all learners discover and achieve their
23 dreams. Our student stakeholders deserve a voice and
24 a choice in their own learning, and we will offer
25 individualized student learning opportunities. We

1 eagerly anticipate partnering with our future Polk
2 County Virtual Academy applicants. These are just a
3 few examples of glimpses into the interests of our
4 stakeholders. We have met many students and their
5 parents whose stories have guided us in this pursuit.

6 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: There are a few moments
7 of silence while the presenters work on a PowerPoint
8 problem.)

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I paused the clock so this
10 is not counting against your time.

11 MS. SHERRER: That's okay.

12 SUPT. WESTON: We'll probably still have plenty
13 of time.

14 MS. SHERRER: We allowed for this, if possible.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: While we're doing this, we
16 do appreciate having Dan with us.

17 SUPT. WESTON: Absolutely.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I know it's hard sometimes
19 to give up the day, but it makes a huge difference
20 for us when we --

21 MR. WESTON: Well, I was hoping you weren't
22 going to ask me to go over and help him.

23 MS. SHERRER: Okay. We have met many students
24 and their parents whose stories have guided us in
25 this pursuit. Based on verbal feedback from students

1 and parents and perceptions survey data from before,
2 during and after our public meeting, we are excited
3 to offer partnering for place and pace. We will be
4 offering choices to multiple populations, including
5 home-schooled, homebound, at-risk, and accelerated
6 learners.

7 Polk County Virtual Academy will offer child
8 centering curriculum provided by Arkansas certified
9 teachers. This unique and flexible offering of
10 learning paths will be individualized for each
11 student to discover and achieve. At this point we
12 have yet to meet our Polk County Virtual Academy
13 students. Applications will be accepted and
14 applicants will be chosen on a first-come first-serve
15 basis. Upon meeting our PCVA students, we will
16 partner with each learner to create a personalized
17 student success plan based on pre and post, online or
18 onsite assessments to determine the appropriate grade
19 level curriculum for each student. Polk County
20 Virtual Academy students will be offered the same
21 quality education with equitable learning
22 opportunities as our Mena Public School students and
23 will have the required 23 or more credits for
24 graduation.

25 We have a goal of valuing variety and voice.

1 Each one of our Polk County Virtual Academy learners
2 will come to us with their own unique qualities and
3 needs. We are offering a variety of learning
4 opportunities to meet those needs of each learner.
5 We will comply with all state and federal special
6 education provisions. We will equitably provide all
7 Polk County Virtual Academy students with the
8 services afforded to our Mena Public School students.
9 We will offer social experiences to foster a personal
10 learning community through face-to-face interactions,
11 field experiences, onsite learning opportunities,
12 service projects, and extra curricular activities
13 where they will blend with our Mena Public School
14 students. We also value the variety and voice of our
15 parents and community stakeholders. We will engage
16 in ongoing communication and gain valuable feedback
17 through parent panels, community cohorts, student
18 dialogue, and perception surveys.

19 Our vision for this Polk County Virtual Academy
20 is to expand our educational opportunities to better
21 meet the needs of present learners in our community.
22 While offering this individualized plan our goal for
23 each learner remains accomplishing academic
24 achievement. Through our various methods and fully
25 aligned courses, our expectation will be for our Polk

1 County Virtual Academy learners to meet state
2 established guidelines for ready or exceeding
3 proficiency levels.

4 Thomas Edison said, "There's a way to do it
5 better; find it." Team Mena believes we have found
6 that way. We appreciate the Panel's time today as we
7 follow our own individualized path of innovation and
8 seek approval to begin this journey of offering
9 students the option of becoming learners of the Polk
10 County Virtual Academy. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Please state your name for
12 the record.

13 MS. SMITH: Good morning. I'm Jeanne Smith,
14 assistant superintendent of Mena Public Schools.
15 Before the Panel asks your questions, I respectfully
16 request you to allow me to tell about our experience
17 with the district conversion charter school
18 application. Due to data from home-school numbers,
19 parent requests and school board member concerns,
20 Team Mena began the journey focused on the goal of
21 starting a virtual academy for students seeking a
22 nontraditional avenue of education. None of us had
23 ever attempted anything of this nature, so the
24 application process was overwhelming, especially
25 requesting the waivers. When the waiver requests

1 review was sent back for further explanation, the
2 comments triggered the realization that the Mena
3 School District was creating a new school that should
4 offer and -- operate and offer equitable educational
5 services and programs that other schools were
6 providing. To quote Mark Goodwin -- Goodman,
7 "Forward thinking people in education institutions
8 are driven by their strong visions and missions.
9 They are willing to take on a certain amount of risk
10 to achieve growth, improve the outcomes and/or
11 increase user satisfaction. When confronted by a
12 shift in pedagogy they exhibit the courage to take
13 leaps of faith when needed, even if limited evidence
14 exists that greater results can be achieved."

15 I know that Team Mena is willing to meet any
16 challenge in order to successfully launch Polk County
17 Virtual Academy. We welcome your questions at this
18 time.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So, Ms. Boyd, is there
20 anyone else to speak?

21 MS. BOYD: No, ma'am.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. Well, we will
23 go ahead and move to questions then. Would anybody
24 like to volunteer to start? Okay. I'll let Ms.
25 Newton and then we'll have Ms. Turner.

1 MS. NEWTON: What I wanted -- I've got two or
2 three questions. The first one would be what is the
3 anticipated increase in enrollment for this
4 initiative? And what are the plans of the district
5 to address -- as opposed to blending these young
6 people into programs, assuming -- you know, you gave
7 a wide list of the number of the categories of
8 students that are going to be involved in this
9 recruitment. Given their diverse needs for ancillary
10 services, it's reasonable to expect that they cannot
11 be blended into the system as it exists now. So what
12 are plans for the increases as relates to staff and
13 other ancillary services that are certainly going to
14 be needed for this population of young people?

15 MS. SMITH: Currently, in the first year we ask
16 to have an enrollment cap of 25. And many of our
17 administrators and other people that we have talked
18 to are concerned at such a low number. We have also
19 talked about just limiting it to high school and,
20 again, I had opposition to that because they wanted
21 it open to K-12 students. So when we talked about
22 what we really wanted the academy to be we settled --
23 we went K-12 in our population and we are looking at
24 25 students because we want to get our feet on the
25 ground. We want to establish how it is going to be

1 started and we want to do it right. We want to get
2 everything in place before we start increasing our
3 enrollment. We looked at 25 students the first year,
4 increase to 50 the next year, with a total of 200
5 when we got to the end of our application process.

6 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Well, that explanation
7 heightens my concern because of the range of K-12. I
8 had an opportunity to visit a charter in Bauxite
9 yesterday that does have the virtual capacity on
10 campus and I talked to them about the needs of
11 individual students as it relates to needing help in
12 different areas, and certainly K-12, that range. So
13 you could potentially have students that run the
14 gamut in terms of what their needs are based on
15 staff. So it looks to strain staff more to me than
16 it would be -- and I'm not an educator, so -- but as
17 a parent and as someone that would look at the
18 benefit of virtual education that would be a concern.

19 MS. SMITH: What we really had in mind for the
20 extended services was to -- for example, if we had a
21 1st grade student enrolled in the virtual academy and
22 they needed to see the nurse or they wanted to do the
23 vision testing, we would send that student to our K-2
24 campus to have that -- those services provided. If
25 we had a high school senior that needed services,

1 that student would go to the high school to receive
2 the services. If we had GT students that wanted to
3 participate in our GT programs, they would go to the
4 appropriate building for that service. That's what
5 we had envisioned to happen.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Newton, is your
7 question more related if you have let's say initially
8 five students. Let's say you have two students in
9 each grade level. Is your question more around the
10 curriculum, the instruction, the everyday aspect of
11 how do you meet all those needs? Could you all speak
12 a little bit to that --

13 MS. SMITH: Okay. I'm sorry; I thought you --

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- about your curriculum
15 and your learning management platform --

16 MS. SMITH: Sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- and who's going to be
18 teaching?

19 MS. SMITH: Sure. The first two to three years
20 we will be purchasing an online curriculum from the
21 state approved vendors list. And the representative
22 that I have spoken with has said that each course
23 would be taught by an Arkansas certified teacher on
24 the appropriate grade level. Does --

25 MS. NEWTON: So the -- excuse me -- the virtual

1 approach would meet that need, but individually if
2 young people have problems --

3 MS. SMITH: I see.

4 MS. NEWTON: -- to the point of having an on-
5 campus -- because my -- another question I had
6 would've been or is what would differentiate the Mena
7 district from the virtual companies that now offer
8 virtual education for students. So I'm looking to
9 hear what makes you different.

10 MS. SMITH: Okay. As far as the face-to-face,
11 we are offering tutoring services after school for --
12 or whenever. We have looked at online means of
13 having some of our teachers available to these
14 students who are taking the online classes.

15 MS. SHERRER: And I'll speak a little to that.
16 Some of the way this was conceptualized was through
17 our stakeholders' feedback to us. Ms. Smith and I
18 have parents often come to the central office and
19 they are explaining to us opportunities for us to
20 meet their needs. And some of what we are hearing in
21 our rural community is they want to be involved in
22 our school with library, music, PE, counseling, GT,
23 athletics, band, choir. They want to maybe come for
24 a certain aspect. But one thing that we hear is the
25 start time of the day does not suit their needs. So

1 we don't have a waiver for our traditional students
2 to augment the time of their day, but we have heard
3 -- and we have names and phone numbers -- of people
4 that, if we get this approved, are very interested in
5 -- I see it as a partnership with our home-school
6 population specifically, that they know they are
7 taxpayers and we are benefitting from that, and then
8 they're having to in addition purchase curriculum for
9 their child to be educated at home. And they are
10 coming to us saying that they would partner with us,
11 allow their child to participate in an academy of
12 ours where we would be educationally equitably
13 advancing their child. But then they could from a
14 menu of options choose Tuesday library, choir, a
15 field trip, helping with many of our social projects
16 that are going on right now with our students, and
17 not feel isolated. But they don't want to jump in
18 fully traditional either. So that is what helped --
19 guided us.

20 MS. NEWTON: And I'm thinking that in trying to
21 be sensitive to the things we hear from teachers,
22 like "give me one more thing to do."

23 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

24 MS. NEWTON: So I'm wondering -- my question
25 specifically is how do you plan to increase the

1 capacity of your staff to be able to -- you know,
2 what plans do you have to grow your staff to the
3 extent --

4 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

5 MS. NEWTON: -- that they can incorporate -- you
6 know, because, you know, just putting one thing --

7 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

8 MS. NEWTON: -- another thing on an already
9 crowded plate, you know, seems to address in theory
10 but in practice how do you plan to adjust to make
11 this something that is accomplishable --

12 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

13 MS. NEWTON: -- based on the fact that you've
14 got the resources? So that's what I'm trying to get
15 at.

16 MS. SHERRER: That's an excellent and valid
17 question. And we met with our full staff K-12 and we
18 rolled out this presentation with them and we asked
19 them for their feedback with this, because we knew we
20 were representing them when we came. And one of the
21 aspects internally to our district right now is
22 vertical alignment with the use of Google Classroom.
23 Just for our students that aren't in attendance at
24 school one day, they can not miss one beat by using
25 the Google Classroom platform at home right now. Or

1 we have homebound students for medical reasons at
2 this time that are still able to keep up with their
3 work using Google Classroom. So we are not maxed at
4 the moment with our student-to-teacher ratio at this
5 time. So when our traditional teachers continue to
6 incorporate and use a Google Classroom platform to
7 its full benefit, then if we have the opportunity we
8 could move from vendor-purchased curriculum and
9 assign those virtual students to our teachers and
10 they will be doing no more than they would be doing
11 anyway for the traditional human bodies in their
12 classroom. We would just be able to access and give
13 that course code or that material to the virtual
14 student that is choosing to learn in a different
15 place or at a different pace.

16 MS. NEWTON: So does the 25 that you anticipate
17 -- you know, having a number to say this is our plan
18 and this is what we can absorb as opposed to, you
19 know, concrete -- and you may or may not have that --
20 but, you know, just saying based on what we have now
21 and based on what we plan we can incorporate this
22 number into different grades; you'd say K-12 -- you'd
23 say we have capacity in K-3 to do five, we have
24 capacity in high school to do -- based on the
25 teachers, and that's what I was searching for.

1 MS. SHERRER: Yes. We do have that.

2 MS. NEWTON: Would you share it with us?

3 MS. SHERRER: We have that capacity to
4 incorporate students. But at this time, year-one, we
5 wouldn't be asking any teacher to add a child to
6 their roster because we will vendor-purchase the
7 curriculum. And so the vendor-purchased teacher
8 would be their teacher of record.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Turner.

10 MS. TURNER: Thank you. I have a couple of
11 questions. One is in your application, looking at
12 your public meeting, the attendance -- and I know
13 several school personnel would be parents as well,
14 but there were only two parents on the list. So can
15 you tell me a little more about your stakeholder
16 support? I just want to hear a little more about
17 that.

18 SUPT. WESTON: Sure.

19 MS. SMITH: Since the public meeting there has
20 -- before the public meeting there were two articles
21 in the local newspaper concerning the Polk County
22 Virtual Academy. And I think that we gained much
23 support from those two articles that were published.
24 People come to us instead of in a meeting. We see
25 lots of parents come and visit with us individually

1 and they don't necessarily come to a meeting. But
2 they do come to school and they do tell us what they
3 are looking at, as pros and cons. We met with our
4 teachers. We try to involve the community in many,
5 many ways. Our school board meetings -- our school
6 board members are very supportive of this option that
7 we are trying to provide for our community, the wants
8 of our community. They hear the same things that we
9 hear; "We would do something else if you had it
10 available. We would come back to your school if you
11 could offer us a different way to educate our
12 children." So, in a small community like Mena that
13 is the best way that we have to communicate with our
14 parents. They don't necessarily like to come to
15 meetings and speak out; they want to tell us in a
16 more personalized way.

17 MS. SHERRER: I'll say something right here.
18 This is my 28th year in education, all of which have
19 taken place in Mena. So I was hired as a 1st grade
20 teacher, but I taught 3rd grade, then I was literacy
21 specialist, then I was building principal, and now
22 I'm at the central office. So going to see Ms.
23 Sherrer at the central office is a way they feel like
24 they have a voice in the change in the district, just
25 because I've been there. It's someone that they know

1 is a stakeholder from within. All three of my
2 personal children graduated from the school. I have
3 an investment in it. There has been a growing
4 population over the years in our home-school. Our
5 numbers now are at 138 --

6 SUPT. WESTON: 139.

7 MS. SHERRER: 139. Some of these kids we have
8 never educated, 139 students, and the largest
9 majority have never been a student of ours. It
10 wasn't a student that got upset with us and left; it
11 was a student that as of a 5-year old never chose us
12 to begin with. But they come to us saying, "We love
13 aspects of the educational quality that you're
14 offering, but we are asking you to partner and tailor
15 it in a different way." So we feel we have a quality
16 educational traditional system. We are being
17 innovative with our AE and our hub and our 9th grade
18 blended learning, but it's still not reaching our
19 entire population. And so we are mainly trying to
20 reach that growing population of learners that we
21 feel we can benefit in a way that we are not
22 presently offering at this time.

23 SUPT. WESTON: And I'll mention we're very
24 blessed in Mena to be a small community. We have two
25 newspapers, two radio stations, and a whole bunch of

1 folks that use social media.

2 MS. TURNER: Okay. And another thing I'd like
3 to hear you -- I've not heard mentioned career
4 technical education and how you plan on doing that in
5 a virtual setting. We do require -- and there are
6 some things that cannot be taught virtually. And so
7 I'd like to hear what you have to say about that in
8 your plan.

9 MS. SMITH: Again, when we realized that we are
10 starting a virtual academy we realized that we could
11 offer those students any -- any of the programs that
12 we have in our regular school, if they choose.

13 SUPT. WESTON: And I'll say this, you being from
14 Department of Career I know you know about Mena,
15 Arkansas because we have a wonderful career ed.
16 programs and we plan on trying to expand those as
17 well. But that's the very reason that some of these
18 folks have requested to be able to do this is to get
19 the curriculum for the basic courses and come to our
20 school and participate in some of our career
21 programs.

22 MS. TURNER: And would those students be allowed
23 to be in the student organizations as well?

24 SUPT. WESTON: Absolutely. Absolutely.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Owoh, do you have a

1 question?

2 DR. OWOH: Yes. Thank you, Chair. A quick
3 question about -- I know -- and if you shared it, I
4 apologize. But from my understanding -- I know you
5 mentioned about the different services that you will
6 provide for your GT students, students with an IEP,
7 and ELL students. Transportation is a concern for
8 me. I haven't really mentioned that. How would you
9 coordinate transportation to insure that all of those
10 individual students receive those services when they
11 need those services, as well as guidance services?
12 As they matriculate through grade levels and prepare
13 for graduation, how would you insure that those
14 students are receiving those services in a timely
15 manner?

16 MS. SMITH: We wrote in our plan that we -- each
17 student would have a student success plan and that
18 plan would be reviewed annually, just as we do with
19 our regular students. The transportation would --
20 and we had a discussion about this yesterday, was the
21 reason I'm kind of smiling. When we have IEP
22 conferences we do not provide transportation unless
23 it is requested by the parent. And one of our
24 principals had a story to go along with that: a
25 mother that had -- it wasn't any special conference;

1 it was just a conference -- and she called the
2 principal and said, "I can't come." And the
3 principal said, "Is there a problem?" "Well, I don't
4 have a way to get there." "I'll be right after you."
5 You know, we are going to treat our virtual students
6 just like we do our regular students. We will help
7 in any way we can. As far -- for example, if we had
8 a field trip and there was a special needs student
9 that should go on the field trip, we have the
10 transportation and we'll provide that transportation.

11 DR. OWOH: So a follow-up, so you mentioned the
12 student success plan.

13 MS. SMITH: Yes.

14 DR. OWOH: So there's meaningful dialogue that
15 takes place between a student and the counselor. So
16 would that dialogue about the plan take place over
17 the phone, virtually, or in person? And then, if
18 it's in person that's the question I have about
19 transportation: how would you meet the transportation
20 needs of those students?

21 SUPT. WESTON: Let me touch on transportation
22 for just a second. We have 21 bus routes and we have
23 a fleet of 27 buses. We require all of our coaches
24 to have a CDL and most of our administrators have a
25 CDL. And we have employees that work throughout the

1 day shuttling kids back and forth to our local
2 community college. And so we have both the personnel
3 as well as the fleet for these types of situations I
4 think that you're speaking to, in order to be able
5 and transport those folks if required to do so -- and
6 if requested to do so, I should say.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Williams.

8 DR. WILLIAMS: Two questions. The first, what
9 prompted this? What's the back-story? Why this, why
10 now?

11 MS. SMITH: We have a very visionary leader and
12 when he sees a problem in the schools, especially
13 with our enrollment, he is going to search out and
14 find where we could improve enrollment. And we felt
15 like this was a very needed service to offer to our
16 families in Mena. So when he said, "Let's try this,
17 let's go and see if we can establish a virtual
18 academy," the rest of us didn't have much choice; we
19 jumped onboard and we went through the process.

20 MS. SHERRER: The other part of that back-story
21 too is we feel like we have benefitted from the pilot
22 year of the advancement of our AE into the AE hub
23 where students are virtual learners. They come in
24 later, they leave earlier, but they still -- and Mr.
25 Hobson, I'm doing his speech -- he's our AE

1 administrator -- but they still have the
2 socialization, they're doing the field experiences,
3 they're doing the project learning, they're mentoring
4 on our other three campuses.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I'm not sure if the
6 other panel members probably don't -- they don't
7 understand what you mean when you say "AE hub."

8 MS. SHERRER: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Maybe if we could give
10 them just a very brief update on what was already in
11 place. Sometimes just having that understanding
12 helps to give --

13 MR. COX: I'm Mike Cox and I'm the alternative
14 education administrator for the district. Two years
15 ago we felt like we had a need to change our
16 alternative learning environment from a punitive --
17 more of a punitive setting to a more positive
18 setting. Even though it was an award-winning --
19 yearly award-winning program, we still recognized
20 there was a need for it. The need there was because
21 of the environment our students didn't have good
22 self-esteem. The year before we changed the program
23 we graduated one from alternative ed.; last year we
24 graduated 18, and we're wanting to expand on that.
25 But the thing we've done is we've changed our whole

1 thought process and it's almost to the point now
2 where it's an application process to get in
3 alternative learning. We do partner with community
4 partners, we volunteer, we do a lot of service
5 learning projects. Our goal is to give our students
6 that are alternative learners a purpose for
7 education. Matter of fact, one of our students who
8 missed 80 days last year has missed one this year and
9 he will tell you, "I have a purpose," and his purpose
10 is technology. He works in our technology
11 department. So what we've done with the service
12 learning, the community partnerships, moving these
13 kids all over the district and all over town to
14 become -- to use these service projects and community
15 partnerships as part of their education -- because
16 they are required to write about it, to use math in
17 it, to know the history of it, to know the science of
18 it. They get a deeper understanding of hands-on
19 education through AE, through the hub. And hub is
20 connected to our JAG program.

21 So what they refer to is, our program, is we
22 took a chance on it because we had a population of
23 kids that we needed -- that we knew did not feel part
24 of our district. And we took that chance; we've made
25 a huge difference in those students' lives. We know

1 there's a huge need with another population and we
2 think we can connect -- I know we can connect
3 community partnerships, volunteerism, service
4 learning projects and our school to improve these
5 students' education. That's what we want to do.

6 SUPT. WESTON: And I'll just follow-up with that
7 and ask a question -- and please don't take it as I'm
8 trying to insult anyone. But if you've watched early
9 morning news, have you seen K12.com advertised? Have
10 you seen Virtual Arkansas advertised? Have you seen
11 a lot of these other schools -- Fayetteville,
12 Springdale, all of those -- that are advertising to
13 come into our district and take our kids? And so we
14 have a passion for education and we feel like "you
15 keep your kids, we're going to keep our kids," and we
16 want to provide whatever is necessary for that child
17 to be educated. And so it drives us. That's what
18 it's about.

19 MS. TURNER: Dr. Pfeffer --

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. I was going to --
21 do you have a question first, Dr. Hernandez? Do you
22 want to follow-up on that?

23 DR. HERNANDEZ: She can go ahead.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

25 MS. TURNER: I just had some clarification on

1 all that. He was talking about his alternative ed.
2 hub and he mentioned JAG. JAG is Jobs for Arkansas'
3 Graduates and it's a program through -- it's a
4 national program through Career and Technical
5 Education that assists students with barriers to
6 completion of high school. And I just wanted the
7 Panel to know what that was. And those students do
8 come to school part of the day and work part of the
9 day in a community.

10 SUPT. WESTON: And I will interject this, we
11 have a JAG program in our alternative ed. program,
12 but we also have one in our regular ed. program as
13 well. And they too are award-winning.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you for that
15 clarification, so -- and for the panel members, Mr.
16 Weston mentioned this, we do have other school
17 district conversion charters that are a virtual
18 charter and a virtual charter blend where students
19 can do all of their education virtually or they can
20 do some virtually, some at the school district. So
21 their application here is basically still providing
22 that quality educational experience for their
23 traditional K-12 students on campus, but also then
24 reaching out to say we have -- we recognize that we
25 have students who may not be part of our school

1 system and here's an opportunity for students who may
2 want to be part of our school system and -- but the
3 manner in which you are accessing your educational
4 opportunities may be very flexible; they may be
5 coming an hour or two a day for a career ed. course;
6 they may be coming for a particular activity span for
7 choir, they may be coming on campus maybe for some
8 advanced placement or concurrent opportunities. And
9 then again you have that digital platform. So I just
10 kind of wanted to let you all know this is something
11 also that we are seeing in some of our other school
12 districts.

13 Do you want to go ahead with your questions?

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: Sure. Okay. I know that
15 there's some mention in the application of Virtual
16 Arkansas and I know they work with the AE hub. And
17 so have you guys settled on a provider yet as far as
18 who you guys are going to use for your online
19 learning?

20 MS. SMITH: We have talked to two different
21 companies. One was Edmentum and the other was Fuel
22 Ed. We have not finalized or have a contract with
23 either one.

24 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. And one of the reasons I
25 ask that is I know you did originally ask for the

1 waiver concerning licensure and then rescinded it.

2 MS. SMITH: Yes.

3 DR. HERNANDEZ: And part of the -- just trying
4 to think through, some that have been successful have
5 asked for that -- and the reason being is that all of
6 these outside providers, sometimes getting them --
7 license requirements because they're online teachers
8 -- I just wonder, have y'all thought all the way
9 through that --

10 MS. SMITH: Well, when --

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- process of rescinding that?

12 MS. SMITH: Of course I'm depending on the word
13 of a salesman. But when I called back and asked that
14 question he assured me that his teachers were
15 Arkansas certified teachers.

16 SUPT. WESTON: Dr. Hernandez, that was one of
17 the first things that we broached when we started
18 talking about this, was to be absolutely certain that
19 whoever did instruct would be certified for our
20 state, because we realize the ramifications of that.
21 And so we have not selected a vendor because it
22 depends if we get approved or not, you know, with
23 that process. But we've never done it before.
24 There's probably some things that we're going to have
25 to learn on the fly.

1 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right.

2 SUPT. WESTON: So we realize that. And we are
3 passionate about education, and you know that. And
4 so we, you know, we pulled the State Department goals
5 and objectives out and we looked at ESSA and we've
6 looked at all of those things. And we feel like
7 that, quite frankly, we are attempting to do what the
8 Governor as well as the State Board would like to see
9 us do, and the Department, in the state. And so that
10 drives us. The need for kids that are out there that
11 we're not reaching at this time, but have been
12 reached out to by parents and by patrons asking us to
13 do some of these things. And we started to bring
14 some with us; we thought, no, we don't have time for
15 that. But we feel like that this is a definite need
16 in our area.

17 DR. HERNANDEZ: And I know there's ways just to
18 -- you know, if the application is successful, then,
19 you know, there's the possibility to come back for
20 amendments.

21 SUPT. WESTON: Sure.

22 DR. HERNANDEZ: Because I know you've asked for
23 and then rescinded it, so I just wanted to make sure
24 that that wasn't something --

25 SUPT. WESTON: And just let me say this about

1 that, if you don't mind. I'm a superintendent, so
2 you know I'm going to talk. And beginning this whole
3 process we really did not have a clear understanding
4 of what waivers we did need or didn't need. So we
5 did like a lot of coaches do, we borrowed from other
6 folks that have been here before us and we talked and
7 we visited with those folks and we asked about those.
8 Well, we understand laws have changed since then, so
9 all of those waivers are not now required as were in
10 the beginning, so --

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: In your application you talk
12 about getting the equipment to students. And so, you
13 know, knowing where Mena is and sometimes challenges
14 with broadband, depending on which provider you use,
15 you know, there may be some limitations in regards to
16 access at home. And so do you guys have an idea or a
17 plan of what you're going to do with that?

18 SUPT. WESTON: Well, as a matter of fact, we
19 talked about that on the way over here this morning.
20 Because, you know, from Mena we had quite a bit of
21 time to talk and so we talked about those issues and
22 those things. And we understand there are going to
23 be some barriers and there's going to be some, you
24 know, some things that we're going to have to be very
25 creative in being able to provide and do. And we

1 feel like that we have the people in place from not
2 only these folks but also from our technology
3 division in our school -- we feel like that we have
4 the people in place to help us and do everything that
5 we can to do it. Would we be able to reach every
6 single one? Well, probably not, because some of you
7 can't get there with a car. And so, but we're going
8 to do everything that we possibly can; we've made a
9 commitment to that. We don't have all the answers
10 but we'll search out and do whatever we can to make
11 it possible.

12 DR. HERNANDEZ: Let me ask it a little bit
13 different way. So if a student does make an
14 application next year and does not have broadband at
15 home, would you guys be providing that broadband
16 access?

17 SUPT. WESTON: Yes.

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. Great.

19 MS. SMITH: And I have spoken with our
20 technology department. And fortunately we have three
21 different providers in the Mena area and one provider
22 may work in certain areas better than another
23 provider. And, of course, we will search out which
24 provider, what service, and how well it works and
25 make sure that we are trying to provide everything

1 that we can.

2 DR. HERNANDEZ: And I would just encourage you
3 as you're looking at these providers that those are
4 some of the questions you ask because -- I'll just
5 give you a perfect example: if you have Netflix and
6 you have Hulu, Hulu sometimes has more demand on the
7 internet because video and some of the features, just
8 the way it's designed.

9 MS. SMITH: Yes.

10 DR. HERNANDEZ: So I'd just encourage you to ask
11 those kinds of questions --

12 MS. SMITH: Okay.

13 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- because sometimes they're
14 good at that and then, you know, you want to make
15 sure that it does function well.

16 MS. SMITH: Yes, sir.

17 SUPT. WESTON: Thank you for that advice.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Williams.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. You know, you're looking at
20 25 students K-12. How does this -- how will this
21 work for your elementary kids? I'm just trying to --
22 you know, the virtual aspect of this, any -- can you
23 all just kind of -- it's been awhile since I've been
24 in the classroom. So I can understand the secondary
25 and the technology and so-forth, but with elementary

1 kids I'm not quite there yet.

2 SUPT. WESTON: I'm glad you asked. I'm
3 secondary trained. We have two elementary
4 principals, former elementary principals right here
5 and they've got it all worked out. So I'm going to
6 let them speak.

7 MS. SHERRER: The vendor provided curriculum
8 would have a human teacher that would be on like the
9 face-time aspect, so the learner would be listening
10 to and following a human educator. And then what we
11 might think is a technological barrier with them
12 actually keying in or uploading information, we have
13 been put at ease just with this year's digital
14 testing now that is going on at our K-2 campus. And
15 our adults had anxiety about how this would happen;
16 our learners walked in and was like, "It's computer
17 lab, there's just a few more facilitators," and they
18 took their first test online. So we are aware that
19 the learner we are now targeting is in a digital age
20 where they are more comfortable with the technology
21 than some of our present high school students that
22 haven't been raised in that same vein. But, again,
23 we feel we have an excellent traditional setting. We
24 would love for them to come and join Mena Public
25 Schools, but this is a choice that a parent is

1 making. I feel they would have to support and be a
2 part of their child's education, if they're choosing
3 fully virtual at that age. But, again, it is a
4 choice they're asking for; we're asking to provide
5 that choice, so --

6 DR. WILLIAMS: I appreciate your comments there
7 because I look at the numbers -- the numbers are
8 relatively small. And I almost wonder is it -- do
9 you really have to have another school? You sound
10 like, just listening to your presentation there on
11 the AE and so-forth, you're already integrating
12 technology in such a way within the school. Do you
13 really need another school to make this happen?

14 SUPT. WESTON: Well, we have a wonderful school.
15 We have a fantastic district. We have a wonderful
16 community, wonderful people. But there's a faction
17 of students that we're not reaching, and we're not
18 satisfied with that. We want to reach all of the
19 students and make -- and not that they're not being
20 reached, but we feel like Mena Public Schools has
21 something to offer. And we feel like this virtual
22 academy will help us offer that, and it may integrate
23 them back into our regular ed. We want them to feel
24 like that our school as the hub of our community is
25 offering what is needed to be offered educationally

1 in Mena. And if we can gain another group of
2 learners, we feel like we're setting a great example
3 and we feel like that maybe we're missing some of
4 them because they're just not the traditional
5 education type student. For some reason or other
6 they choose not to come to us; we're trying to figure
7 out what that reason might be. And we have actually
8 heard from 20 or so of these folks that they would
9 like to see something like this provided. Now we
10 started with a low number, 25, because we realize we
11 need to grow into this and we realize that we need to
12 take our time and we need to do it right because,
13 sir, you don't know me but I don't -- we don't accept
14 failure. And so we feel like that by starting small,
15 growing into it, it's going to give us the
16 opportunity to grow along with it and to become what
17 we need to be for these kids.

18 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And if I may go ahead and
20 ask a couple of questions as kind of a follow-up to
21 Dr. Williams. Ms. Sherrer, you were talking a little
22 bit about especially at an early age -- so we know
23 every student will have a student success plan that
24 is the foundation to move forward in making those
25 decisions in their curriculum and, you know, what

1 they're doing virtually or if they're participating.
2 But then for those younger children what is the plan
3 to insure that -- and I guess it might be even more
4 of "who" -- who would be kind of following them? And
5 as you've said, you know, the parents should be very
6 involved in this process as well. But what is the
7 plan to kind of keep the parents well connected since
8 the curriculum will be delivered from that platform
9 where the teacher is not a teacher within our school
10 system?

11 MS. SHERRER: We will, first of all, always
12 offer -- if they cannot come to us, we would go to
13 them. You know, we do that as administrators now.
14 So if we need to go to the home and help create the
15 student success plan, we will so do that. We also
16 have an area not on -- it's in our district campus,
17 but it is not presently assigned to any campus, that
18 we would like to basically market it as our Polk
19 County Virtual Academy building where we will have
20 our support systems there and times available where
21 the students can come to get -- if they want onsite
22 assessments, if they don't want to do it online, if
23 they want our tutoring services, if the parents want
24 to come and help us plan what a daily schedule looks
25 like. We realize we're asking for the support of a

1 parent to help in the education platform when they
2 are probably not an educator. So we don't have a
3 problem with sitting down and even saying, "What does
4 your day look like?" One example is a working mother
5 that said to me, "When my child gets on a bus I am
6 not home. When my child gets off the bus I am not
7 home. When I am home my child is in bed. I choose
8 to homeschool my child so I can be with my child" for
9 the times she is available to be in the home. So we
10 could sit down with her and script a schedule of
11 learning around her job so that she could be in the
12 support phase to that child. But we would always,
13 always have the option of, "Do you want to come
14 onsite? Do you want to come and gain any valuable
15 information you can from our already educated
16 professionals that are available for you?" And I
17 think some will accept that.

18 Oh, yes, and we will have a director, if that's
19 what you're asking. We will have a director of the
20 entire services and we also have some people planned
21 within their schedule allotment already that can
22 support the Polk County Virtual Academy in addition
23 to the task they do for us in the district at
24 present.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Thank you. And my

1 other question was related to goals that you have
2 outlined here. I'm noticing that in terms of the
3 reading and math proficiency, and writing, that the
4 goal is set at the 60% scoring ready or exceeding.
5 Can you explain a little more about that? At what
6 point would you expect that? And in terms of --

7 MS. SHERRER: Sure.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- thinking longer-term
9 aligning -- as you heard, a previous --

10 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- charter, you know, they
12 come back and have adjusted the goals to being more
13 in line --

14 MS. SHERRER: Sure.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- with the new
16 accountability.

17 MS. SMITH: And when I wrote those goals for the
18 achievement I was looking at another example. And as
19 we were going through it and reviewing, after we got
20 your comments back, we thought about, okay, we should
21 put down what the State expects all of our children
22 to do and expect that from the Virtual Academy also.
23 I noticed that on our website requirements there's a
24 new level of school improvement, and I have forgotten
25 what the new ones are, by May 2018. So I didn't have

1 that information when the goals were set. So I will
2 have to go back and look and revise those.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So I guess I don't want to
4 -- I don't want to impose on you what you're
5 submitting in the application. So am I hearing --
6 well, I don't know how to do this without trying to
7 put words in your mouth.

8 MS. SMITH: Well, we want -- what we are
9 thinking is that we will meet the same guidelines for
10 a student achievement that is set by the State for
11 all students. That's what we are -- that's what I am
12 thinking now.

13 SUPT. WESTON: That would be a revision. Is
14 that correct? That would be a revision?

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Right.

16 SUPT. WESTON: Yes.

17 MS. SMITH: Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes, that would be. And
19 as we agree on --

20 SUPT. WESTON: Right.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- the terms here today.
22 So you're aligning with the accountability goals --

23 MS. SMITH: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- that will be in place?

25 MS. SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. So do
2 we have some additional Panel questions before we go
3 further? Because I know that we have some questions
4 about the application that we're going to need to
5 check on, so --

6 SUPT. WESTON: One other quick --

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: We'll go to Dr. Williams
8 and then we'll come to Mr. Wilson. Okay?

9 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. What about your current
10 students, will this opportunity be available for them
11 also?

12 SUPT. WESTON: Yes.

13 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

14 MR. WILSON: I take it that your target
15 population that you want to attract back into the
16 school system would be those home-school kids; is
17 that correct? 139, I believe you said?

18 SUPT. WESTON: It's all children -- but, yes, it
19 is.

20 MR. WILSON: Do you plan to -- if you're
21 successful in this, plan to contact those folks
22 directly or go down there and --

23 SUPT. WESTON: Those folks -- there's a large
24 contingency in Mena and some of them are church
25 associated and some of them are not. But all

1 different groups have already reached out to our
2 principals and had discussions with them if and when
3 and what and all of those type questions. So, most
4 of those groups have pinpointed certain people to
5 represent them as far as finding out information and
6 those kinds of things.

7 MS. SHERRER: And just to follow-up with that,
8 to be equitable we will make sure that we will use
9 our newspapers, radios, and our district social media
10 to let everyone know at the same time the
11 opportunities, how they can get applications at
12 school campuses, at our central office, and when a
13 deadline is. Because since it is a first-come first-
14 serve it would not be equitable if we just went down
15 and started calling people in an order, because that
16 would not be fair. So we want to make sure that even
17 though we have a list of people that are already
18 asking for this that we want to make sure that we do
19 it to where everyone gets the same message at the
20 same time and has the same opportunity to be
21 applicants.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Ms. Davis, I
23 know that we've gone through quite a few questions
24 here and I think we're at the point now where maybe
25 we need to start looking at the specific waivers and

1 some of the -- if there were any remaining issues
2 that we need to go through. So I'll let you guys --

3 MS. DAVIS: Okay. I do have several remaining
4 issues. The first one is on the school year. They
5 originally had asked for a waiver of the school year
6 dates. So I think I was a little unclear because
7 they say that they're going to operate on the same
8 calendar as the Mena Public Schools -- and if so,
9 then I don't know why a waiver is necessary. So they
10 may have more information or --

11 MS. SMITH: I called and spoke to the lady that
12 is in charge of Van Buren Virtual Academy and asked
13 her this very question. And she told me that they
14 had found through experience that it worked best for
15 them if their virtual students were on the same
16 calendar as their school calendar, the regular
17 students' calendar. Because she found that if they
18 were different the virtual students wouldn't come
19 when Van Buren students were out. So she said,
20 "Stick to the same calendar as your regular school
21 calendar." That was her advice to us.

22 SUPT. WESTON: So we're asking to rescind that
23 request for that waiver.

24 MS. DAVIS: Okay. So then my next question was
25 -- and it's more just a clarification; it was on the

1 Gifted and Talented. They had requested a waiver of
2 6-42-101. That one is not needed and I suggested
3 that they add 6-42-109 instead. And I think, again,
4 I was a little confused because they said that they
5 were no longer requesting it and I just need to let
6 them know that you just need to -- can you just let
7 them know affirmatively on the record that you are
8 requesting that?

9 SUPT. WESTON: Yes. We're requesting to not do
10 the first one but to do the second one.

11 MS. DAVIS: Okay.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Hernandez, did you
13 have a follow-up on that?

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: The way it's written it's saying
15 that 6-42-101 is not necessary but 6-42-109 -- so I
16 guess my question is the charter, conversion charter
17 itself will not be providing these services, but if
18 students want that that they can go on campus and
19 receive services. And so they do need the waiver for
20 that or they don't?

21 MS. DAVIS: They do. Typically our charters get
22 the waiver because they're not providing the services
23 in the same manner in which the law prescribes. But
24 they are providing those services, so --

25 DR. HERNANDEZ: So they are asking for the

1 appropriate waivers to do that?

2 MS. DAVIS: That is correct. So they are asking
3 for the clarification of 6-42-109.

4 SUPT. WESTON: And, Dr. Hernandez, we were
5 confused on that as well, I guess.

6 MS. DAVIS: It might've been -- I probably
7 confused you.

8 SUPT. WESTON: No, that's okay.

9 MS. DAVIS: That was probably my fault.

10 And same thing on the next one, the school nurse
11 and the media service, I just need confirmation that
12 they are rescinding the waivers for section 16.01.02
13 and .03 of the Standards for Accreditation. I just
14 need confirmation.

15 MS. SMITH: And that is school nurse and school
16 media?

17 MS. DAVIS: Uh-huh.

18 MS. SMITH: Yes.

19 SUPT. WESTON: Yes, we are. And we have four
20 nurses on our campus and we have sufficient.

21 MS. DAVIS: Okay. They didn't need the three
22 blanket waivers because they had added on the 16.02.3
23 which is the specific section.

24 I think I have one other question. Oh, okay.
25 The last one was on curriculum. They have asked for

1 waivers of two of the sections of the standards. I
2 wasn't certain exactly what they were asking for
3 because I know one of the section numbers is not a
4 section in the standards.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: I have a question --

6 MS. DAVIS: Pardon me?

7 DR. HERNANDEZ: I said when you're done I have a
8 question about that.

9 MS. DAVIS: Okay. And then I also just wasn't
10 sure why they were needing a waiver of the curriculum
11 in the first place. So maybe you can --

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Hernandez, do you want
13 to ask your question then?

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yes. So in reading the
15 application what I understood you guys are trying to
16 do is that if students are allowed to take things
17 like Algebra I or geometry say in 7th and 8th grade
18 online, when they get into high school in order to
19 meet the 38 you will count AP courses as part of the
20 38?

21 SUPT. WESTON: Yes, sir.

22 DR. HERNANDEZ: And so -- which is perfectly
23 fine. I just -- what do they need to be able to do
24 that, is the question.

25 MS. DAVIS: I'll verify real quick in the law

1 just to make sure, because like I say I wasn't
2 exactly sure what they were asking. So if you'll --
3 if you have any other questions, if you can continue
4 with those and I'll get back with you in just one
5 second.

6 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Which list are you
8 on right now?

9 DR. HERNANDEZ: I'm on the things that say
10 Issues that Remain Unresolved, and then on the very
11 first summary page.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Ms. Boyd, while
13 Ms. Davis is researching the answer to that question,
14 so this page, this section relates to those that
15 after the Internal Review Committee had gotten
16 feedback there was some remaining questions?

17 MS. BOYD: Yes, ma'am.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And if the other panel
19 members want to pull that up from the agenda -- let
20 me look at the title of it -- it would be --

21 MS. BOYD: So a number of these issues were just
22 things that remained unclear. So I think it would
23 just be helpful to have the applicant speak to what
24 was meant by what they put down on paper for these
25 issues. So we -- the Internal Review Committee --

1 for the first one, the Internal Review Committee
2 inquired about transportation and how the students
3 would have access to field experiences.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So is it all right if I
5 kind of go down through these?

6 MS. BOYD: That's perfectly fine.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Since I think some of
8 these were addressed in the question process here.
9 And then if Panel Members feel like that they weren't
10 already addressed, then we'll chime in.

11 MS. BOYD: Okay.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So, on the first one,
13 basically just making sure that students are going to
14 have access to the fieldtrips. My understanding from
15 what Mr. Weston told us was that with the capacity
16 they have and with their transportation, with those
17 two, are able to transport; that if a student is
18 involved in something or wishes to be involved in
19 something the district is going to make the efforts
20 to allow any and every student to be involved in the
21 academic curricular or extracurricular. Is that --

22 SUPT. WESTON: That's correct.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- an accurate reflection?

24 SUPT. WESTON: Yes. Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Does anybody feel

1 that's unresolved or we feel like we've got that?

2 Okay. Academic achievement goals, we discussed
3 that. The Internal Committee had noted something
4 about rationale for only having 75% of students
5 report on their project-based learning experiences.
6 I don't think we talked about that on what --

7 SUPT. WESTON: I don't think we did.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Can someone speak to that
9 part to clear that up?

10 MS. SMITH: I think we maybe -- that was mis-
11 worded on our part, I think, because we want to give
12 students choices on their service projects. And I
13 think that's where we got confused about what
14 percentage we were going to -- well, we want all
15 students to have a service project but we want to
16 give them choices in how to complete that project.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

18 MS. SMITH: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And that would fall in
20 line with their student success plan?

21 SUPT. WESTON: Yes.

22 MS. SHERRER: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And then your goals, all
24 -- a hundred percent of your students will be having
25 that success plan and that will be monitored?

1 MS. SHERRER: Yes. Our model is again off the
2 hub where there's multiple options. Every child does
3 not have to participate in every option, but we can
4 say out of 12 projects you would have to participate
5 in four. But we're giving them options, but we want
6 them a hundred percent to fulfill their obligation.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. The next section
8 was related to the schedule of courses offered, and
9 there are four bullet points that were raised there.
10 I'm needing some clarity around K-5 recess within
11 that application; oral communications, if it's going
12 to be offered for the full year or just first
13 semester; physical education being taught in 8th
14 grade in Arkansas; history in grades 7 or 8. So I
15 think we might need to go back to that first one
16 about -- the question around the K-5 recess. And I'm
17 not sure for the Internal Review Committee why that
18 would be raised if we're talking about a virtual
19 environment where students may or may not be on
20 campus. So maybe, Ms. Boyd, if you could give us
21 clarity on that question?

22 MS. BOYD: So the school still has to provide a
23 plan for accommodating or allowing for recess. It
24 may look different than in a traditional environment,
25 but it's part of the Standards and so the kids have

1 to have recess time in K-5.

2 DR. HERNANDEZ: Can I ask a question?

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: (Nodding head up and
4 down.)

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: Is that something that can be
6 waived?

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: That was my question.

8 MS. BOYD: Roy Causbie from Standards is here.
9 I think he's better equipped to answer that question.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: I thought we'd give Mr. Causbie
12 some action today.

13 MR. CAUSBIE: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And we'll let you just
15 kind of facilitate the discussion --

16 MR. CAUSBIE: Sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- on this whole section.

18 MR. CAUSBIE: I'm Roy Causbie, Unit Leader,
19 Standards for Accreditation. I am not aware of
20 waivers for this under Standards for Accreditation.
21 As mentioned, there's 90 minutes of physical activity
22 required each week for students K-6. I know this is
23 a different environment but that's one of the
24 standards.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Boyd, in our other

1 virtual schools -- yeah, bring us on back because I
2 think it would be really tough to tell parents you've
3 got to prove your kid went outside for --

4 MS. BOYD: Well, in other schools they don't
5 have waivers of it. They -- a few of them have like
6 the parents submit like a log, like a recess log of,
7 you know, my student did have a break from the
8 learning time and it was 30 minutes on Monday,
9 Wednesday and Friday.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So we could just build in
11 a verification statement from parents --

12 MS. BOYD: That's correct.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- for any physical
14 breaks?

15 SUPT. WESTON: We would be glad to do that.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. And then have
17 they clarified on the other scheduling issues or are
18 we going to need --

19 SUPT. WESTON: Okay. On the oral communication
20 the issue is you can teach a full year of oral
21 communication or a semester of oral communication and
22 a semester of drama. And I should say "offer"
23 instead of "teach." So that would need to be on the
24 schedule where they offer either a full year of oral
25 comm. or a semester of oral comm. and a semester of

1 drama for grades 9 through 12.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we have
3 confirmed --

4 SUPT. WESTON: That -- yeah, that wouldn't be a
5 problem, and it would be semester. That's what we do
6 for our regular ed. students.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So the district
8 will continue to offer those graduation requirements
9 for all students?

10 SUPT. WESTON: Right.

11 MR. CAUSBIE: And on the original process there
12 wasn't a plan for curriculum in 8th grade. I know
13 that has been taken care of. But, again, we're
14 talking about physical education for 8th graders;
15 that's 40 minutes a week or 1440 minutes time for 8th
16 graders.

17 SUPT. WESTON: Can we do like a parent note like
18 we'd talked about with that?

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Boyd, how does the 8th
20 grade physical education need to be handled?

21 MS. BOYD: The physical education is different
22 from recess because there are standards that have to
23 be met. So the school -- what the schools -- what
24 the other virtual schools do is they create a
25 curriculum for physical education and it could be

1 with videos or things of that nature for the parents
2 to assist the students in getting that done.

3 MS. SHERRER: If I may, as a former principal we
4 used the Go Noodle platform at our elementary
5 traditional campuses, which are brain breaks of
6 activity. It's, you know, dance along with the
7 instructor or do aerobics or jogging in place. So
8 that was just one off in my head that we could even
9 offer. Since it's a virtual learning opportunity and
10 it's digital we could offer some of those platforms
11 along with a schedule of opportunities for them to do
12 activities as well. But this would be something at
13 least an elementary K-5 child could follow that was
14 led by video for them to get activity.

15 SUPT. WESTON: And in the 8th grade we have that
16 curriculum already in place and we have that, and
17 that would be the same as for our regular -- but I
18 hope y'all can see the difficulty in a school
19 district submitting -- there are some unclear things
20 that if you're applying for this type of a school
21 it's hard to do it all without clarifications.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes, sir. And what I
23 would tell you is we're not trying to make it
24 difficult.

25 SUPT. WESTON: Oh, I understand that. No, no,

1 no; please, we're learning. Everything you say,
2 we're learning.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think what we can
4 take away from this is that in our -- as these
5 applications are being completed --

6 SUPT. WESTON: Sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- and as we're looking at
8 those requirements that maybe are under Standards of
9 Accreditation or in situations --

10 SUPT. WESTON: Absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- to even work more
12 closely with you --

13 SUPT. WESTON: Sure.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- so that you are not
15 trying to come up with something on the fly.

16 SUPT. WESTON: Wonderful. Wonderful.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But it does sound like
18 though that you will have your vendor or the district
19 can provide the curriculum necessary --

20 SUPT. WESTON: Absolutely.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- for the 8th grade --

22 SUPT. WESTON: For the 8th grade.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- in that --

24 SUPT. WESTON: Absolutely.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And the last

1 remaining one was the Arkansas History; is that
2 correct?

3 MR. CAUSBIE: Yes. Now there's two ways you can
4 address this issue; either have a semester of
5 Arkansas History in the 7th or the 8th grade or if
6 you offer to teach Arkansas History in the high
7 school grades 9-12 when you do that it becomes a
8 graduation requirement and then each student will
9 have to have a semester in grades 9-12. So they can
10 address that either way, which is best for them.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

12 MS. CAUSBIE: You have to tell them who you are.

13 MR. SHERRER: Yes. Cliff Sherrer, principal,
14 Mena Middle School. Currently, we -- in our
15 traditional setting we do Arkansas History in 7th
16 grade. And I think since our whole idea is to be
17 equitable with our virtual situation, as well as our
18 traditional, that we would offer that either through
19 our vendor or if we had to create the content we can
20 do that through Google Classroom, so --

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Is that -- so, then
22 Mr. Causbie?

23 MR. CAUSBIE: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. Thank
25 you all.

1 I think the next item has already been addressed
2 because it was related to the licensure and that
3 waiver has been rescinded.

4 The student services, those two items I think
5 have been addressed as well. Have we addressed both
6 of those?

7 SUPT. WESTON: (Nodding head up and down.)

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And then the enrollment
9 criteria and procedures, were there any questions
10 related to that, Ms. Boyd, in terms of the way they
11 would plan to do their enrollment?

12 MS. BOYD: That was clarified. They said that
13 they were going to use a first-come first-serve
14 basis, which is fine. We just -- I just want them to
15 acknowledge the fact that if they do first-come
16 first-serve and don't do a lottery then the federal
17 government won't necessarily recognize them as a
18 charter if they should apply to the government for
19 any kind of grant related to charter schools.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. Ms. Davis,
21 were you able to find the answer to Dr. Hernandez's
22 question?

23 MS. DAVIS: Yes. And as suspected, they do not
24 need a waiver -- but we wanted to verify. They don't
25 need a waiver because if they want to use courses in

1 grades -- taught in grades 5-8 for high school credit
2 the Standards already allows them to. You can
3 already count an AP course towards a graduation
4 credit. And if they wanted to teach an AP course in
5 lieu of the standard course, there is a process
6 within our Standards that they can go to apply and
7 say -- you know, if no students signed up for the
8 regular course and they were going to teach the AP
9 course instead, there's already a process for that.
10 So they would not need any waivers in order to
11 accomplish what they want.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So they don't need any
13 waivers; they would just need to go through the
14 process with Standards of Accreditation if they're
15 going to substitute that --

16 MS. DAVIS: Right.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- just like they would in
18 their traditional K-12. Is that correct?

19 MS. DAVIS: That's correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Mr. Weston, it
21 looks like y'all -- have you got that?

22 MS. DAVIS: So we'll rescind these two?

23 SUPT. WESTON: Yeah, we'll ask to rescind those.

24 MS. DAVIS: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: All right. So, Ms. Boyd

1 or Ms. Davis, are there any remaining issues with the
2 application?

3 MS. DAVIS: I don't have any.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Panel Members, any
5 remaining questions?

6 Okay. So if not, at this time I will accept a
7 motion regarding Polk County Virtual Academy's
8 application.

9 MS. TURNER: I move to approve the application
10 of the Polk County Virtual Academy.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We have a motion to
12 approve.

13 DR. OWOH: Second.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And we have a second -- I
15 heard two seconds. I heard Dr. Owoh's just a little
16 bit louder.

17 All those in favor?

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

20 Okay. Congratulations. Your application has
21 been approved. And if you will give us a few
22 minutes, we will record our responses and provide you
23 with feedback.

24 SUPT. WESTON: Thank you very much. We
25 appreciate it.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you.

2 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Hernandez,
4 we'll begin with you.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: I voted for the motion. I think
6 this will be a great addition to the Polk County
7 community. I also highly encourage the Mena School
8 District to reach out to the various other virtual
9 charters around the state for guidance and support.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Newton.

11 MS. NEWTON: I voted in support. And my reason
12 was --

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I don't think your
14 microphone is --

15 MS. NEWTON: I voted in support of the motion.
16 And my reason is that this district's desire to
17 implement this will allow enhanced educational
18 opportunities for students in the Mena School
19 District.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you. Dr. Owoh.

21 DR. OWOH: I voted yes for the motion. I
22 believe that the conversion charter will provide an
23 innovative educational experience for students who
24 will excel in both personalized and individualized
25 instruction. I am concerned about the availability

1 and timeliness of key instructional services because
2 of the potential transportation issues.

3 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Turner.

4 MS. TURNER: I voted for the motion. This
5 district has provided opportunities for students who
6 face barriers to graduation, and this expands
7 opportunities for home-school and other students who
8 may not be successful in the traditional classroom
9 setting.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Williams.

11 DR. WILLIAMS: I voted for the motion. The
12 conversion charter school provides enhanced learning
13 opportunities, such as individual learning and the
14 use of technology for students that are and those
15 that are not enrolled -- currently enrolled in the
16 Mena Public Schools.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson.

18 MR. WILSON: I voted for the motion. I was
19 impressed with the effort to recruit or regain those
20 youngsters who are home-schooled. I think that's a
21 good thing that y'all are doing and I hope you're
22 very successful at it.

23 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Thank you. I know it's
24 been a rigorous conversation this morning, but
25 hopefully you all are feeling good about going

1 forward, and we appreciate you being here. And we
2 also will welcome your feedback with us in terms of
3 how we continue to get -- to streamline the
4 application process, because this is a learning
5 experience I think for both the school districts,
6 open enrollment charters, and the Department. So,
7 thank you all for being here.

8 SUPT. WESTON: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And congratulations.

10 ARKANSAS CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So that brings us through
12 the items on our Action Agenda. We do have a work
13 session scheduled for a little bit later. But, Ms.
14 Boyd, I understand that the State Board last month or
15 at a previous meeting has requested that the Charter
16 Panel review Arkansas Connections Academy regarding
17 their finances. So, can you share a little bit more
18 information with us?

19 MS. BOYD: Yes, ma'am. At the -- hold on, I'm
20 bringing it up because I want to say what it is word-
21 for-word. At the September meeting we presented the
22 Panel -- I mean the State Board with the end-of-year
23 reports for new charters, and Arkansas Connections is
24 one of -- last year was their first year. The State
25 Board was concerned about their finances and they had

1 a really low fund balance. And they requested that
2 you call Arkansas Connections before them in
3 December. And so I'll let Ms. Davis explain to you
4 how we can handle this today to have it in December.

5 MS. DAVIS: So in order to add an agenda item
6 for discussion and possible action you will need to
7 have a vote amongst yourselves to add it to the
8 agenda item. Once it's been added, then you can
9 discuss and make any decisions that you may or may
10 not wish to make at that time and any action after
11 that. But you will need a motion to basically hear
12 it.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So the request was
14 to hear --

15 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh. I can read the motion to
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

18 MS. BOYD: To request that the Charter
19 Authorizing Panel call Arkansas Connections Academy
20 in December to review the finances.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So if this were put on the
22 agenda it would be to review finances. Would it just
23 be a hearing to review or could there potentially be
24 action taken by the Panel based on the review? Or is
25 it to review and just to provide a recommendation --

1 what I guess would be the -- what steps?

2 MS. DAVIS: Well, first, I would recommend that
3 you have a motion amongst yourselves to even bring
4 this item up to put it on today's agenda for
5 discussion. At that point then we can discuss and
6 you can decide whether or not to -- what that -- any
7 motion would look like, what a hearing would look
8 like. But because this agenda item was not on a
9 published agenda you will need a motion.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So we need to put it on
11 the agenda now for discussion?

12 MS. DAVIS: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So --

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: I make a motion to put it on the
15 agenda.

16 DR. WILLIAMS: Second.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All those in favor?

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay.

20 MS. DAVIS: Thank you.

21 MS. BOYD: And so pretty much after your
22 discussion, whatever you decide is what we'll do. So
23 when you want to hear them, what you want to hear
24 from them -- or if you want to hear them at all, what
25 you want to hear from them and what your expectations

1 are, what kind of action you -- and you should put
2 them on notice -- that you'll be making at that
3 meeting.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And was there a reason why
5 the State Board recommended December or is that
6 something that we can discuss as well? Because it's
7 my understanding we've got a pretty packed agenda
8 already in December.

9 MS. BOYD: Right. I definitely think that is
10 something that is up to your decision whether or not
11 you want to do it sooner or later than December. I
12 can't recall exactly what the conversation around the
13 "in December" was. I just know that they wanted to
14 get it done; if it was a big problem, we want to
15 cover it sooner than later.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Panel Members, any
17 discussion? Dr. Hernandez.

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: Can you review again what the
19 reason why we're bringing them back?

20 DR. WILLIAMS: Also, to add to that, could
21 somebody just kind of give a quick snapshot of the
22 school itself?

23 MS. BOYD: Right. So I can -- I sent you a link
24 with the Board report for the finances; that's really
25 what triggered the discussion. But Arkansas

1 Connections Academy is a statewide virtual school
2 that operates as K-12, grades K-12, and their
3 platform is the Connections platform, which is run by
4 Pearson. So a lot of the issues -- at the State
5 Board meeting Ms. Cyndi Smith, who's the coordinator
6 of Financial Support Services, she said that because
7 the school has not been adding its financial
8 transactions throughout the year through our APSCN
9 system they couldn't really speak to the fiscal
10 viability of the school. So because it's run by a
11 parent company it appears that they've been running
12 their finances through what the company uses and they
13 haven't been inputting the data into our state
14 system, which everyone has to use for their financial
15 detailed data. So whereas with other schools,
16 including charter schools, we will know more
17 information about their finances, we kind of have a
18 limited view of their finances because of the way
19 they have not been inputting the data into our
20 system.

21 Additionally, their fund balance at the time
22 this was run on August 29th was \$1,000. So that's
23 really what brought the concern.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Go ahead.

25 DR. HERNANDEZ: So they don't have a waiver from

1 inputting that information into our state system
2 right now?

3 MS. BOYD: Nobody can get a waiver from APSCN.
4 There's actually an assurance in the application that
5 everyone has to state that they will use APSCN.

6 MR. WILSON: Has anyone made a demand on them to
7 produce the numbers?

8 MS. BOYD: Yeah. So I personally have been on
9 several phone calls with Arkansas Connections, with
10 their -- the person who does their finances, Mr. Ben
11 Shipley. It's been my-self and Dr. Saunders, Mr.
12 Rogers, Ms. Smith, Ms. Crain. We've had several
13 phone calls throughout the course of last year,
14 mostly in the spring semester, to try to rectify this
15 data input situation. Yeah, so we've talked to them
16 about it.

17 MR. WILSON: Somehow you need to get their
18 attention.

19 MS. BOYD: I think that's why the State Board
20 would like for you to see them. I think that was the
21 point, to get their attention.

22 DR. HERNANDEZ: May I ask another question?
23 When school districts -- any school district doesn't
24 do what they're supposed to do in terms of financial
25 reporting, you know, there are the mechanisms of

1 withholding state funds and things like that. So I
2 guess what I'm wondering is, is that something that
3 we would do or is that something that the Department
4 could do? Does that make sense? What I'm asking is,
5 you know, what --

6 MS. BOYD: Yeah.

7 DR. HERNANDEZ: It seems like there could be
8 other mechanisms besides coming from the Charter
9 Panel.

10 MS. BOYD: I definitely understand what you're
11 saying. In the past the -- when the Charter Office
12 had grant money we will withhold that grant money
13 until they will be in compliance. And that way, when
14 -- the foundation funding. But to answer your
15 question, that was kind of like a midpoint to kind of
16 have some teeth with this. But that would be an
17 action that I would recommend coming from Mr. Rogers
18 and not from the Panel.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So we do have a request
20 from the State Board to conduct a hearing around
21 finances of this charter and we do have -- how much
22 notification would need to be given to the school?

23 MS. BOYD: Let me check. We need to check the
24 rules to be for sure.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I think my initial was

1 concern just over the December agenda already, if
2 this is going to be a pretty weighty discussion.

3 MS. BOYD: Yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But I don't know that
5 November would lend itself to a timeline.

6 MS. BOYD: We typically give them 30 days
7 notice.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Hernandez has a
9 question and I think it's reflective of Mr. Williams'
10 question.

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right. You know, I just have a
12 concern if they're simply being noncompliant that,
13 you know, if any other district was doing that in
14 terms of the finances I don't know that we would put
15 it off and have a hearing somewhere down the road to
16 find out that they're not being compliant. Because I
17 struggle with what the purpose of the meeting would
18 be, unless they're going to come before us and ask
19 for a waiver from submitting into APSCN, which I
20 don't -- I know we're saying that's not allowed, but
21 I don't know that that's more of our internal rule
22 and not necessarily something they can't waive.

23 MS. BOYD: So for the question earlier about --
24 we have to give them 20 days notification, so at any
25 meeting that we have scheduled after this one that

1 will meet that notification threshold.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: But that would mean
3 notification in terms of Charter Authorizing Panel,
4 you know --

5 MS. BOYD: Yeah. If we're going to try to make
6 a decision -- if you want to call them in, then I'll
7 send them a hearing letter tomorrow.

8 Dr. Hernandez, Jennifer and I are talking about
9 your question. And the law does not allow for
10 putting charter schools in fiscal distress. So
11 usually taking other actions fall under the fiscal
12 distress protocol, which we don't have for charter
13 schools.

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: We do have the ability to
15 withhold funding, and so that's the -- kind of like
16 you said, you guys used to withhold grant money. If
17 they're not getting, you know, funds, then -- I just,
18 you know, wonder about what other -- what we hope to
19 accomplish by having a hearing, and then once we have
20 a hearing, you know, now it's December/January when
21 some action is taken, and meanwhile they're still --
22 we don't know what's going to happen between now and
23 then.

24 MS. DAVIS: I think that -- now I have not seen
25 -- I've only been with the Department a few years --

1 any times where we withheld funding. I think that
2 the difference is because this is a charter, rather
3 than withhold funding, knowing what it does to the
4 students and the operation of that, then we would
5 just revoke their charter, and that's where you come
6 in. So I think that's kind of where we're at because
7 you have the ability to put them on probation, you
8 have the ability to revoke their charter for
9 noncompliance, rather than doing those measures. And
10 I think that's kind of where, you know, it comes
11 before you, because you can modify their charter, you
12 can, you know, require them to come in quarterly with
13 their updated APSCN reports, or whatever it is that
14 you would choose to do to insure compliance before it
15 maybe got to a situation of completely revoking
16 funding, in the event that, you know -- because the
17 students are going to be the ones that are suffering
18 at that point.

19 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Mr. Wilson.

20 MR. WILSON: If we put them on notice of the
21 charter is in danger of being revoked, is that -- if
22 this Panel does that, is that consistent with what
23 the State Board asked us to do? I'm not real clear
24 on what the State Board wants us to do, except
25 straighten it out; right?

1 MS. BOYD: That's a good question, Mr. Wilson.
2 So the State Board wants you to review and then make
3 a decision based on your review; so the decision is
4 up to you about what you want to do at the end of
5 that review. In these situations that you are the
6 Charter Authorizing Panel, action initiated on a
7 charter has to come through you first. So the State
8 Board can't call the charters up themselves; you have
9 to do it initially. So that's why we're doing this;
10 that's why they asked you to review them, because you
11 have to be the initial point of contact.

12 MR. WILSON: To follow-up on what Dr. Hernandez
13 said, I don't want to fool around here and wait till
14 December or January if those people are not in
15 compliance with the requirement of submitting their
16 financial information. It's gone on long enough. So
17 I'd put them on notice they're going to be revoked
18 and set it for a hearing as early as possible, as
19 early as we can.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So you would advocate for
21 a hearing earlier than December?

22 MR. WILSON: If possible, if that's reasonable
23 to do.

24 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think then it would
25 be a matter of trying to set a date where the Panel

1 could convene.

2 MR. WILSON: Well, once they get that demand
3 they'll straighten up pretty quick.

4 MS. BOYD: Currently, you have a meeting
5 scheduled for November 15th, so you could see them
6 then. I don't -- the charter was on the phone at the
7 State Board meeting, so they know the State Board has
8 requested your review, so it shouldn't -- the letter
9 that you send, if you choose to review them,
10 shouldn't be a surprise to them.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So we do have
12 Arkansas Public School Resource Center here and I
13 think Mr. Smith wanted to make a comment. So, we'll
14 let him --

15 MR. SMITH: Yeah, Madam Chair and Members of the
16 Panel, Scott Smith with the APSRC.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Hang on just a minute. He
18 doesn't have to be sworn in?

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

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. Sorry,
21 I just -- I don't know all the rules; I just always
22 like to check.

23 MR. SMITH: You don't want me under oath. Just
24 in response to this issue, just some background
25 information to make you aware -- I can't remember if

1 it was Mr. Rogers or the Commissioner who had made us
2 aware of some of the frustrations on this point.
3 We've reached out to the school. I think they are in
4 the process of getting everything aligned. I think
5 the description by ADE has been accurate to this
6 point about they were running their finances through
7 their parent organization. I think their balances
8 are well in advance of \$1,000, but it didn't show up
9 in the system because of the way they were running
10 their finances. The story I heard, which you know
11 how that goes, is they thought they had approval to
12 do something different -- but we made it clear to
13 them that that's not the fact. So I hope that this
14 issue will be quickly resolved and remedied. I
15 understand the Department's frustration because I
16 think they have had several conversations, so I don't
17 know what the hang-up has been. But we have had that
18 conversation with them.

19 Mr. Hernandez, to your point, you have greater
20 flexibility than the fiscal distress laws under the
21 Charter Act. So you can revoke, modify, take
22 whatever action you want. And I think the 20-day
23 notice will be even quicker than what they
24 anticipated from the State Board hearing, but if
25 you're going to potentially take action on their

1 charter at a minimum you have to give them 20 days
2 notice in order to have that hearing.

3 So I just wanted to give you that background as
4 far as additional conversations that have happened
5 with them. And from what I understand from their
6 conversations, they are quickly moving to try and get
7 in line with what the State requirements are in this
8 area. Now we will be happy to report back further as
9 we try to work them through this process. We got
10 brought into the issue late, again based on
11 conversation with Mr. Rogers, from the Department, or
12 the Commissioner. I can't remember how it came to
13 us.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Are there --

15 MR. SMITH: Any questions or comments?

16 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yes. Are you guys working
17 pretty closely with them right now?

18 MR. SMITH: We haven't been. They have been a
19 member, but I did let me say strenuously enforce the
20 point that this stuff needs to be cleaned up and
21 cleaned up quickly. I think they've got that
22 understanding. And if they don't, I think they
23 understand it's going to be enforced one way or the
24 other. So I do think there was some
25 misunderstanding, but I also think there was some

1 dragging of the feet, for whatever reason, and that's
2 just my opinion. But we'll see where it goes.

3 DR. HERNANDEZ: So they are making efforts that
4 you've seen to get in line with their --

5 MR. SMITH: Either they will or we'll be happy
6 to report back to you one way or the other on this
7 situation.

8 DR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you.

9 MR. SMITH: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any other questions?

11 Okay. So, Panel, it seems that -- well, and so
12 then I was going to ask also: Ms. Boyd, you said this
13 issue came up at the State Board meeting because of a
14 report on -- was it first year charters?

15 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Do we do -- do we get
17 regular reports on that or is it only like just for
18 the first year?

19 MS. BOYD: It's for the first year. It's
20 written in the law as at the end of the first
21 semester and at the end of the second semester.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And this was the
23 only one that --

24 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh. There were only two --

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- raised a red flag?

1 MS. BOYD: Yeah. There were only two. The
2 other one was Future School of Fort Smith, and the
3 Board just voted to approve the report for them.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So the only way the
5 Charter Panel would really have knowledge if there
6 were other charters with financial kind of issues or
7 anything like that would be if the ADE Finance Unit
8 provided an update before the Charter Panel; is that
9 correct?

10 MS. BOYD: That's correct. And we can work with
11 the Finance Department to get that -- to get a
12 summary report on how the charters -- all the
13 charters are operating financially, if you'd like
14 that.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Dr. Hernandez.

16 DR. HERNANDEZ: I don't have a motion; I just
17 have maybe a question that may turn into a motion.
18 But is it possible that we can request a hearing that
19 is kind of two-fold: one is that we're requesting a
20 hearing that we may take action, but if it's reported
21 back to us by our Finance Office that they are being
22 compliant with that information, then that hearing
23 will then turn into a bucket review meeting as
24 opposed to something we may take action on?

25 MS. BOYD: Yeah. Well, one of the actions you

1 can take is to take no action. So if they become
2 compliant between now and then, then it could be a
3 very short meeting.

4 MR. SMITH: Would they have the opportunity to
5 submit information to the Department prior to that
6 hearing, if the hearing is necessary?

7 MS. BOYD: So the question is if they'll have
8 opportunity to submit information to the Department
9 before the meeting, of course. So if you all make a
10 decision to review the school we'll ask you at this
11 time to tell us what it is you want to see from the
12 school and what you want to see from the Department
13 so that we'll have all that information prepared and
14 put on the agenda prior to your meeting. And that
15 will be put in the hearing letter; it will be spelled
16 out in the hearing letter what they need.

17 DR. HERNANDEZ: I have a question. I think that
18 could be a possibility, but the concern I would have
19 is the State Board asked us to do a review. And so
20 would that be -- would that report be given to us in
21 a timely manner, that maybe before the November State
22 Board meeting that that information could be shared
23 and addressed to see if we do need to continue on
24 with the hearing or not? That would be the -- I hate
25 to say no, we're not -- they can provide us with

1 information and we say no hearing, but the State
2 Board asked us to, and so us not carrying out those
3 wishes might be problematic.

4 MS. BOYD: So the State Board meets on the 9th
5 of November and we would want to give the school as
6 much time as possible to give us the information that
7 we request. And so I typically upload the agenda --
8 it would be Friday, November 3rd where I would
9 typically upload the agenda. So it would be November
10 3rd and then the State Board meets November 9th. I
11 don't -- I think if you set the meeting -- I don't
12 think you can cancel the meeting without having a
13 meeting to say we don't need to have this meeting
14 anymore.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So I think though in terms
16 of if we set the meeting because we have been asked
17 to review, if this Panel has concerns about waiting
18 too long could we go ahead, set the meeting; if
19 things have been corrected, then it is just
20 confirmation of the corrective action that has taken
21 place, what the charter has learned from the process.
22 And then could we also get an update from ADE Finance
23 if there are concerns with other charters and
24 reporting? Could we look at that and whether or not
25 -- provide us with an update so we would know if

1 there are other situations, instead of waiting? Is
2 that something that we could do? It would require us
3 to go ahead and have a November meeting. Is that
4 something that the Panel would wish to hear? Or do
5 we want to just move forward with this one request
6 based on State Board recommendation and --

7 MR. WILSON: Let's fix one thing at a time.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: That is a valid point. So
9 I think that's kind of the decision you all need to
10 think through and --

11 MS. NEWTON: I think that we should have the
12 hearing or meeting based on the request, especially
13 since it falls under the purview of what we're
14 obligated to do as part of our duties. And if it
15 resolves itself, then it resolves itself and maybe it
16 could be canceled or make that determination at that
17 point. But I think it's incumbent upon us,
18 especially with our meeting coming after the State
19 Board, then we have to pass that information on in
20 December. But I don't see how we'd get out of the
21 responsibility to do that, unless we schedule it for
22 December. And we still have a conflict with dates --
23 well, we wouldn't have a conflict with dates then
24 necessarily.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: If we have a meeting in

1 December, we would do it -- we could do it in
2 conjunction with one of the two days of the already
3 scheduled. But then it would be January --

4 MS. DAVIS: Exactly.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- before the State Board
6 would have any information.

7 MS. NEWTON: But the expectation would be that
8 you guys would still be working with them to resolve,
9 so it wouldn't be something that was just lying
10 dormant. But at the same time you'd be working to
11 resolve it and even more time would've then passed to
12 allow them to get into line.

13 MS. DAVIS: And I obviously am not a State Board
14 member, but I think their intent was that if you hear
15 it in November you can report and have any kind of
16 agenda item back to the State Board in December. So
17 that way if action needs to be taken it happens
18 sooner rather than later -- because if not, it does
19 extend it. And so my recommendation is that if you
20 have a meeting in November, even if they submit
21 additional material, that the review would probably
22 consist of not just that you managed to get the
23 information submitted in time but, you know, are
24 there obstacles that are preventing them from doing
25 it and have been or, you know, kind of the bigger

1 picture, and then report back any action or no action
2 that you might have taken to the State Board in
3 December.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Because the budget balance
5 that you mentioned, that was from August; correct?
6 So we would have much more of that information if we
7 hear it.

8 MS. BARNES: That's correct. So it sounds like
9 we'll -- you guys will choose to review. And so once
10 you do that, I'll send them a letter and they'll be
11 coming on November 15th. And then after that, you
12 also want a report on how the other charters are
13 faring financially. That's what I hear.

14 So if you want to review, you have to make a
15 motion and vote.

16 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yeah.

17 DR. WILLIAMS: One question.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

19 DR. WILLIAMS: If we decide to hold a meeting in
20 November, is it possible to move some of the December
21 items to November?

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: No. We're not able to do
23 that. I think we actually have a scheduled date for
24 November; is that correct?

25 MS. BARNES: Yeah. We have a date for November

1 15th. And the items that you're hearing in December
2 are part of the application cycle.

3 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

4 MS. BARNES: They're the renewal applications,
5 so we can't move those up.

6 DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. I was just thinking of one
7 item.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And to come back to what
9 -- the second part of an update from the ADE Finance
10 Office, I don't think we need to just leave it wide
11 open to, you know, anything and everything. I think
12 if we want any updates from ADE Finance, we're going
13 to have to be very clear what that is as far as what
14 we would want them to update us on. And if we're not
15 clear on what that would be, then we would just
16 simply need to focus on the one issue. So that's
17 something in thinking about some of -- if we do have
18 some questions, those are going to have to be things
19 that we submit specifically to Alexandra, if we did
20 want an update from ADE Finance, so --

21 So at this time do we -- would anybody like to
22 make a motion with regards to a review?

23 MR. SMITH: Madam Chair, can I just say one
24 thing on behalf of -- just to be clear, the hearing
25 that's being set up for November --

1 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: You're going to have to
2 step up to the microphone please.

3 MR. SMITH: Just to be clear, as I understand it
4 the hearing that's being set up for November 15th is
5 not just a review. This Panel could revoke, modify,
6 take out the charter, or anything like that. So it
7 is a full revocation hearing with -- obviously, you
8 can do something less than that but, you know, the
9 review -- the report to the State Board may be other
10 than just formality somewhat moot because you could
11 actually take the charter out. So the school --
12 we'll make sure they understand what type of hearing.
13 So I want to be clear on that point.

14 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I think in our motion
15 we would need to be really clear that -- what this is
16 a review of. And if it's a review of the finances,
17 we're going to need to be very clear in terms of what
18 we would expect the charter to come prepared to
19 answer.

20 MR. SMITH: Yes, ma'am, because this is an
21 action on their contract. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes.

23 MR. WILSON: Well, I'll try my motion, and we
24 can fix it. My motion is to notify the school -- I
25 don't know the name of it -- that their charter is in

1 danger of being revoked and set for hearing on
2 November 15th. If in the meantime they produce
3 sufficient financial information to satisfy the ADE
4 Finance Department, and the Finance Department tells
5 us that that's sufficient or satisfactory, then we
6 cancel the hearing.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Ms. Davis, is that an
8 option to do or do we just need to have a motion that
9 we will --

10 MR. WILSON: We give them a drop-dead and a
11 chance to be resurrected.

12 MS. DAVIS: I would recommend that you have the
13 hearing. And, you know, at that point in time ADE
14 Finance can be here and they can present and then you
15 could take no action. I just know, you know, like
16 you don't want them to cram, not that they would; but
17 you don't want them to cram just in time for that
18 deadline but then the issues that are causing these
19 to begin with don't get resolved. And there may be
20 other things that, you know, aren't necessarily
21 reflected on paper. So I would just recommend having
22 a full hearing, period.

23 MR. WILSON: Okay. But I mean it can be a full
24 hearing but it could be real short too.

25 MS. DAVIS: Absolutely.

1 MR. WILSON: Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So --

3 MR. WILSON: Then I'll withdraw my motion or
4 substitute Ms. Davis' language for that, however we
5 get the right --

6 MS. NEWTON: Can I take a try?

7 MR. WILSON: Sure.

8 MS. NEWTON: Okay. I'd like to make a motion to
9 review the virtual school's charter and set it for a
10 hearing to make a full review of the charter.

11 MS. TURNER: Second.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. We have a motion
13 and a second to have a hearing to review Arkansas
14 Connections Academy. So let me ask, I think the
15 motion said a full review. Is a full review
16 different from review of finances and financial
17 operations?

18 MS. BOYD: It could be. I think once you -- if
19 you -- once you guys -- well, I'll let Jennifer -- go
20 ahead. Sorry.

21 MS. DAVIS: I mean, I agree, it could be. But
22 if you are only going to be reviewing financial
23 matters, then I would just say reviewing fully
24 financial. So that way it doesn't lend itself to
25 academic or other kind of operations or curriculum at

1 some point.

2 MS. NEWTON: Well, what's the desires of the
3 Board? Is it financial review? If you'll withdraw
4 your second, I'll amend my motion to be a financial
5 review, if that's sufficient.

6 MS. TURNER: I'll second.

7 MS. NEWTON: So that's my motion for financial
8 review.

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And who was her second?

10 MS. TURNER: I was. Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Second. Okay. So the
12 motion has been made and seconded to conduct a
13 hearing for financial review for Arkansas Connections
14 Academy.

15 All in favor say "aye."

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Any opposed?

18 Okay. So we will have that review on -- Ms.
19 Boyd, you said November 15th?

20 MS. BOYD: Yes, ma'am.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: That time has already been
22 scheduled. Okay. All right.

23 Ms. Boyd, Ms. Davis, is there anything remaining
24 for us to discuss prior to adjourning for lunch?

25 MS. BOYD: Well, I don't think lunch is here

1 yet.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Oh, okay. Adjourning for
3 a break and then our lunch session?

4 MS. BOYD: We need to outline what it is -- what
5 information you want from the charter and what
6 information you want from the Department.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Hang on just a
8 moment. Okay. I'm sorry, go ahead again.

9 MS. BOYD: We need to outline what information
10 you'd like from the Department and what information
11 you'd like from the charter.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Oh, okay. You're talking
13 about with regards to the hearing?

14 MS. BOYD: Yes, ma'am.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. And I'm trying to
16 think in the past how we've done that. We've
17 articulated in the -- have we articulated everything
18 in the meeting or have we done a -- submitted a
19 written information to your office and then you pass
20 that on?

21 MS. BOYD: Yeah. We could do it both ways. You
22 could outline here what you want or if you need more
23 time you can send it -- individually email me with
24 what you want to hear. However, we are under a time
25 constraint so I would like to send the hearing letter

1 out as soon as possible.

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Definitely understand.
3 Since this will be a hearing for a financial review,
4 I think part of it is going to be for us to
5 understand what it is that we're going to need to
6 see, like what are some of the things causing the
7 issues and, you know, the overall -- so I don't know
8 -- I think a good place for us to start, we don't
9 have a copy in front of us of what the State Board
10 had reviewed prior to. So can you go back over it?
11 And we probably need to go ahead and just run through
12 a list right now.

13 MS. BOYD: So what -- I'm looking at the --
14 sorry. I'm looking at the State Board agenda from --
15 I'm trying to see. Hold on. I think it's from
16 September, and it was on the Consent Agenda; it was
17 pulled off. And they have the board report, they
18 have the monthly enrollment count, and I think that's
19 all they have but let me double-check.

20 Okay. So what they had is from the September
21 meeting. They have July 2017 initial year open-
22 enrollment report, information provided by ADE, and
23 then the detailed fund balance. So we -- in their
24 first year we keep up with how many students they
25 have month-by-month, so they have that information.

1 And then they have the board report, which
2 demonstrates the major categories of spending and
3 funding and ending fund balance that showed \$1,000.
4 And then they had information from the State, a
5 notice that kind of detailed how much money they were
6 given from -- that the State gave to them.

7 So it was just those three items.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: So as far as us coming up
9 -- so, Ms. Boyd, I think right now we probably need
10 to take a break. I think we're starting --

11 MS. BOYD: Yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- to kind of drift off
13 here for a minute. So we're going to probably need
14 to take a break and when we come back from the break,
15 if we could -- we can discuss this item and then
16 discuss how we need to proceed to be sure that this
17 school and the ADE Finance Office is going to have a
18 good list of what all we're going to need.

19 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: I know we have a work
21 session for later, but we don't want to adjourn this
22 part until after we've fully completely everything.

23 So what's our schedule like right now in terms
24 of lunch?

25 MS. BOYD: Yeah. It's 11:30 now. Lunch is

1 supposed to be here at noon. So if you guys -- if
2 you want to take like a break and then come back and
3 we can close this up and then go to lunch. Does that
4 sound good?

5 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Yes. Let's do that.

6 Okay. Let's take a 10-minute break.

7 MS. BOYD: Thank you.

8 (BREAK: 11:30 - 11:45 A.M.)

9 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So, Ms. Boyd, we
10 were going to provide feedback on the kind of
11 information that we're going to want on the day of
12 the 15th for the review.

13 MS. BOYD: Yes. And, Dr. Pfeffer, I think I may
14 be able to help a little bit. We spoke with ADE
15 Finance who made some suggestions. I'd like to
16 present those to you.

17 From the charter we would like to see the cash-
18 flow documents and bank reconciliation reports, which
19 we've been asking from all charters. So we just want
20 to make sure that those are up-to-date for them and
21 get those from the school. Also, we would like a
22 board report detailing the liabilities and the
23 correlation with accounts payable. Their audit is
24 currently under -- it's going through right now, and
25 so we would like just general comments of how that

1 audit process is going. And then they make a big --

2 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Can I interrupt a minute?

3 Okay. You said their audit, they're undergoing an
4 audit right now?

5 MS. BOYD: Right now. Uh-huh.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Is that a Leg Audit
7 or is that an internal -- or a private auditor that
8 they use?

9 MS. BOYD: I do believe they use a private
10 auditor.

11 And then we -- they make a big payment to the
12 parent company and we would like an itemized -- we
13 would like those payments to be itemized, the big
14 chunk they've paid in the past, what they're actually
15 paying for.

16 And then from the ADE, we'll provide the
17 information that the State Board saw and we'll
18 provide an updated board report. And then we'll also
19 ask Cyndi Smith and Talea Causey [ps] to be present
20 at the meeting.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. Panel Members,
22 questions or additions?

23 DR. HERNANDEZ: I have a question on the
24 itemized part of the charter management organization
25 stuff. Is that something that we ask for from other

1 charters and they've given it to us, or has there
2 been some --

3 MS. BOYD: Right. So typically we ask for it in
4 the application process. So if they put in their
5 budget that they're going to make a payment to a
6 management company we ask them to itemize that. But,
7 you know, of course, that's just a projection, an
8 estimate. So this would be a follow-up to what we
9 asked them during the application process.

10 DR. HERNANDEZ: Did they provide it in the
11 application process?

12 MS. BOYD: I can't remember how much detail they
13 gave. But I know they did respond to our request,
14 but I can't speak to what the --

15 DR. HERNANDEZ: So we're just asking for an
16 updated version of that really?

17 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Dr. Owoh.

19 DR. OWOH: If we move forward with asking for
20 that itemized budget, is it possible for -- are we
21 line to ask for the types of services that their
22 parent organization provides?

23 MS. BOYD: I think that's what we're trying to
24 uncover in asking them to itemize that payment, is,
25 you know, was it for back office, was it for PD, was

1 it for -- you know, what was it for.

2 MS. DAVIS: I just want to say that we have
3 typically asked for it, I know as of recently, to a
4 lot of charters to find out, you know, what kind of
5 services are being provided. And I think with this
6 particular one they -- because they were using their
7 parent system, which is part of this problem, they
8 kind of log one payment in and one payment out, and
9 so really knowing what all of that is for -- because
10 they have all that itemized in their parent system
11 and we don't have access to that. So it's a little
12 bit even more so than the traditional, you know,
13 model that the other schools do. But we ask for that
14 regularly.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Anyone else have anything
16 to request?

17 MR. WILSON: And what does our motion need to
18 be, if we already --

19 MS. BOYD: Oh, we don't need a motion. You've
20 already made your motion to review.

21 MR. WILSON: Okay.

22 MS. BOYD: This is just outlining what you
23 expect to see on November 15th from the Department
24 and from the charter.

25 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I would -- and also it

1 would probably be good to kind of know what training
2 they have had in terms of our reporting systems and
3 requirements and any clarification on any training
4 they might need, so --

5 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And I don't know whether
7 our office would want to provide any information
8 related to that, as well.

9 MS. BOYD: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Or recommendations.

11 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. All right. So, Ms.
13 Boyd, you'll send this information to them?

14 MS. BOYD: Uh-huh.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Is there anything else you
16 need from us regarding this?

17 MS. BOYD: No, ma'am.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Okay. So is there
19 anything remaining then --

20 MS. BOYD: No, ma'am.

21 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: -- in terms of our action
22 agenda?

23 So our next meeting -- we do have our work
24 session this afternoon. So in a moment we'll adjourn
25 for lunch and come back for the work session.

1 So our next meeting will be on November 15th at
2 this location.

3 MS. BOYD: Yes, ma'am.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: And what time will we
5 start?

6 MS. BOYD: At 8:30.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: At 8:30 a.m.

8 Okay. All right. Well, if there's no other
9 items then we will adjourn. Do I have a motion to
10 adjourn?

11 DR. WILLIAMS: So moved.

12 DR. OWOH: Second.

13 CHAIRPERSON PFEFFER: Motion and a second to
14 adjourn.

15 We will adjourn and let's come back at -- would
16 you all -- if we have lunch delivered at noon, can we
17 come back at 12:30?

18 Okay. We are adjourned and we'll return at 11
19 -- at 12:30 -- excuse me -- 12:30 for our work
20 session. Thank you.

21
22 (The meeting was adjourned at 11:54 a.m.)

23

24

25

1

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