

**In The Matter Of:**

*DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION*

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*March 12, 2020*

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ARKANSAS DIVISION OF  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

MARCH 12, 2020  
10:00 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. DIANE ZOOK, Chairman  
MS. CHARISSE DEAN, Vice Chairman  
MS. OUIDA NEWTON  
DR. FITZGERALD HILL  
DR. SARAH MOORE  
MS. SUSAN CHAMBERS  
MS. KATHY McFETRIDGE (via phone)  
MR. BRETT WILLIAMSON (via phone)

NON-VOTING MEMBERS:

MR. JOHNNY KEY, Secretary of Education  
MS. STACEY McADOO, Arkansas Teacher of the Year

DESE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. LORI FRENO	General Counsel
MS. MARY CLAIRE HYATT	Attorney
MS. JENNIFER LINK	Attorney

LOCATION:

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
- Auditorium  
#4 Capitol Mall  
Little Rock, AR 72201

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E X H I B I T S

A-8: SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL  
EXHIBIT ONE (1)  
Transition Plan

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 A-1: CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF NOMINATED  
3 MEMBERS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE STANDARDS BOARD

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: The first agenda item is a PLSB  
5 case and Karli Saracini will come to the podium.

6 I also will mention I wiped down everything this  
7 morning before we came. But I also -- if you feel  
8 more comfortable, if you're going to be speaking, I  
9 have some wipes up here that you're more than happy  
10 to -- that I'll give -- I won't loan them to you, I  
11 will give them to you, if you want to feel more  
12 comfortable and safer about that.

13 Okay. Ms. Saracini.

14 MS. SARACINI: Karli Saracini, Assistant  
15 Commission for Educator Effectiveness.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I'm not sure if your microphone  
17 is on or if you're not close enough.

18 MS. SARACINI: Can you hear me now?

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: A little better.

20 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: That's better. Yes.

22 MS. SARACINI: All right. Karli Saracini,  
23 Assistant Commissioner for Educator Effectiveness and  
24 Licensure.

25 And before you is a request for approval for a

1 nominated member for the Professional Licensure  
2 Standards Board to replace another member who  
3 retired, and this is a teaching position. And it's  
4 Hosea Born, and he is a middle level educator, 7th  
5 grade math teacher from Hope, Arkansas. And you need  
6 to know that we've replaced -- we have to have so  
7 many teachers, classroom teachers; so he is replacing  
8 a classroom teacher.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I think my only concern about  
10 that is it's my understanding they have those  
11 hearings during the workday, which pulls that teacher  
12 out of the classroom. And sort of my thing for the  
13 years I've been on the State Board is doing as little  
14 as possible to -- when we can to keep from pulling  
15 teachers out of the classroom, because the kids need  
16 them there. So, but if you have to have so many --  
17 and I don't know if people would be willing to do it  
18 on the weekend and summers or not, but --

19 MS. SARACINI: It makes it very constrained if  
20 we --

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Right.

22 MS. SARACINI: -- had to go outside the  
23 workweek.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Right.

25 MS. NEWTON: I have one question.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Newton.

2 MS. NEWTON: One question. One of the things  
3 that we talked about the last meeting was trying to  
4 develop some consistency on cases and consequences as  
5 far as across-the-board. And I know members coming  
6 on and off the Board, sometimes that's difficult to  
7 do. And one of the things that I discussed with Dr.  
8 Pfeffer and something that we do sometimes on testing  
9 -- standardized testing is just kind of some base  
10 setting, doing some practice cases and just kind of  
11 going through that training period. What kind of  
12 training are y'all doing with new members as they  
13 come on?

14 MS. SARACINI: Well, we discussed that at the  
15 PLSB full board meeting last Friday about new members  
16 and having training, and even making sure that we  
17 kind of set that baseline, kind of calibrate.

18 MS. NEWTON: Yes.

19 MS. SARACINI: And even they talked about even  
20 asking for maybe a joint session with the State  
21 Board.

22 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So that's something that's  
23 on the radar?

24 MS. SARACINI: Uh-huh. Yes, it is on the radar.  
25 And they are going to give me a proposal probably

1 within the next week or two.

2 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Good.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We would be receptive to that.

4 MS. NEWTON: Yes, very.

5 MS. SARACINI: Because we talked about -- when I  
6 was here last time as director of Licensure, we did  
7 have a joint session, work session. And so we know  
8 that new board members of State Board maybe --

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Right.

10 MS. SARACINI: -- they haven't had that training  
11 as well. So we wanted to see when we could maybe do  
12 it jointly as well.

13 MS. NEWTON: That way, we could all get on the  
14 same page --

15 MS. SARACINI: Yes, ma'am.

16 MS. NEWTON: -- and start having some  
17 consistency. I think that would be awesome.

18 MS. SARACINI: Yes.

19 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

20 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Chambers.

22 MS. CHAMBERS: Just a quick question. This is  
23 just through the end of June this year for this  
24 particular person. Is that right?

25 MS. SARACINI: It will be -- yes.

1 MS. CHAMBERS: How long is the normal term?

2 MS. SARACINI: The normal term, there isn't --

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Mr. James might --

4 MS. SARACINI: Yes. Eric, come right on up.

5 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Mr. James comes to the  
6 podium and whispers to Ms. Saracini.)

7 MS. SARACINI: It is three years.

8 MS. CHAMBERS: And it's staggered?

9 MS. SARACINI: Yes, it's staggered, unless  
10 someone retires. And this person actually retired  
11 before her term was up.

12 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Anything else?

14 May I have a motion?

15 MS. NEWTON: Move to approve.

16 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Newton, second by  
18 Ms. Chambers.

19 All in favor?

20 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

22 A-2: CONSIDERATION OF SUSPENSION OF TEACHING LICENSE FOR  
23 NONPAYMENT OF FINES - CASE #20-02, KYLE KEMPF

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: The next is a Consideration of  
25 Suspension of a Teacher's License for Nonpayment of

1 Fines, and Ms. Link will help us with that.

2 MS. LINK: Good morning.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Good morning.

4 MS. LINK: Jennifer Link, attorney for Educator  
5 Effectiveness and Licensure.

6 Do you all need the packet?

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Could you come closer?

8 MS. LINK: Sorry.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: The reason I keep asking people  
10 on the -- to come to the microphone is not only so  
11 you can hear it, but we're being live-streamed and  
12 the people sometimes have trouble hearing us if we  
13 don't get real close to it. Excuse me for  
14 interrupting.

15 MS. LINK: No problem. Jennifer Link, attorney  
16 for Educator Effectiveness and Licensure.

17 Do you all need the packet?

18 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Does anybody need anything?  
19 Some of -- all of this was sent to us by email and  
20 just wanted to see if anybody needs a copy to refresh  
21 themselves.

22 Okay. Go ahead.

23 MS. LINK: I'm here today for you to consider  
24 the suspension of the teaching license of Kyle Kempf.  
25 If Mr. Kempf is present, I ask that he come forward.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Is the Educator or  
2 representative of the Educator in the room?

3 Ms. Freno is checking outside.

4 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Ms. Freno called the  
5 hall.)

6 MS. FRENO: No.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No.

8 MS. LINK: So I will quickly address the  
9 underlying basis for the consider- -- for the  
10 recommendation of suspension.

11 Mr. Kempf's standard teaching license expired  
12 December 31, 2019. He has an outstanding fine of  
13 \$200, as ordered by the State Board of Education on  
14 July 11, 2019. Mr. Kempf has not responded to any  
15 collection attempts. DESE staff respectfully  
16 requests the suspension of Mr. Kempf's license until  
17 the fine is paid.

18 Do you have any questions?

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Anybody?

20 Do I have a motion?

21 DR. MOORE: Motion to approve.

22 MS. DEAN: Second.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Motion to approve by Dr. Moore,  
24 second by Ms. Dean.

25 All those in favor?

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(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

Thank you, Ms. Link.

MS. LINK: Thank you.

A-3: PETITION FOR CLOSURE OF ISOLATED SCHOOL - HARMONY GROVE  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Next -- and I'll remind you --  
no one signed up ahead of time, like yesterday, to  
speak, but we do have some people who signed up  
today. So we'll need a motion and a second and a  
vote to see whether or not the Board wants to hear  
public comment during this session.

MS. NEWTON: I move to hear public comment.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Newton moved to hear.

DR. HILL: Second.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Dr. Hill.

All those in favor?

(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

Okay. Thank you.

All right. Ms. Freno, will you come and remind  
us?

MS. FRENO: Thank you. Lori Freno, Division of  
Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Harmony Grove School District has -- seeks

1 to close its Sparkman K-12 campus, which is an  
2 isolated school as defined under Arkansas law. The  
3 Arkansas Code Annotated 6-20-602 affords two  
4 different ways that an isolated school can be closed:  
5 either by a unanimous vote of the local board of  
6 directors or, if it's not unanimous, if it is  
7 approved by the majority of the State Board of  
8 Education. In the present case, the majority of  
9 Harmony Grove -- of the Harmony Grove Board of  
10 Directors voted to close it, but it was not  
11 unanimous; it was only 5-2. That is why this is  
12 before you-all today.

13 A local board of directors must file a -- a  
14 local board of directors that wants to close an  
15 isolated campus must file a petition within 30 days  
16 prior to a State Board meeting where they're asking  
17 for the State Board to consider the matter. In this  
18 case, the Harmony Grove School District has filed  
19 that petition and it is before you today.

20 This Board has the authority to approve or  
21 disapprove the petition, but only shall approve the  
22 petition if it finds that the closure will be in the  
23 best interest of the students in the school district  
24 as a whole and that the closure will not have any  
25 negative impact on desegregation efforts or that it

1 will not violate any federal court -- valid federal  
2 court orders. And, again, the Harmony Grove School  
3 District has filed a timely petition and has  
4 requested a hearing before this Board.

5 And if I may, I will go over the hearing  
6 procedures at this time.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Please.

8 MS. FRENO: All persons wishing to testify  
9 should be placed under oath. That does not include  
10 the lawyers; just non-lawyers. The spokesperson for  
11 the petitioning school district shall have a total of  
12 15 minutes to present the school district's remarks.  
13 The State Board may allow more than 15 minutes if it  
14 deems necessary. The spokesperson for any individual  
15 or group of citizens that opposes the petition shall  
16 have a total of 15 minutes to present the remarks of  
17 the individual or group of citizens. The State Board  
18 may allow more than 15 minutes, if it deems  
19 necessary. The spokespersons for the petitioning  
20 school district shall have a total of 5 minutes to  
21 present closing remarks, which may be extended. And,  
22 likewise, the -- any -- oh, no -- the spokesperson  
23 for the petitioning school district shall have a  
24 total of 5 minutes to present closing remarks, and  
25 the State Board may grant additional time, as

1 necessary. After that, the Board deliberates upon  
2 the matter and will either approve or deny the  
3 school's petition. If it deems necessary, the State  
4 Board may take the matter under advisement and  
5 announce its decision at a later date, provided that  
6 all discussions, deliberations, and votes upon the  
7 matter take place in a public hearing.

8 And if no one has any questions, I will then  
9 turn it over to the petitioning district.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And before you do that, I  
11 want to make sure that the people who have signed up  
12 know that their time is not within that 15 minutes.  
13 That will be after both sides present their case and  
14 before we make a final vote on this decision, if we  
15 make one today, so --

16 MS. FRENO: That is correct, Ms. Zook.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And I also want to  
18 acknowledge as we always appreciate our  
19 Representatives and Senators for being here. We have  
20 Representative Womack and Vaught, and also Senator  
21 Maloch, and we do appreciate you being here. And if  
22 I have overlooked an elected official at the  
23 Legislature, please motion to me and I'll try to  
24 acknowledge you as well.

25 MS. FRENO: Okay. Any other questions?

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Is everyone ready? And anybody  
2 have any questions of Ms. Freno?

3 Thank you.

4 Okay. Be sure and identify yourself.

5 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And I need to swear you  
7 in -- and anyone else who plans to give testimony  
8 needs to stand, raise your right hand. Do you swear  
9 or affirm that the testimony you're about to give  
10 shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
11 the truth?

12 (SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

14 CASE BY THE PETITIONING DISTRICT

15 SUPT. SNOW: All right. My name is Albert Snow.  
16 I'm the Superintendent of Education of the Harmony  
17 Grove School District, outside of Camden, Arkansas.

18 I'm here today to petition the State Board to  
19 close the Sparkman K-12 campus.

20 I've only been onboard as superintendent since  
21 July of 2019 -- no, excuse me -- July of 2018; so  
22 I've been there a year and eight months now.

23 I started this process last year, in the fall.  
24 I had went up to Sparkman and had a meeting with the  
25 faculty up there. I told them there were three main

1 issues with the Sparkman campus: test scores -- and I  
2 also told them two of them they didn't really have a  
3 lot of control over. Test scores was the first one,  
4 and that was something that they could control; the  
5 second one was enrollment; and the third was teacher  
6 retention. Didn't get -- you'll hear a lot about the  
7 finances, and there was a good bit of that in your --  
8 in the petition packet that you received. That was  
9 not my main concern when I started this.

10 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Supt. Snow picks up the  
11 remote to begin his PowerPoint presentation.)

12 All right. Somebody might have to show me which  
13 one of these -- there we go.

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: There you go.

15 SUPT. SNOW: All right. My main concern when we  
16 started this was the state of academics at the  
17 Sparkman campus. As you can see here, for the last  
18 three years Sparkman Elementary had an F report card  
19 for two years -- an F report card at the elementary  
20 school. Sparkman High School has had a D for the  
21 past three years. This is the very definition of a  
22 failing school. They'd had two F's in a row when I  
23 took over. Okay. I went up to the campus and talked  
24 to the faculty about what they needed to do with  
25 these issues and I made a commitment to help the

1 Sparkman campus as much as possible as long as I was  
2 superintendent of a school district, and I will  
3 continue to do so. I took advantage of every  
4 specialist that I could, worked in conjunction with  
5 the co-op. They have math, science, literacy  
6 specialists that we were able to use just for the  
7 price of being in their consortium; so it didn't cost  
8 us a great deal of money. I also contracted with  
9 E2E, a consultant firm that I'd used when I was the  
10 superintendent at Fordyce -- and, of course, that  
11 cost a good bit of money. I made a commitment to  
12 give them help. Okay. They did raise their test  
13 scores to a C in one year. They got an award from  
14 OEP, from the University of Arkansas, for Bridging  
15 the Gap and they are to be commended for that.  
16 That's true. I am not sure -- well, the high school  
17 -- and I'll talk more about it in a little bit -- has  
18 made no progress in three years, and that's mostly  
19 due to the situation at the high school, and I'll get  
20 into that further.

21 As you can see there, Harmony Grove Elementary  
22 and Harmony Grove High School, we've been at a B  
23 level for years, okay, and we're constantly striving  
24 there to get to the A level. A couple of those years  
25 we missed being an A by a handful of points, so

1 there's nothing wrong with the academics at the  
2 Harmony Grove campus.

3 Now the public comments and probably from the  
4 response to me, the official response you'll hear --  
5 mostly what you hear is about the finances, how they  
6 don't think our figures are right. They're saying we  
7 do things wrong, we're misusing money. You'll hear  
8 about the Dallas County money. One thing I want to  
9 make sure the Board understands is Sparkman was  
10 consolidated 15 years ago. There's not been a  
11 Sparkman School District in 15 years. So to separate  
12 Dallas County money is really not germane to this  
13 process. There's Harmony Grove money and taxes and  
14 so-on.

15 When you hear public comments, I'm sure you're  
16 going to hear a lot of very passionate people. No  
17 one wants to lose their community school, and I  
18 appreciate that. Okay. I think some of this -- I  
19 would've liked to have seen all this passion when we  
20 had an F grade at the elementary two years in a row  
21 -- okay -- and not a lot of schools in the state will  
22 get that kind of grade.

23 The other -- another issue that we talked about  
24 was declining enrollment, okay, and that's one of the  
25 things teachers don't have a whole lot of control

1 over. These figures are from March 6, for the past  
2 three years. Okay. The figure I used for the 33 up  
3 there -- the first year that I took over -- after 10  
4 days we drop all the no-shows. There were 142  
5 students at the Sparkman campus in August of 2018.  
6 Today, as of this morning there are 108 students at  
7 the Sparkman campus. That's 34 students from a year  
8 and eight months. Okay. That's a huge problem, and  
9 that's where -- and if you'll look back, it's going  
10 down every year. That's not something that's unusual  
11 to Sparkman and Harmony Grove district. Okay.  
12 That's all over south Arkansas. There's a lot of  
13 schools with the same problem. But that's where the  
14 financial end raised its head. Okay. You can't lose  
15 34 students in a year and remain financially viable.  
16 Okay. It started with me talking about this with  
17 academics. Now, finance is a big question here.

18 Okay. Now they will argue that 20 of them came  
19 to the Harmony Grove campus, and that's true. Okay.  
20 My question there is why are the students leaving the  
21 Sparkman campus and coming to the Harmony Grove  
22 campus. I think that's a sign that they're looking  
23 for a better quality education, which can be provided  
24 there. They will say differently. Okay. They'll  
25 say -- one of the interrogatories we got wanted to

1 know how much money we'd spent on recruiting students  
2 from Sparkman. The answer was, "Zero." We don't  
3 actively recruit students to Sparkman. Yes, we have  
4 things that they don't have on the Sparkman campus;  
5 sports is one. A lot of people -- people that do  
6 come down even now, some of them come to play sports.  
7 We also have more academic opportunities. But like I  
8 said, I'll discuss the high school again in a minute.

9 The other problem that I originally talked about  
10 was teacher retention. All right. That doesn't look  
11 too bad, the numbers there. But when you look at 15  
12 certified positions -- the year I came onboard, '18-  
13 19, there were five new-hires in the certified  
14 positions. That's a third of the faculty. That's  
15 why -- one of the reasons was no continuity with the  
16 teaching staff and it makes it hard to keep up  
17 academic standards when you're constantly bringing  
18 new-hires in. And I've been in schools like these  
19 before, my previous school. We hire teachers every  
20 year. We hire people from Henderson State,  
21 Arkadelphia, and they come in and get a year or two  
22 of experience, and then they go back home. Hot  
23 Springs -- okay, Hot Springs has got a whole lot more  
24 to offer than Fordyce, Arkansas, or Sparkman,  
25 Arkansas. So what we become is a training ground for

1 other people's schools. We lost four this year.  
2 Now, that's -- I did add a new position. We had a  
3 music teacher retire and I added another elementary  
4 position to do away with a blended class. We had 3rd  
5 and 4th grade in the same class, which is not a good  
6 situation. I'm going to have to do more of that if  
7 the Board chooses to keep it open. I'm going to have  
8 to cut finances somewhere and that would be one of  
9 the places that I would start.

10 All right. Let's talk about the financial  
11 issue. In all the material you've seen from the  
12 Sparkman faction, I don't think they say anything  
13 about the pay raises coming down the pike. We've  
14 been fortunate at Harmony Grove that our pay scale  
15 was above the state minimum. Legislature has  
16 mandated it be raised to \$36,000 for -- in four  
17 years. Now we've been fortunate. Okay. We've been  
18 fortunate that we've had above that. All right.  
19 For the next two years, we're going to have to raise  
20 the pay scale \$1,000 a time. Okay. The State will  
21 give us money for that for two years, and then it  
22 goes away. Okay. You all heard about the \$60  
23 million that they allocated for the teacher pay  
24 raises. That goes away in the fifth year. Okay.  
25 Harmony Grove is not going to be the only school

1 district with financial problems because of that pay  
2 raise. It's kind of like the perfect storm here.  
3 The minimum wage increase is going up as well.

4 We -- I talked to Cindy Smith at the Department  
5 of Fiscal Services. She may be in the audience  
6 tonight. She had a letter that was in my petition  
7 saying that she agreed with the figures. Her words  
8 were, "Harmony Grove is a stable school district  
9 financially right now. But there are glaring issues  
10 that must be addressed with the finances." Okay. I  
11 know how that works. As soon as you get a little  
12 drop in your legal balance, Fiscal Services wants to  
13 know what's going on; "You're in early stage alert,  
14 fiscal distress." Okay. It's my job as  
15 superintendent to see that Harmony Grove never gets  
16 there -- okay -- never gets to early  
17 intervention/fiscal distress. And you will hear the  
18 Sparkman faction say, "He's not taking in the  
19 students in Sparkman into consideration." Yes, I am.  
20 I'm taking all of the kids in our school district  
21 into consideration. Okay. We probably have 70  
22 students already from Sparkman that go to our campus  
23 every day.

24 All right. My time is running out.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You have two-and-a-half minutes.

1 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. This just speaks to the  
2 efficiency of the school -- school district.  
3 Sparkman Elementary -- and I think this is a powerful  
4 slide -- Sparkman Elementary has 56 students in K-6,  
5 with seven teachers. Second grade at Harmony Grove  
6 Elementary has 69 students in 2nd grade with three  
7 teachers. We've got over 75 in 6th grade, with three  
8 teachers. The average class size at Sparkman  
9 Elementary is eight; average class size in Harmony  
10 Grove Elementary is 19. You can see that that's not  
11 a very efficient allocation of resources. Sparkman  
12 people will say, "Oh, we love the small classes."  
13 Well, we do; everybody does. Okay. But we can't  
14 have that at Harmony Grove. We don't need to have it  
15 at Sparkman either.

16 Another thing you'll hear is the students --  
17 well, this is the difference. We're spending more --  
18 almost \$2800 more per student to educate students at  
19 the Sparkman campus than on students at the Harmony  
20 Grove campus. Again, that's not sustainable for the  
21 finances of the district.

22 You will hear that Sparkman students will be on  
23 the bus for two hours. That's not going to happen.  
24 Okay. If you know geography in south Arkansas, you  
25 can get to Little Rock in two hours. Okay. We've

1 plotted it out, Google Maps. The farthest household  
2 in the Harmony Grove district is 41 minutes from the  
3 Sparkman campus. Okay. Now that's driving in your  
4 car; a bus route is going to be longer than that.  
5 We've been working since this started to figure out  
6 the bus routes. Okay. You'll hear that we have no  
7 plan. I don't have one on paper, but this discussion  
8 has been going on. We do have all the houses plotted  
9 out. This discussion --

10 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

11 SUPT. SNOW: -- has been going on.

12 All right.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You'll have 5 extra minutes at  
14 the end.

15 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

17 SUPT. SNOW: All right.

18 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Supt. Snow tries to  
19 turn off the PowerPoint.)

20 SUPT. SNOW: Well, there we go. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

22 CASE BY THE OPPOSITION

23 MR. ASKEW: I'm Jess Askew for the Opponents who  
24 are from Sparkman.

25 The Harmony Grove District has the privilege and

1 the duty to provide a fair and adequate education to  
2 the children from Clark County and Dallas County, as  
3 well as Ouachita County. And that duty includes  
4 special money for isolated schools and protections  
5 for isolated schools. And we have to have isolated  
6 schools protected to prevent the creation of  
7 education deserts in locations and places in our  
8 state. If we have a place without a school  
9 available, then we don't have adequate education,  
10 unless we start using helicopters to transport  
11 children to schools. We have to keep isolated  
12 schools open. That's what the law requires, the  
13 constitution requires.

14 Harmony Grove does not account for the \$300,000  
15 that we noted. That's the difference between the  
16 isolated money that it receives and what it has  
17 reported in Dr. Hill's -- Norman Hill's numbers.  
18 Harmony Grove does not account for the \$365,000 every  
19 year it receives in tax money above URT from Clark  
20 County and Dallas County. It punishes Sparkman on  
21 this enrollment issue, while admitting that 70  
22 students from Sparkman who could cure that problem  
23 are at Harmony Grove. I did not hear a single  
24 reference to isolated schools from Dr. Snow -- not a  
25 single one. Finances, sure. Performance, sure. But

1           this is a special situation for an isolated school;  
2           it's in the best interest of all the children in the  
3           school district -- I did not hear that. He talks  
4           about things that adults and administrators worry  
5           about: money, convenience to adults. Well, we know  
6           that when administrators start talking about making  
7           their lives easier, they may not be rising to the  
8           challenge that is required to meet the best interest  
9           of our students and our children. It requires  
10          creativity, it requires courage, and it requires new  
11          efforts. Certainly, I hear Harmony Grove equals "us"  
12          and "we." I heard this several times, "we at Harmony  
13          Grove," "our people," "our teachers." And then I  
14          heard Sparkman, "they," "them." What Dr. Snow has  
15          done is impeach his management of his district and  
16          the resources that Harmony Grove has given and  
17          applied at Sparkman. That is not a basis to wipe out  
18          an isolated school and create an education desert.

19                 You'll hear from Mrs. Walker, a retired teacher;  
20                 you will hear from Mrs. Taylor, who's got a creative  
21                 plan for keeping the Sparkman school open; and you  
22                 will hear from Senator Maloch, who will talk about  
23                 isolated schools from his perspective in the General  
24                 Assembly. We will take questions at the end, if you  
25                 wish. Thank you.

1 MRS. WALKER: Thanks to the Little Rock School  
2 Board of Education for my allotted time to speak on  
3 behalf of Sparkman Schools. For thirty --

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. If you will identify  
5 yourself.

6 MRS. WALKER: For 39 years --

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: If you will identify yourself.

8 MRS. WALKER: Okay. I'm Bobbie Walker. Yes, I  
9 thought I said that.

10 On January 16, 2020, the Harmony Grove School  
11 Board voted 5-to-2 to close the Sparkman School in  
12 Dallas County and bus its students to the Harmony  
13 Grove campus in Ouachita County. Our community is  
14 asking for your help in preventing this closure.

15 In every small town, the school is the heart of  
16 every community. Friday night ballgames, athletic  
17 banquets, homecoming activities are a few of the  
18 events that once brought our community together.  
19 Without a vision the people perish, and without a  
20 school the community loses its identity.

21 We have always been a small school, but we have  
22 received recognition academically and athletically.  
23 Most important, even though we are small in size and  
24 low on resources we've put out some extraordinary  
25 fine young people who've gone on to make important

1 contributions in the fields of education, medicine,  
2 law, business, journalism, various trades, and the  
3 list goes on. Great things have been and can  
4 continue to be accomplished in a small school.

5 One big concern and pressing problem our  
6 students will encounter if our school is closed is  
7 that some of our students will be on the bus for two  
8 hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon,  
9 leaving home in the dark and returning home in the  
10 dark during the winter months; getting up and getting  
11 dressed at 5:00 a.m. to ride a school bus leaving at  
12 6:00 a.m. According to a national sleep study,  
13 children ages 5 through 10 need nine to ten hours of  
14 sleep. To each of you, imagine putting your child or  
15 your grandchild on a bus at 6:00 a.m. and riding the  
16 bus for two hours. For some, a need to use the  
17 bathroom; many deprived of enough sleep to function  
18 successfully or academically and to pay full  
19 attention in class.

20 In addition to a long bus ride twice a day, the  
21 youngest of our students do not need to be so far  
22 from their parents in case of an emergency and  
23 there's a need to be picked up in a hurry. We have  
24 special needs students. Many are on medication and  
25 many depend on the school to help with their

1 medication, causing some to be forced into a  
2 difficult medical schedule that may affect their  
3 medical needs.

4 Our teachers are doing a fantastic job. This  
5 school year our elementary students ranked second in  
6 the state for academic growth. Also, earlier this  
7 year, our high school students received recognition  
8 from the Office for Education Policy at the  
9 University of Arkansas for Beating the Odds in math,  
10 Beating the Odds overall, and Beating the Odds in  
11 ELA. In a study on rethinking the school closure,  
12 Mara Casey Tieken, Associate Professor of Education,  
13 has done a study on the negative short-term impact of  
14 school closure on students. The evidence is well-  
15 documented; students' test scores and grade-point  
16 average tend to fall in the year before and  
17 immediately after closure. Socially, closure can  
18 disrupt students' relationship with peers and  
19 teachers and lead to students' confusion, depression,  
20 an increase in absenteeism, and parental involvement  
21 decrease. Psychological affects on our students is  
22 another major concern. For several years now, the  
23 threat of closure has hung over the heads of both the  
24 faculty and the student body of the Sparkman School.  
25 This has led to low morale on campus and resulted in

1 the slow migration of our students to neighboring  
2 schools, as Sparkman parents have tried to protect  
3 their children from the stress of the uncertain fate  
4 of their school.

5 School closing can be destructive economically  
6 and socially in many rural communities. It can  
7 represent a loss of the community's largest  
8 employers. Mara Tieken's study also included a  
9 comment by a former resident, and I quote, "When a  
10 school closed, it became a ghost town."

11 Finally, one important finding about school  
12 closure, closures are not evenly distributed. Most  
13 studies show that they disproportionately affect poor  
14 communities and communities of color. Low-income  
15 residents may not have adequate transportation and  
16 finance to get to parent-teacher conferences. And  
17 many students rely on schools to provide their daily  
18 meals. Making a long bus ride would be really  
19 grueling. Current evidence suggests that school  
20 closure can often bring more harm than benefits for  
21 students and the community.

22 Today, I beg, I plead, and I sincerely pray that  
23 each of you will prayerfully consider giving us the  
24 opportunity to keep our school with the plan that  
25 Mrs. Taylor has to present. "I can do all things

1 through Christ which strengthen me."

2 MS. TAYLOR: Good morning. My name is Judy  
3 Taylor and I'm here representing the teachers and  
4 staff at Sparkman School.

5 While they would all love to be here today, they  
6 are back at Sparkman loving on our students and  
7 helping them realize their dreams through education.  
8 On behalf of all the faculty and staff at Sparkman,  
9 we want to thank you for listening to our plans and  
10 for finding value in us and in our students.

11 I'm not from Sparkman; I'm from Harmony Grove.  
12 I'm a third-generation Hornet. I'm the first to  
13 admit that I took a teaching job at Sparkman as a way  
14 to get in at HG -- but what I found at Sparkman was  
15 something I couldn't have found there. With the  
16 small class sizes at Sparkman I got to really know my  
17 students, not just their favorite colors or what they  
18 want to be when they grow up, but I got to learn each  
19 of their learning styles. I'm able to differentiate  
20 instruction for each of my students and help them  
21 reach their full potential. This is one of the many  
22 reasons we were able to score second in the state  
23 last year for growth. I had students who went up as  
24 many as seven grade levels in math last year alone.  
25 You may be wondering why they were low when I got

1           them. It was a product of decisions made by past  
2           administrations to save money. For example, my 6th  
3           graders last year had been in a combined grade the  
4           year before and solely taught by MobyMax for the two  
5           years prior. These decisions to combine grades, have  
6           an online curriculum, as well as other decisions made  
7           by administrations may have saved on the bottom-line,  
8           but it did not help our students.

9           Our school is small and with small schools come  
10          inefficiencies. While some of these can't be  
11          overcome without changes at the state level, such as  
12          providing waivers for faculty or staff to wear  
13          multiple hats, there are things that are within the  
14          current laws that can be done to make a small school  
15          run more efficiently without combining grades.  
16          Keeping all of this in mind, we sat down, looked at  
17          the certifications our great staff has, and worked  
18          out a schedule where we could trim our staff by 14%  
19          without combining grades, as well as moving some  
20          teachers to the high school for both English and  
21          math. This will give our students a teacher in every  
22          subject area that is tested, except science. If you  
23          were not aware, grades 9-12 at Sparkman are currently  
24          using Virtual Arkansas for all of their classes,  
25          except music, art, and P.E.

1           Another way we have looked into saving money and  
2 helping our students and community is to go to a  
3 four-day school week. We feel this would draw  
4 students through School Choice and help our families  
5 who rely on older students to assist financially by  
6 having a job. As you know, Kirby went to a four-day  
7 week this year and not only has it been physically  
8 advantageous by cutting transportation and food costs  
9 by up to 20%, they have also gained over 20 students.

10           When Dr. Snow proposed to close Sparkman, he  
11 gave us three reasons:

12           First, he said that if we didn't make changes  
13 our costs would be \$1.24 million next year and we  
14 would only bring in \$950,000. These figures did not  
15 take into account the isolated transportation money  
16 that is used district-wide for buses or cars, nor did  
17 it take into account the surplus millage that is paid  
18 by Dallas and Clark County residents of over \$350,000  
19 per year. By making the staff changes and going to a  
20 four-day week we would remain profitable, even  
21 without the tax or earmarked funds.

22           The second reason given for closure is the low  
23 academic scores in the high school. While our high  
24 school does have an ESSA score of a D and is ranked  
25 257th in the state, Bearden is 256th and Gurdon is

1 242nd. As you see, we're very comparable to our area  
2 high schools. Also, our ACT average is 19.1, which  
3 is right in line with the state at a 19.3.

4 The third reason given for the closure is our  
5 loss of students. In the last year we have lost over  
6 20 students, but these students didn't move. Last  
7 year Harmony Grove started running buses in Sparkman.  
8 Currently, we have 69 students who ride the bus from  
9 Sparkman to Harmony Grove.

10 This continued threat of closure, no teachers in  
11 the high school, and combined classes are the  
12 underlying reasons we have lost students.

13 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

14 MS. TAYLOR: We firmly believe this plan  
15 addresses all of these issues and will give parents  
16 confidence to re-enroll their children at Sparkman.

17 I'm sure you're aware that Sparkman is isolated  
18 --

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Your time is up, and we're going  
20 to let the Senator speak. Sorry. I know it's hard  
21 when you have multiple speakers to stay in the time,  
22 but we are listening.

23 SENATOR MALOCH: Thank you, Madam Chair, Members  
24 of the Board. My name is Bruce Maloch. I'm the  
25 State Senator for District 12, which includes

1 Sparkman and all of Dallas County. Representative  
2 Rich Womack is also here. I appreciate just a couple  
3 or three minutes that you would grant to the public.

4 First of all, let me acknowledge the challenges  
5 that I know the Harmony Grove District has, both  
6 academically and financially, as many of our rural  
7 districts around the state have. But it's the  
8 responsibility of the State to provide an adequate  
9 education, and all of us -- we don't want just  
10 adequate; we want an excellent education. And so  
11 those we hope are being addressed.

12 We've gone through the years of consolidation,  
13 and I know we're not talking about a consolidation  
14 here; we're talking about splitting off. But it's  
15 still -- or closing a school. But it's still an  
16 isolated school. Now when that happened a number of  
17 years ago, when they dropped below 350, I don't know  
18 whether it was a shotgun wedding or whether it was a  
19 celebration, but that's beside the point. We're here  
20 and we're having to address some of the issues and  
21 the challenges that they have.

22 We're coming to the point though in Arkansas  
23 from a policy perspective that the distance  
24 challenges that we're going to have on closing some  
25 of our rural isolated districts is going to present a

1 challenge. And I think it also affects negatively on  
2 the academic performance of these children.

3 Now Dr. Snow mentioned the length of time or the  
4 mileage to Harmony Grove. I live in the Emerson  
5 School District -- actually now it's Emerson-Taylor-  
6 Bradley; so I'm familiar with these consolidations.  
7 Now, fortunately, those all have K-12 at each of  
8 those locations. Their numbers are a little bit  
9 better. My grandchildren live five miles from  
10 Emerson School. Their school bus ride is 30 minutes  
11 because the bus goes down this road and that road.  
12 And so that is an issue that we do have to consider.

13 From a policy standpoint also I think the State  
14 is going to have to do more for isolated districts.  
15 I know we have isolated funding; I know we have some  
16 additional transportation funding. But we're going  
17 to get to the point with some of these isolated  
18 schools where even our formula is going to have to  
19 allow more funds for a lower teacher-to-student  
20 ratio, because it's just going to get to the point  
21 where we can't keep transporting students. Now  
22 following the Lake View ruling in 2003 we had the  
23 adequacy study to create the funding formula. Since  
24 that time, for the most part -- not exactly, but for  
25 the most part we just tweaked that formula based on

1 the Consumer Price Index. That's not exact, but  
2 that's basically what we've done. In December of  
3 this year, we authorized a new independent study to  
4 be done throughout this year -- and I think part of  
5 that study necessarily will look at some of these  
6 isolated districts, some of the higher costs, and  
7 some of the responsibility that the State has to  
8 continue to provide an adequate education to  
9 students, regardless of where they live.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You have about 15 seconds.

11 SENATOR MALOCH: Okay. Some alternatives have  
12 been listed, some mentioned. I would ask that you  
13 consider those. I know Representative Womack, Rich  
14 Womack, Representative --

15 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

16 SENATOR MALOCH: -- Vaught is here. She has  
17 rural districts. And other Representatives in the  
18 area would ask you to consider those and at least a  
19 delay to see if some of these options work. Thank  
20 you for your consideration.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

22 Okay. You have five more minutes.

23 SUPT. SNOW: All right. I am going to respond  
24 to some of these that you just heard.

25 I think somebody questioned my courage about

1 taking the easy way out by closing a school. If this  
2 is the easy way, I sure don't want to see the hard  
3 way. This is a very hard process and it's worn on me  
4 for months now. Okay. I don't think I've had a good  
5 night's sleep in four or five months.

6 Let's talk about isolated funds a little bit.  
7 For this school year we received \$300,000 in isolated  
8 transportation funding -- isolated transportation. I  
9 cannot spend that on salaries. The school district  
10 spends over a million dollars on salaries at  
11 Sparkman. Now we do get isolated funding that we can  
12 use, and that was about \$120,000. That will pay for  
13 about three teachers on that campus. Okay.

14 You heard some things, we were misusing money  
15 from Clark and Dallas County. I want to remind  
16 everybody for the past -- forever Harmony Grove  
17 School District is under Legislative Audit every  
18 school year. If we were misusing fund money,  
19 Legislative Audit would've told us about it. That's  
20 their job. They spend at least six weeks on our  
21 campus every year looking for something to tell us  
22 we're doing wrong.

23 I do want to mention a little bit of the  
24 history. Well, I want to talk about the high school  
25 for just a minute. All core classes and most

1 electives in grades 9-12 are taken on computer  
2 through an online provider, Virtual Arkansas.  
3 Students take seven online classes per day. That  
4 means they sit in a computer lab and work online from  
5 the time they get to school till the time they leave.  
6 I believe high school should be more than that.  
7 There is much more to a high school education than  
8 sitting in a classroom interacting with a teacher  
9 half the state away. Okay. And you can see by our  
10 letter grades there it's not working very well. One  
11 of the committee members came to me and he said,  
12 "Well, it works fine for my kids." Okay. He said,  
13 "That's what colleges are doing." Well, colleges  
14 mostly are adults by that time. Okay. And I can  
15 tell you it does not work for all students; the good  
16 students, yes -- but even they tell me it's hard to  
17 keep organized when you're taking that many online  
18 classes a day. Now for the average student and the  
19 below-average student seven online classes is not  
20 working real well. Okay.

21 I want to mention Kingsland in Cleveland County,  
22 which is a neighboring -- it's close to Dallas County  
23 which takes in part of Sparkman. This board closed  
24 that school last year. Kingsland Elementary School  
25 had 71 students at that time; their letter grade was

1 also a C at that time, and they had even been  
2 recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School and had a  
3 Milliken scholar teacher at that school. And it was  
4 closed last year for reasons much like we're doing.  
5 It wasn't exactly the same. Okay. All situations  
6 are different. They were already under early  
7 intervention alert from Fiscal Services for fiscal  
8 distress. All right.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You have one minute.

10 SUPT. SNOW: You also heard some things about we  
11 could do this or we could do that -- four-day  
12 workweek, draw kids in from School Choice. School  
13 Choice doesn't save an isolated school. Okay.

14 One proposal was to start an ag program, like  
15 they have at Centerpoint. Yes, it's successful.  
16 They are drawing kids there at Centerpoint, but  
17 they've had that program for a long time and they  
18 were not in danger of closing. Okay. So that's not  
19 -- there's a lot of other things. We provide a good  
20 quality education on the Harmony Grove campus and we  
21 will take care of every child. We've already made  
22 plans on how -- what we're going to do with the  
23 Sparkman children at the elementary school. We're  
24 going to make sure we have a buddy system where --

25 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

1 SUPT. SNOW: Anyway --

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: It's all right. You can take a  
3 little bit longer --

4 SUPT. SNOW: Does the Board have --

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- because I gave them some  
6 time.

7 SUPT. SNOW: -- questions or is that going to be  
8 later?

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: That will be later.

10 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay, Board. Do you want me to  
12 start on one end and then -- or do you -- let me  
13 start down here.

14 Ms. McAdoo, do you have any specific questions  
15 on this? I'll come back to you if you don't.

16 MS. McADOO: Okay.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Dr. Moore.

18 DR. MOORE: Will we do public comment after  
19 questions?

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Uh-huh.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. I do have questions specific  
22 -- yes. Do you want me to pull up the  
23 Superintendent?

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah, just pull up whoever you  
25 want and then ask the questions. And then after the

1 questions, before we vote we will hear public  
2 comment.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. Superintendent Snow, if you  
4 don't mind, I have some questions for you.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah, and get as close to the  
6 microphone as you can please.

7 DR. MOORE: I appreciate you-all being here and  
8 providing this information today. I know this is  
9 very difficult for everyone involved. And I just  
10 want to get a better understanding and some context  
11 here. When we're looking at the high school with all  
12 virtual courses, when did that switch occur and how  
13 was that --

14 SUPT. SNOW: Sometime before I got there.

15 Mr. Mock, do you know when that was?

16 Mr. Mock is my high school principal.

17 MR. MOCK: Three or four years ago is when we  
18 made the move to the online classes.

19 SUPT. SNOW: And I will say this: it was a great  
20 idea, okay, but the reality of it hasn't worked very  
21 well.

22 DR. MOORE: The practice of it. Are there  
23 students that are able to come to Harmony Grove for  
24 select courses? What do you do about --

25 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

1 DR. MOORE: -- career and technical education  
2 courses?

3 SUPT. SNOW: We run a bus every day at noon --

4 DR. MOORE: Okay.

5 SUPT. SNOW: -- and students come to the Harmony  
6 Grove campus for various reasons; many of them are  
7 for sports, some of them are for classes. There are  
8 some students at Sparkman that drive to Harmony Grove  
9 to take a class and then go back. So that option is  
10 available.

11 DR. MOORE: At what point in time were the  
12 extracurriculars and sports cut out from the school?

13 SUPT. SNOW: Again, I was not there.

14 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay.

15 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Mr. Jeff Mock stands  
16 and begins to speak from the audience.)

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I'll need you to come to the  
18 microphone. And have you been sworn in?

19 MR. MOCK: No, ma'am, I was not.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Please let me do that.

21 Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're  
22 about to give shall be the truth, the whole truth,  
23 and nothing but the truth?

24 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And identify yourself.

1 MR. MOCK: I'm Jeff Mock. I'm the high school  
2 principal at Harmony Grove. I've been there for five  
3 years. My history may be a little bit fuzzy on some  
4 of it, but I'll try to give you some of the  
5 background to it.

6 Just in summary, when the decision was made  
7 previously, a previous superintendent and board made  
8 the decision to move to online classes there. That  
9 was also about the same time basketball and baseball  
10 were gradually phased out. Those were phased out  
11 because they weren't able to actually form a team or  
12 have enough students to continue to manage that. The  
13 opportunity was made -- we reformed our schedule at  
14 Harmony Grove to where all athletics was in the  
15 afternoon to meet that need for those students that  
16 were interested to come do that. Currently, either  
17 because students are attending vo-tech or coming to  
18 athletics, I think there's about 18 to 20 students  
19 that arrive on my campus every day at about  
20 lunchtime. Several of those students end up --  
21 because of not being successful in online courses  
22 they are enrolling in -- they're actively in my  
23 classes, particularly Algebra I and math courses or  
24 things that they're currently -- that they may have  
25 failed and they're making a credit up on. We're

1 making those considerations daily. Those things are  
2 occurring.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay.

4 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

5 DR. MOORE: Thank you. That's helpful  
6 information to have.

7 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am. Do you want me to  
8 stay?

9 DR. MOORE: Yes, I have a couple more, if you  
10 don't mind.

11 When these conversations started to occur, were  
12 there conversations about phasing it out and maybe  
13 just closing the high school first and elementary  
14 later on? Or what did that conversation look like  
15 with your board?

16 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. There were some  
17 conversations. I brought this up at the November  
18 board meeting. The same thing you've heard from me  
19 here was brought up at that board meeting. There was  
20 some discussion about just closing the high school.  
21 If you do that -- and by the way, I think -- in our  
22 discussions I think we could absorb all of those  
23 students into our classes that we already have,  
24 possibly -- if everybody came, there's a possibility  
25 in certain areas we may need a middle school teacher

1 possibly. But we've been working on master schedules  
2 since this process got started. The problem with  
3 just closing the high school, then your economy-of-  
4 scale is even worse. Okay. Then you're keeping a  
5 school open for 56 students. Okay. And you still  
6 have to have at least a part-time librarian, a  
7 counselor, an administrator, and it just puts the  
8 financial end even more out-of-whack. Okay. And I  
9 believe that's probably why Cleveland -- excuse me --  
10 Kingsland was closed.

11 DR. MOORE: Okay. When your -- I actually meant  
12 to ask that. When you're looking at you said that 15  
13 positions on campus, does that include certified  
14 positions? Does that include the --

15 SUPT. SNOW: Counselor, librarian.

16 DR. MOORE: Counselor, librarian. And do you  
17 have a building administrator for K-12?

18 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

19 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. Is there some sort of  
20 transition plan for what that would look like if the  
21 schools were to close?

22 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. Transition plan for --

23 DR. MOORE: For the staff.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Everybody. We've already done our  
25 Letters of Intent for this year. Everybody on the

1 Sparkman campus has indicated that they want to come  
2 to work for the Harmony Grove campus, if possible.  
3 Okay. It's been my experience that that doesn't  
4 happen when it becomes finalized. If you were to  
5 close the school today, some of those teachers would  
6 immediately go out and get other jobs. Okay. So,  
7 and we would like to do all of it through attrition.  
8 Okay. We replaced -- between certified and  
9 classified, we replaced 20 positions last year for  
10 the whole district. So if that -- but that's kind of  
11 high. If that were to happen this year, depending on  
12 who left, it would be close. Okay. Because I've  
13 done RIFs before and it's always a traumatic  
14 experience, and if -- depending on the number of  
15 positions, some of the teachers at Harmony Grove  
16 school could be RIF'd; it's not just at Sparkman.  
17 Okay. It all depends. First year teachers are at  
18 risk on both campuses. Okay. Believe me, I would  
19 love for it all to be done through attrition, okay,  
20 or retirement. That's just less painful  
21 conversations that I have to have with individual  
22 teachers. Okay. The RIF policy is non-  
23 discriminatory; it is based strictly on years of  
24 experience in the District and it goes to a point  
25 system if there's a tie. Okay. I plan -- I have a

1 school consultant here with me today, Norman Hill,  
2 and he does this on a regular basis. In working in  
3 conjunction with him, we will determine how many  
4 people have to be RIF'd. Okay. And then, of course,  
5 the lawyers get involved and we make sure everything  
6 is done legally, okay, before we notify anyone.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you. I think for now  
8 I'll let someone else ask more. Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Ms. Dean?

10 MS. CHAMBERS: I do have questions.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Chambers? Oh, Ms. Dean.

12 No.

13 MS. CHAMBERS: Yes, sir. So what's interesting  
14 is that as we've had an opportunity to speak with  
15 communities they've seen -- they've got below the  
16 threshold of 350.

17 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

18 MS. CHAMBERS: So initially we had the hard-and-  
19 fast, and then it was no, the community gets to come  
20 and speak to that. And if they have academic and  
21 fiscal strength they can --

22 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

23 MS. CHAMBERS: Do you know how close you are to  
24 the risk of being in any form of fiscal distress if  
25 you were to go forward as you are right now?

1 SUPT. SNOW: If we went forward as we are right  
2 now -- if it's okay I'd like Mr. Norman Hill to  
3 answer that question. Norman is a financial --  
4 school financial consultant and he's got 55 years in  
5 education, 30 years as a superintendent, 15 as a  
6 financial consultant. This is what he does for a  
7 living and I've used him in the past. But I'd like  
8 for him to answer that question.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Have you been sworn in?

10 DR. NORMAN HILL: No.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Do you swear or affirm that the  
12 testimony you're about to give shall be the truth,  
13 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

14 DR. NORMAN HILL: Yes, ma'am.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Identify yourself and  
16 then --

17 DR. NORMAN HILL: I'm Norman Hill, financial  
18 consultant, as Dr. Snow said. And your question was  
19 how far away you think they are from being in fiscal  
20 distress? I have a little bit of hearing problems,  
21 so I want to make sure I'm answering what you want to  
22 hear --

23 MS. CHAMBERS: That's exactly right.

24 DR. NORMAN HILL: -- in doing that. In my  
25 opinion, if things stay exactly like they are now --

1 they're losing students gradually and they're facing  
2 the mandated raise for the classified personnel that  
3 went from \$8.50 to \$11.00 an hour over two years.  
4 Then with the mandated teacher raise by the  
5 Legislature put into effect last year -- they don't  
6 have to give any raises this year or they will not  
7 have to give raises next year; they will start two  
8 years from now, in the fourth year. With all those,  
9 if nothing changes and they keep operating I think  
10 you're looking at the 23-24 school year, which would  
11 actually be three to four years out, because they're  
12 not losing students to a great extent. Now if the  
13 number of students pick up that they're losing, it'll  
14 be quicker than that. But if it stays about -- well,  
15 if you look at their history there's a gradual loss,  
16 but it's picking up, like most south Arkansas and  
17 east Arkansas schools. Every year it gets a little  
18 worse. It's hard to predict that. But if it stays  
19 like it is right now, I think the first year after  
20 the mandated raise -- that's assuming the Legislature  
21 doesn't increase or find any funds for those raises,  
22 both classified/certified -- if they keep losing  
23 students and nothing else changes.

24 MS. CHAMBERS: Okay. Thank you.

25 I've just got a couple of questions --

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Sure. No.

2 MS. CHAMBERS: And I don't think they're yours.

3 So my next question has to do with the school  
4 board and --

5 Oh, I'm sorry. I think we're good. I think  
6 we're good on finance. Thank you.

7 DR. NORMAN HILL: Thank you.

8 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you. It's hard to hear in  
9 here.

10 SUPT. SNOW: Yeah, it is. Norman and I both  
11 have hearing issues, so when we talk it's kind of  
12 difficult.

13 MS. CHAMBERS: Me too. Me too.

14 So in terms of the school board that voted 5-2,  
15 is the membership of the board representative of  
16 Sparkman?

17 SUPT. SNOW: Yes. Yes, ma'am. The two Sparkman  
18 members voted against it.

19 MS. CHAMBERS: They did. Okay.

20 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

21 MS. CHAMBERS: And the three that voted for are  
22 in the Harmony Grove?

23 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

24 MS. CHAMBERS: Okay. Okay.

25 SUPT. SNOW: That's the way the school board

1 breaks down --

2 MS. CHAMBERS: Okay.

3 SUPT. SNOW: -- with the districts.

4 MS. CHAMBERS: So the other thing I'm working my  
5 way through right now is trying to distinguish what  
6 is a hardship that's associated with consolidation.  
7 I'm from a very small town that consolidated a number  
8 of years ago, and so I get to live through personally  
9 what that community is still going through -- and  
10 it's been hard. They did it a number of years ago,  
11 and actually they're going to need to consolidate  
12 again because there's just not -- it's a rural  
13 community. And so I'm trying to understand what our  
14 duty is relative to isolated schools and what  
15 distinguishes the pain of a lot -- what a lot of  
16 communities are going through to consolidate to  
17 continue to provide the right kind of services and  
18 support --

19 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

20 MS. CHAMBERS: -- versus it's really unique,  
21 this -- the geography and the distance that Sparkman  
22 has. Can you help me understand that, or can someone  
23 from Sparkman help me understand that?

24 SUPT. SNOW: I'm not sure I understand the  
25 question.

1 MS. CHAMBERS: Well, isolated -- this really  
2 kind of comes down to what distinguishes what is  
3 unique about an isolated school versus lots of  
4 communities that have to consider consolidation. And  
5 I don't know, some of this is maybe more the duty of  
6 the Board. But I was curious what Sparkman or what  
7 you had to say about it. What is unique in this  
8 situation?

9 SUPT. SNOW: Well, I understand the issues when  
10 a community loses its school. Okay. That's what  
11 you'll hear, I believe. It is an issue, okay, and it  
12 is the end of some communities. Okay. So, yes,  
13 ma'am, I understand that. That is an issue. Okay.  
14 But one of the things that I'm trying to do is look  
15 out for all of the students in this district. Okay.

16 You just heard we were looking at fiscal  
17 distress in three to four years. Okay. That's  
18 somewhere we don't want to be. And I believe it's  
19 still the only thing that -- unless some kind of  
20 felony is involved, the only thing a superintendent  
21 can be let-go for. Okay. And so it's my job to keep  
22 us out of that. Okay. And I know the State does not  
23 want to have to step in and dissolve a school board  
24 and effect -- and then appoint someone and  
25 effectively have them answer to Johnny Key. Okay.

1 The State does not want to do that; they want to  
2 avoid that at all cost. And so, yes, ma'am, there  
3 are consequences, but it's also my job to worry about  
4 the whole district.

5 MS. CHAMBERS: Right.

6 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

7 MS. CHAMBERS: Yes.

8 SUPT. SNOW: Do you want me to sit down?

9 MS. CHAMBERS: No, no, no. But thank you. I  
10 think Sparkman may be -- have a point of view as  
11 well.

12 MS. TAYLOR: As far as isolation goes, we're 25  
13 miles from the closest school in any direction. I  
14 live in Harmony Grove; I'm about two miles from  
15 Harmony Grove school, and it takes me close to 30  
16 minutes to get to work each day -- and that's no bus  
17 stops along the way. If you want to go to Wal-Mart,  
18 you're going to drive 30 minutes either to  
19 Arkadelphia or to Camden to get there. We did get a  
20 Dollar General this year -- praise the Lord -- but I  
21 mean that's all we have in Sparkman. We have three  
22 sawmills. Most of our families are single  
23 transportation families and so, them having to go  
24 that far to pick up their child if they're sick would  
25 be a big issue.

1 MS. CHAMBERS: And when was the school board  
2 consolidated, the fact --

3 MS. TAYLOR: They were consolidated in 2004.

4 MS. CHAMBERS: 2004.

5 MS. TAYLOR: Yes, ma'am.

6 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you.

7 MS. TAYLOR: Well, it was voted in 2004, so it  
8 was 2005 when it was consolidated.

9 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Dr. Hill.

11 MS. McADOO: I had questions. I do have one  
12 now.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Wait. Let me go down and  
14 then I'll jump back. Okay?

15 Dr. Hill.

16 DR. FITZ HILL: I heard you talking about the --  
17 what's the mileage from Harmony Grove to -- from  
18 Sparkman to Harmony Grove. What is the mileage?  
19 Because I heard you talk about minutes but I didn't  
20 never get the mileage.

21 SUPT. SNOW: It's 25 miles to the school. Okay.

22 DR. FITZ HILL: From one school to the other?

23 SUPT. SNOW: Right.

24 DR. FITZ HILL: Okay.

25 SUPT. SNOW: And, you know, we talk about the

1 bus routes and so-on. We're already bringing  
2 Sparkman students to our campus, okay, and there's  
3 different ways we've done that. And we're looking  
4 real hard about how we will do it next year if the  
5 school closes. And we're going to try to do it --  
6 some of the scenarios we've worked out will even cut  
7 down on transportation and cut down on times and so-  
8 on. If we start a bus at the very northeast corner  
9 of the District, at Dalark, and come this way, it's  
10 41 minutes on Google Maps. Okay. That's the very  
11 furthest household. We have every household in the  
12 District plotted on a map and that's by Google Maps;  
13 that's not --

14 DR. FITZ HILL: Yeah.

15 SUPT. SNOW: That's not a bus route. Okay.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

17 SUPT. SNOW: Was that --

18 DR. FITZ HILL: Yeah. I was just trying to  
19 figure out what the mileage was. We just talked  
20 about the time, but I didn't know what --

21 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

22 DR. FITZ HILL: -- that would equate to.

23 SUPT. SNOW: I'd like to address somewhat of  
24 your last question about -- if I could, about the  
25 effects. Okay. Sparkman in the 1980s was a thriving

1 community. Okay. They had grocery stores, they had  
2 doctors, and so-on. Okay. Over the last 40 years  
3 almost all of that is going away, and I do understand  
4 they feel one of the last things they have is this  
5 school. I do understand that.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Newton.

7 MS. NEWTON: Would you like to see if Ms.  
8 McFetridge has a question, or Mr. Williamson? I know  
9 they may be on the line.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Oh, yeah, I was going to check  
11 with Ms. McFetridge --

12 MS. NEWTON: Okay. I didn't want to forget --

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- after Ms. McAdoo.

14 MS. NEWTON: I just didn't want to forget them.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

16 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I appreciate that.

18 MS. NEWTON: All right. I have a couple of  
19 questions. Dr. Snow, could you answer a question for  
20 me please?

21 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

22 MS. NEWTON: I know we've talked about your 9th  
23 and 10th grade and then the 11th and 12th grade there  
24 in computer labs all day.

25 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

1 MS. NEWTON: Let's talk a little bit about the  
2 7th and 8th grade. Could you describe to me what  
3 their day is like?

4 SUPT. SNOW: Well, it's not the best situation  
5 either. Okay. We -- because of numbers and  
6 certifications we have one teacher that teaches  
7 social studies, science, and English to the 7th  
8 grade, three classes, one of each, and they have  
9 about six students in each class. And then in the  
10 8th grade that same teacher teaches them the same  
11 subjects; so she spends six periods a day teaching  
12 math, literacy, and science to 7th and 8th grade. We  
13 have another teacher who does the math every day.  
14 It's not -- it's not an ideal situation.

15 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So are those classes blended  
16 or are they separate?

17 SUPT. SNOW: They're not blended.

18 MS. NEWTON: They're not blended. Okay.

19 SUPT. SNOW: No, ma'am.

20 MS. NEWTON: The 9th and 10th grade are blended  
21 though in the computer lab. Am I --

22 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

23 MS. NEWTON: And then the 11th and 12th grade  
24 are blended in the computer lab?

25 SUPT. SNOW: The 9th and 10th grade are in one

1 computer lab; the 11th and 12th grade are in the  
2 other one. And -- well, I've sat in those classes  
3 and it's difficult.

4 MS. NEWTON: And you have a -- what kind of  
5 person in that computer lab?

6 SUPT. SNOW: We do not have -- we do not have a  
7 certified person in there. We have what we call a  
8 DLC, a Distance Learning Coordinator, and they are  
9 not a certified teacher.

10 MS. NEWTON: So what does a student do when they  
11 need help?

12 SUPT. SNOW: If you can get it over the  
13 internet, we -- the principal is a certified math  
14 teacher and he does do some help.

15 MS. NEWTON: Okay. I had another question on --  
16 it flew out of my mind. Have you ever done that?

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: That's okay. If you think of it  
18 --

19 MS. NEWTON: Well, I've got some other  
20 questions.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

22 MS. NEWTON: I had one more question on  
23 academics that I've forgotten.

24 On the finances, can I get someone from the  
25 Department maybe to talk --

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Smith, can you come and help  
2 Ms. Newton -- or Mr. Rogers or whomever?

3 MS. SMITH: Cindy Smith, Fiscal Services.

4 MS. NEWTON: Thank you. Sometimes we hear  
5 different numbers and I want to kind of make sure I  
6 understand the correct numbers. How much isolated  
7 funding does the District get?

8 MS. SMITH: So total this year they got \$449,649  
9 and about \$300,000 of that was specifically for  
10 transportation.

11 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So that \$300,000 cannot be  
12 spent on anything but transportation?

13 MS. SMITH: Just transportation.

14 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So \$100,000 is what can be  
15 spent on teacher salaries --

16 MS. SMITH: Or anything else. Yes.

17 MS. NEWTON: -- or whatever. Okay. As far as  
18 money for the District, does it separate -- I mean --

19 MS. SMITH: No. No. When the money comes in,  
20 it is just revenue for the entire district; it's not  
21 specified for a campus.

22 MS. NEWTON: Okay. And then, in your  
23 estimation, if things went as they are going now  
24 would the District be in danger of becoming on fiscal  
25 distress?

1 MS. SMITH: So like many districts that are in  
2 this situation, they've already had a couple of years  
3 of declining fund balances. So third-year is when I  
4 really start digging in. And I've already had a  
5 conversation with Dr. Snow about, you know, this is  
6 something that could happen. We would reach out to  
7 them in year-three and say, "What are your plans to  
8 remedy this?" Depending on how large the decline was  
9 year-three you could potentially go into fiscal  
10 distress. We don't like to do that. It's just like  
11 state takeover; we'd rather get in there and help and  
12 assist and help them find, you know, a resolution to  
13 this problem. But at year-five if there is no more  
14 money for the teacher raises that could potentially  
15 be a year that we would really have to look at the  
16 District.

17 MS. NEWTON: So have they already -- you're  
18 saying they already had two already?

19 MS. SMITH: They were not huge declines but,  
20 yes, it has already started declining.

21 MS. NEWTON: So they're potentially at year-  
22 three right now?

23 MS. SMITH: Right. And that does not always  
24 mean -- you know, the law does not say year-three  
25 you're in fiscal distress. That's just usually if we

1 see a third year of a declining balance we start  
2 reaching out to the District and finding out what the  
3 problem is and what their resolution is to stop this  
4 decline.

5 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

6 SECRETARY KEY: If I may, Ms. Newton, to just  
7 make sure two things -- one, that's one indicator of  
8 fiscal distress; that is not the sole indicator of  
9 fiscal distress. And, two, fiscal distress does not  
10 -- it seems that there's a common thought with --  
11 around the state that fiscal distress means takeover.  
12 We've had a number of districts that went into fiscal  
13 distress that did not result in state takeover. So I  
14 want to make sure that the Board and audience is very  
15 clear that that's not an automatic.

16 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

17 MS. SMITH: And we prefer to do just assistance  
18 for early intervention before we get to that. You  
19 know, many times that is something that we can do.

20 MS. NEWTON: Okay. If you're looking at -- and  
21 I know you said it's District money, so it's hard to  
22 look at. If you're looking at the finances spent at  
23 Sparkman, is more -- are they spending more than  
24 they're getting in, I guess is my question.

25 MS. SMITH: So if you look at the report that

1           you can pull online for Harmony Grove Elementary,  
2           last year they spent \$8,857 per student, and then  
3           Sparkman spent \$12,352 per student. That's just in  
4           elementary. And then Harmony Grove High School, they  
5           spent \$9,773 per student and Sparkman High School was  
6           \$9,911. So they are spending more at Sparkman than  
7           they are at Harmony Grove per student.

8           MS. NEWTON: Okay. I guess what I'm asking is  
9           are they -- the amount of money that they're getting  
10          for the Sparkman campus, are they spending more at  
11          Sparkman than they're getting revenue coming in for  
12          that campus? Or is there any way to tell that?

13          MS. SMITH: Well, the only way that you could  
14          even potentially figure that would be is if you  
15          divided how much total revenue the District got by  
16          how many students they have at each campus.

17          MS. NEWTON: Okay.

18          MS. SMITH: But that would not necessarily mean  
19          -- you know, I mean, if you were doing it by county  
20          --

21          MS. NEWTON: Okay.

22          MS. SMITH: -- you could look at it that way or  
23          you could do it by student. But there's really not a  
24          way that we can say "this money," because it's  
25          specifically for the District.

1 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

2 MS. SMITH: It's not for each campus.

3 MS. NEWTON: Okay. All right. Thank you. That  
4 was my question.

5 I thought of my question for Dr. Snow.

6 Going back to academics and the situation at the  
7 high school and elementary, so to make sure I  
8 understand, 11th and 12th are in one classroom, 9th  
9 and 10th are in one classroom, and then 7th and 8th  
10 grade have their own classroom, and then K-6 are also  
11 there. How close in proximity are let's say  
12 kindergarten and 12th grade? Are they in the same  
13 building or separate buildings?

14 SUPT. SNOW: Same building.

15 MS. NEWTON: How close? Are they on the same  
16 hallway?

17 SUPT. SNOW: Same hallway.

18 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

19 SUPT. SNOW: There's only one hallway.

20 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So they're all right there  
21 together in that same --

22 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am. Now there's fewer high  
23 school students there in the afternoons because so  
24 many of them come to Harmony Grove.

25 MS. NEWTON: Right. Okay. Okay. That was my

1 -- that's all I've got for right now.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McAdoo. And then, Ms.  
3 McFetridge and Mr. Williamson, I'll come to you.

4 MS. McADOO: I hate to make you keep standing up  
5 and sitting back down. So my question is about the  
6 children. Before your time ran out, you were about  
7 to talk about the study for the buddy system.

8 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am. If possible, we're  
9 going to bring the principal down, for one thing,  
10 from Sparkman to Harmony Grove campus so he would  
11 know all the students, if it's closed and they come  
12 next year. But that's one thing we're going to do.

13 In the elementary school we're going to make  
14 sure in every class that there is at least one other  
15 person from Sparkman in that elementary class so they  
16 will have at least someone that they know in there.  
17 Okay.

18 For those of you that are -- have been involved  
19 in consolidations, the students are usually not the  
20 problem. Okay. The students tend to make friends  
21 very quickly and assimilate into the school very  
22 quickly.

23 Did you have --

24 MS. McADOO: Yes.

25 SUPT. SNOW: -- a second question? Yes, ma'am.

1 MS. McADOO: So the other thing that you pointed  
2 out was the difference in the letter grade from the  
3 schools. What is your plan to get the students all  
4 on one accord?

5 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. If possible -- we do have --  
6 we do have a full-time literacy consultant on the  
7 Harmony Grove campus. She spent a lot of time last  
8 year at the Sparkman campus; so there is -- we do  
9 have a lot of interventions on our campus. I have to  
10 be very careful about my hires next year if the  
11 school is closed so that I don't hire too many  
12 people; otherwise, I'm not getting a financial  
13 benefit. But we are looking possibly at having two  
14 full-time math certified teacher interventionists on  
15 campus. Like I said, that's going to depend on the  
16 numbers that come. Next year is going to be a  
17 transition year that we find out who comes to Harmony  
18 Grove from Sparkman that is not already coming.

19 MS. McADOO: Okay.

20 SUPT. SNOW: And if we need to add another  
21 elementary teacher, we will. If we need to add a  
22 middle school teacher, we will. There's no way of  
23 knowing exactly how many students come until we get  
24 into it.

25 MS. McADOO: Have you started thinking about

1 professional development? You mentioned that the  
2 students aren't necessarily the ones who have an  
3 issue with transition, which I think that they do; so  
4 I do think that you need to think about what the --  
5 the emotional impact that it will have and providing  
6 services for them. But if your -- what is your  
7 professional development plan for the two different  
8 teaching staffs?

9 SUPT. SNOW: We've been working with both  
10 campuses in doing the same reading training during  
11 the summer -- we're using the RISE program -- and  
12 most of them should be either in year-three or  
13 completed with it. So everybody has had the same  
14 training as far as that's concerned, including high  
15 school and elementary -- elementary teachers. And we  
16 will also look at the time -- the PD time that we  
17 have this summer, spending a good bit of time talking  
18 about the transition with the faculty.

19 MS. McADOO: And that will include academic and  
20 emotional and --

21 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

22 MS. McADOO: Okay.

23 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am. And, you know, until  
24 we finalize the closure and the reduction-in-force  
25 we're not sure exactly who the faculty would be.

1           Okay. But like I said, it may involve losing people  
2           from both campuses, and everybody on those campuses  
3           know that.

4           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McFetridge?

5           MS. McFETRIDGE: Yes. My question is about  
6           transportation.

7           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We're having trouble hearing  
8           you. Can you get closer to your microphone?

9           MS. McFETRIDGE: Can you hear me?

10          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Barely, yeah.

11          MS. McFETRIDGE: I was wondering if the \$300,000  
12          in transportation money falls off if it was for the  
13          Harmony Grove?

14          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: She --

15          MS. McFETRIDGE: Do they still qualify for those  
16          transportation dollars?

17          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. She's questioning since  
18          Sparkman is isolated and you get the money, the three  
19          hundred for that, if that campus is no longer will  
20          you continue to get that --

21          SUPT. SNOW: No, ma'am.

22          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- \$300,000?

23          SUPT. SNOW: No, ma'am.

24          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Was that your question, Ms.  
25          McFetridge?

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Yes. Yes.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

3 MS. McFETRIDGE: I also am curious about pre-K  
4 education in Sparkman and Harmony Grove. Is there  
5 any opportunity to add a pre-K on either campus? Is  
6 there a need for that?

7 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Do you have a pre-K at either  
9 campus?

10 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am. We have pre-K. We  
11 currently have 50 students at the Harmony Grove  
12 campus. It's a combination of the ABC Program and  
13 Head Start. They had a program at Sparkman, but it's  
14 been closed due to lack of students. We are adding  
15 another class for the next year in cooperation with  
16 the South Central Co-op. We've made a commitment to  
17 add another pre-K class on the Harmony Grove campus.

18 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And this is 3 and 4 year olds?

19 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Anything else, Ms.  
21 McFetridge?

22 MS. McFETRIDGE: No, that's all I have. Thank  
23 you.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

25 Mr. Williamson?

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: No. No questions at this time.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: (inaudible) questions, that's  
4 what I was looking for.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Ms. Dean.

6 MS. DEAN: You may have already stated this, but  
7 I don't know if you did or not. But with your  
8 financial advisor have you all considered what the  
9 cost would be of leaving the virtual model, where the  
10 students are in computer labs, and going back to the  
11 teacher model? Is that -- because I don't remember  
12 hearing the budget for that, what that would -- what  
13 the cost of that would be. It seems that that's a  
14 huge issue of why --

15 SUPT. SNOW: We would have to add at least -- I  
16 think we would have to add at least four teachers to  
17 do that. And it's not an exact science, depending on  
18 years of experience. But if we added four teachers  
19 we're looking at at least \$200,000 in salary.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Correct me if I'm wrong, but  
21 since Virtual Arkansas is a charter that money per  
22 pupil goes to the charter. So if you no longer used  
23 it, does -- that per pupil money would come to your  
24 district? Is that -- am I --

25 SECRETARY KEY: Madam Chair, let me make sure --

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

2 SECRETARY KEY: -- we're on the same page.

3 Virtual Arkansas is not the same as Arkansas Virtual  
4 Academy.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

6 SECRETARY KEY: So I think you're referring to  
7 Arkansas Virtual Academy. Virtual Arkansas is  
8 through the Arch Ford Co-op and helps provide digital  
9 learning opportunities across the state.

10 SUPT. SNOW: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: But they do get money to do  
12 that?

13 SECRETARY KEY: Well, they -- so they get grant  
14 funding from the Department and then they -- there is  
15 a fee schedule that they charge districts as well.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

17 SUPT. SNOW: I think, yes, the money -- we do  
18 have students on Virtual Arkansas at the Harmony  
19 Grove campus, but it's not all day. And we will  
20 still be contracting with Virtual, but it won't cost  
21 us as much money as we were putting out at Sparkman  
22 now.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Dean.

1 MS. DEAN: I don't have a question, but I do  
2 have a comment.

3 I was in M-to-M. I was an M-to-M student, which  
4 means Majority-to-Minority -- Minority-to-Majority.  
5 And I lived in Little Rock and I went to school at  
6 Oak Grove, which is -- I think it may have been like  
7 25, 30 minutes away. Fortunately, I was the last  
8 stop -- or the last stop on the bus route to school,  
9 and that was still a long bus ride.

10 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

11 MS. DEAN: And I was the first stop back. But I  
12 had the experience of being the last one, one time,  
13 and that was a really -- that was a really bad bus  
14 ride. That was a really bad bus ride. It was hours  
15 before -- it was a couple of hours before I got home.  
16 I didn't have time to do homework, my mother had to  
17 leave dinner for me on a plate, and it just gave me  
18 an experience of what all of my other schoolmates  
19 have to go through on a daily basis. And I don't  
20 think -- if there's any way that we can prevent any  
21 child from having to experience that on a day-to-day  
22 basis -- my parents didn't come to -- hardly came to  
23 anything that I went to because we had one car.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

25 MS. DEAN: My parents were pastors. My mom was

1 a stay-at-home mom. High school was not a very fun  
2 experience for me. Most of the students that I knew  
3 lived around Oak Grove; I was the only one that lived  
4 in my area. I had no friends to hang out with after  
5 school. Everyone I went to school with went to  
6 school in Little Rock. So I understand from a very  
7 personal point-of-view what it does to a child's  
8 psyche and what it does to their emotional wellbeing.

9 [CHORUS OF AMEN'S FROM THE AUDIENCE]

10 MS. DEAN: So if there's any way that we can  
11 prevent that -- and I understand it's going to be  
12 three -- I'm glad you asked that question because I  
13 was thinking the same thing: it'll be three to four  
14 years out before we hit that really critical point.  
15 If there are some ways that you-all can make some  
16 adjustments -- it's devastating, and I can't even  
17 imagine what it would be -- what it would do a whole  
18 community -- just my small experience. And that's  
19 not -- like I said, that doesn't even include the bus  
20 route. I was the first one to get off the bus; I was  
21 the first one -- last one to get on. But I got to do  
22 that bus ride one time and it was not a very good  
23 one.

24 It also opens the doors for bad experiences on  
25 the bus ride. It just leaves students in a very

1 vulnerable position to be on a bus, a school bus full  
2 of kids where the only authority is trying to drive  
3 the bus.

4 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

5 MS. DEAN: There's so many scenarios that are  
6 just -- could just go wrong here. And I know you're  
7 trying to do your job, I understand that.

8 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. DEAN: I'm just trying to give you my  
10 perspective --

11 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. DEAN: -- and --

13 SUPT. SNOW: When I mentioned 41 minutes, you  
14 know, that's in a car.

15 MS. DEAN: Yeah.

16 SUPT. SNOW: But one stop, that very farthest  
17 stop with that -- if those -- if they're not riding  
18 the bus or if they're driving their car to school, it  
19 cuts time off of that bus route. And we're already  
20 transporting a lot of students from Sparkman, so we  
21 are doing this on a regular basis.

22 MS. DEAN: Yeah.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Does anyone have a  
24 question or are you ready for comments?

25 DR. MOORE: No, I want to ask a question of the

1 Department attorneys --

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

3 DR. MOORE: -- if that's okay. Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Freno.

5 DR. MOORE: Thank you for coming up. I just  
6 want to check a couple of things.

7 Based on my understanding, Harmony Grove  
8 participates in School Choice. Those students can  
9 choose in or out of the district. Is that correct?

10 MS. FRENO: Harmony Grove -- Lori Freno.

11 Harmony Grove participates in School Choice, so  
12 students can choice out. The only restriction is  
13 with regard to Camden-Fairview; that is one -- that's  
14 the ongoing litigation in the 8th Circuit. Students  
15 from Camden-Fairview cannot choice into Harmony  
16 Grove.

17 DR. MOORE: Can Harmony Grove students choice  
18 into Camden?

19 MS. FRENO: Harmony Grove could choice into  
20 Camden-Fairview. Yeah.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. And Harmony Grove could  
22 choice into any of a number of other districts  
23 around?

24 MS. FRENO: Harmony Grove could choice into any  
25 of the surrounding districts. Yes.

1 DR. MOORE: Okay. Based on my research, it  
2 looks like Sparkman and Harmony Grove was a forced  
3 consolidation in which it wasn't pre-agreed upon  
4 before the State --

5 MS. FRENO: It was -- I mean it was an Act -- it  
6 was a consolidation under Act 60. Yes.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay. What -- and I guess we don't  
8 know. Has -- what authority do we have over boundary  
9 lines? And what does that look like? You know, if  
10 you're looking at the map and you're looking at  
11 logistically what makes sense when you're factoring  
12 in transportation, potentially there are areas where  
13 if the boundary was changed to be in another district  
14 it would be easier. What is --

15 MS. FRENO: The State --

16 DR. MOORE: -- our authority for that?

17 MS. FRENO: The State Board has some authority  
18 over boundary lines. They can change boundary lines.  
19 Usually what you will see -- what you'll see come  
20 before the State Board are like there will be two  
21 school districts that are in agreement that they want  
22 to change a boundary line and they'll come before the  
23 State Board. And those are the only cases I really  
24 have -- I can recall that there's ever been a change  
25 in a boundary line.

1 DR. MOORE: Okay. So they have to come to us in  
2 order for that to happen?

3 MS. FRENO: There has to be --

4 DR. MOORE: It can't be initiated by the State  
5 is what I'm saying, I guess.

6 MS. FRENO: That's my understanding.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay.

8 MS. FRENO: Yes.

9 DR. MOORE: Okay. And I guess then I want to  
10 bring back up the Superintendent.

11 MS. NEWTON: I have one question for Ms. Freno  
12 before she leaves.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

14 MS. NEWTON: Would that be okay?

15 Ms. Freno, in our decision-making today --

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Microphone.

17 MS. NEWTON: In our decision-making today, the  
18 only decision that we can make is stay open or not  
19 stay open. Is that correct?

20 MS. FRENO: That is correct. Yes.

21 MS. NEWTON: So we can't -- can we -- you know,  
22 if we hear a plan or have a plan, we can't tell the  
23 District to do a particular thing?

24 MS. FRENO: No. It is -- I mean under the law  
25 it's you either accept or reject the petition.

1 MS. NEWTON: Okay. That was my question. All  
2 right. Thank you.

3 DR. MOORE: Actually, I have one more from that  
4 then.

5 So we cannot accept part of the -- like accept  
6 just high school and not elementary; we take it as a  
7 whole?

8 MS. FRENO: That is correct, because that would  
9 -- the local board of directors has to make the  
10 initial determination. And in this case they made  
11 the initial determination and they filed the  
12 petition; that's the only reason that it gets to you.

13 DR. MOORE: Okay. If this was just the high  
14 school or just the elementary closing, would the  
15 State Board still hear this case?

16 MS. FRENO: If it was an isolated school --

17 DR. MOORE: Okay. So --

18 MS. FRENO: -- and there was not a unanimous  
19 decision --

20 DR. MOORE: Okay.

21 MS. FRENO: -- the State Board would have to  
22 hear -- would hear the case. Yes.

23 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

24 MS. FRENO: Sure.

25 DR. MOORE: Yes, for the Superintendent, if you

1 don't mind.

2 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

3 DR. MOORE: I know in the era of School Choice  
4 there are times where you are losing students or  
5 gaining students. How does that play a role in your  
6 decisions? And have you had any boundary line  
7 discussions with districts in the area, discussing  
8 whether it would make more sense for a student to go  
9 -- for a segment to go to another district than stay  
10 in Harmony Grove because of transportation?

11 SUPT. SNOW: I wasn't quite sure about the  
12 question about School Choice, the beginning of that.

13 DR. MOORE: Yes.

14 SUPT. SNOW: What was your question?

15 DR. MOORE: So how many students choice into  
16 your district?

17 SUPT. SNOW: How many students choice into our  
18 district?

19 DR. MOORE: Do you know?

20 SUPT. SNOW: I'm going to say about 20.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay.

22 SUPT. SNOW: That's just off the top of my head  
23 though. Okay. We get some -- School Choice in  
24 Arkansas is very seldom about academics,  
25 unfortunately.

1 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

2 SUPT. SNOW: School Choice in rural areas -- and  
3 there are people that will dispute this with me -- is  
4 usually because they've gotten mad at the  
5 administration or a teacher and they decide the grass  
6 is greener on the other side, or to play sports or  
7 so-on. Okay. Now, do they have School Choice? The  
8 little community of Dalark is the furthest point  
9 northwest in this district. Okay. Those students  
10 already, some of them, school-choice to Arkadelphia.  
11 Okay. In fact, the Arkadelphia bus passes the  
12 Harmony Grove bus every morning. Okay. So that does  
13 already take place.

14 Okay. What was the second part of your  
15 question?

16 DR. MOORE: Boundary line changes -- have there  
17 been any discussion as to whether changes should be  
18 made?

19 SUPT. SNOW: I've heard some things about it,  
20 but all of them are predicated on keeping the school  
21 open. The ones I've heard are predicated on keeping  
22 the school open at Sparkman. And I know one district  
23 didn't want to talk about it because of the financial  
24 end of it.

25 DR. MOORE: Okay.

1 SUPT. SNOW: So -- and now the others, I don't  
2 know.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

4 I guess I want to hear from the other side as to  
5 whether they've had discussions with other districts  
6 and what that looks like. Thank you.

7 MR. ASKEW: I can speak to that. I'm Jess  
8 Askew. But I was not at the most recent board  
9 meeting with the Gurdon School District where that  
10 has been discussed. And it has been discussed also  
11 with Ouachita County Schools. There needs to be  
12 time. This is a complicated issue. And Harmony  
13 Grove would have to agree to it; the receiving school  
14 district would have to agree to it. It would have to  
15 make sense from an isolated school standpoint,  
16 because it doesn't make Sparkman any closer to Gurdon  
17 or Arkadelphia or Bearden or Harmony Grove. So it's  
18 complicated, and I think that's a reason why this  
19 should not happen this year. And there's time for  
20 things to fall into place, including this legislative  
21 study.

22 And your point about boundary lines is a great  
23 one because if you were to shutdown Sparkman the  
24 logical thing to do would be to create this parameter  
25 around Sparkman and draw pie-shaped wedges into

1 Sparkman. And the kids in Dalark and Clark County  
2 would not be part of the Harmony Grove School  
3 District, but be part of perhaps Arkadelphia School  
4 District. There's no provision under the law that  
5 I'm aware of that allows exploding a former school  
6 district or part of a current school district into  
7 different areas to avoid the School Choice or the  
8 isolated school problem, which is why we have  
9 isolated schools.

10 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

11 MR. ASKEW: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Are y'all ready for public  
13 comment?

14 Okay. One thing that we do ask is that you  
15 limit your comments to 3 minutes. And if the  
16 comments become repetitive, then we ask you, if  
17 somebody has already said what you were going to say  
18 -- the number of people that speak is not as relevant  
19 as what you have to say. And so if you understand  
20 that -- this is the first time many of you have been  
21 here, but we have had lots of emails and  
22 conversations and we do listen to everything that's  
23 said. So I'm going to go in the order that people  
24 signed up. And if you choose to pass when it's your  
25 turn, then we assume that they've said what you

1 wanted us to hear.

2 Valerie --

3 MS. BARBARITA: Barbarita.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Barbarita. Good for me. Good  
5 for you. I love those phonetically good last names.

6 Okay. If you'll identify yourself and then give  
7 your comments.

8 VALERIE BARBARITA

9 MS. BARBARITA: I'm Valerie Barbarita. I'm a  
10 parent of one of the children in our beautiful  
11 school, Sparkman. Good morning, and thank you  
12 graciously for not only listening but truly hearing  
13 the pressing concerns of our community today.

14 I have never spoken on such a large platform  
15 before, but I take strength from advice my late-  
16 father shared with me as a youth. He told me to  
17 never miss out on an opportunity, due to being  
18 afraid, to ask a question, because by not asking the  
19 answer was already no. So today I stand before you  
20 asking you for a yes -- yes to a chance to prove our  
21 value and yes to our children's future.

22 I am a parent of a 3rd grader at Sparkman  
23 Elementary and also a two-year resident of Sparkman.  
24 My daughter has attended this school since November  
25 of 2018. Our family had moved here from Bentonville,

1 where my daughter was struggling in all aspects of  
2 study since kindergarten. I was pressed by her  
3 previous school to retain her in kindergarten and  
4 again in 1st grade. By 2nd grade, she was leaving  
5 her homeroom twice a day for intervention, which  
6 became highly upsetting to her because she was  
7 embarrassed that there were only a few children from  
8 each of the five 2nd grade classes being pulled for  
9 extra help. These were all at full capacity, all of  
10 these classes. When we moved to Sparkman in November  
11 of 2018, we immediately began seeing improvements in  
12 her grades and, more importantly, in her self-  
13 confidence. Within two short months, all of her  
14 scores, including standardized testing, improved  
15 tremendously. She made the Honor Roll for the first  
16 time last year and her last report card revealed  
17 straight A's. Her last STAR report shows my precious  
18 3rd grader reading at a 5th grade level. I am beyond  
19 proud. There's absolutely no doubt that these  
20 monumental changes occurred due to how incredible our  
21 Sparkman School is. This brings to mind the proverb,  
22 "Good things come in small packages."

23 Our teachers are dedicated to facilitating  
24 learning and have positively impacted my daughter's  
25 path beyond words. Not only would it be devastating

1 to our community, but also personally agonizing to  
2 have our school closed and our children bussed so far  
3 away. I honestly believe it will be truly  
4 detrimental for my child's learning, as well as her  
5 self-esteem. So please consider the massive negative  
6 impact that closing our school would have on each of  
7 our children, our community, and our families, as  
8 well as my sincere feelings towards this life-  
9 changing matter. Thank you and God bless.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

11 Brady Harmon. And the next person after that --  
12 is it Bobbie Walker or Bookie Walker?

13 Okay, that'll be -- you'll be next.

14 BRADY HARMON

15 MR. HARMON: Hello. My name is Brady Harmon.  
16 And my wife is a teacher at Sparkman and my four  
17 children -- excuse me -- three children -- hopefully  
18 my fourth next year will be enrolled at Sparkman.  
19 I'm from Arkadelphia. I graduated there and I own a  
20 business in Arkadelphia. I bleed Badger blue and  
21 red, but my heart is in Sparkman and that's my  
22 community.

23 And the reason I wanted to talk today is because  
24 I just feel like within the last 15 years we really  
25 have not received a fair shake.

1 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Chairman Zook indicates  
2 to Mr. Harmon that he pull the microphone closer.)

3 MR. HARMON: Excuse me. I don't believe we've  
4 received a fair shake in the last 15 years, since  
5 consolidation. And the reason for that is because,  
6 you know, decisions were made -- you know, some of  
7 them before Dr. Snow's time -- that I feel like all  
8 led us to this point. You know, we -- when we  
9 started off we lost our -- six years ago -- or three  
10 years ago, excuse me, we lost our sports, we lost our  
11 agri. You know, that started the decline. People  
12 wanted to play sports, so they started moving their  
13 kids to other districts. And we lost agri; that  
14 affected us. Then, you know, the District decided  
15 that the best thing to do to save costs on teachers  
16 was to put all of the elementary on MobyMax. And my  
17 wife, being an elementary teacher, you know, she was  
18 told, "This is great. MobyMax is going to be  
19 fantastic. It's going to help you. You're not going  
20 to have to worry about lesson plans as much" -- and  
21 it was really built up to Sparkman as this fantastic  
22 thing. What they found out was that it was not what  
23 was best and our kids fell behind, and those numbers  
24 up there show it. The numbers that were put on the  
25 screen were the years that those kids went on

1 MobyMax. The minute that -- excuse me -- after that,  
2 classes were consolidated; that caused another mass  
3 exodus. You know, parents of elementary kids didn't  
4 even want to think about their 1st and 2nd grader  
5 being in the same class. My wife, being one of those  
6 teachers, will tell you that she learned a whole lot  
7 about her-self while having to teach two grades and  
8 make sure standards were covered, you know, on both  
9 sides. That also was a decision that caused a lot of  
10 people to leave. With the State's help, like Dr.  
11 Snow said, they came in and said, "No, this isn't  
12 working. You've been set-up to fail." You know, Ms.  
13 Rocci Malone came and observed my wife's classroom  
14 and told her, "Look, don't worry, this is not your  
15 fault; you were set-up for failure. This is never  
16 going to work." Those decisions we're now being  
17 punished for, you know. And the thing that I feel  
18 like hasn't been brought to light like it should is  
19 that rise in the elementary score that was second in  
20 the state was when those programs were finally  
21 removed. That's when those programs were removed and  
22 teachers were allowed to teach.

23 [TIMER BELLS RINGS]

24 MR. HARMON: And so I just want you guys to look  
25 at not punishing us for the things that had been

1 decided for us to make things better that have now  
2 failed. We have a system we feel like we could go to  
3 and improve on a lot of those things. We feel like  
4 if the high school was able to get some teachers,  
5 like our plan calls for, those grades would excel,  
6 just like the elementary did.

7 And so I don't envy you guys. I know this is a  
8 hard decision. I can't imagine having this job of  
9 being on this Board. But I just hope and pray that  
10 y'all look at this from every single angle and truly  
11 make a decision about what's best for our kids.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

14 Mr. Walker.

15 BOBBIE WALKER

16 MS. WALKER: It is Bobbie Walker, and my time is  
17 -- is the mayor -- is Mayor Ricky Craig on your  
18 agenda? Mayor Ricky Craig of Sparkman, is he on your  
19 agenda?

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No.

21 MS. WALKER: Okay. My time will go for him --

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

23 MS. WALKER: -- if that's okay.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Tupa. Oh, here comes Mayor  
25 Craig. Sorry. And then Tupa will be next.

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MAYOR RICKY CRAIG

MAYOR CRAIG: Good afternoon. My name is Ricky Craig, Mayor of the City of Sparkman. I'm here with prayers in my heart because our children is our greatest asset. Farming is our business down that way, and timberland. I just want to let you know that rural areas provide food for the cities; we raise the beef, the pork, the poultry. We get the logs out of the woods; we manufacture the lumber at our sawmills, which we have three. Mr. White is here. They cut the best lumber in the United States -- Ray White Lumber Company. So I just want to let you know that we provide the food for the Little Rock area; we provide the building material. Our children, we train them to be farmers, the agri -- in agri.

So these rural areas are vital to keep open so that we can have people that will supply the materials you need to live the life you live. When you destroy our lifestyle and our children's lifestyle, putting them on a bus at 5:00 in the morning -- I heard what Mr. Snow said. It's a 50-minute drive from the county line, farthest point, to Harmony Grove in my car on a good day, good conditions. Now the bus is going to stop. When you

1 put young children on that bus early in the morning  
2 you're going to -- they're not going to learn  
3 anything; they're going to have wet pants and  
4 everything when they get to school probably.

5 So I'm begging and I'm praying that someone will  
6 hear our plea and save our children because they are  
7 our most valuable asset.

8 And I want to let you know that Sparkman,  
9 Arkansas has produced some of the most brilliant  
10 people in the world -- doctors, lawyers,  
11 psychiatrists, engineers, IBM CEO's. So we could  
12 just go on down the line; many, many professional  
13 people come out of the rural area.

14 When I went to school -- and I just want to say  
15 this and I'm going to get down -- when I went to  
16 school we had raggedy books, didn't have a cover --  
17 they was hand-me-downs -- because I went to school  
18 back in the 50s and the 60s. I went in the Marine  
19 Corp in 1969, moved to Michigan. Let me tell you, a  
20 rural area is the best place to live. I lived in  
21 California and Michigan; I moved back to Arkansas,  
22 and I moved back to rural. I have horses and cows  
23 and I cut hay. I love that. And these children down  
24 there love that. But we produce what you need, so  
25 don't destroy the rural -- because if you do, you're

1 going to destroy yourself one day, because we produce  
2 what the world needs: food. We plant the soybeans.  
3 We're farmers. And our children, we grow them up to  
4 be farmers. And we don't have drive-by shootings.  
5 We teach our children morals down in Sparkman,  
6 Arkansas, and in the rural areas.

7 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

8 MAYOR CRAIG: So we don't have drive-bys.

9 So I'm just praying and begging that you give us  
10 a chance to -- and the County Judge is here, Dallas  
11 County Judge. Mayor Clark, he's here. My goal is to  
12 rebuild Sparkman. I talked to a man yesterday about  
13 building about 15 or 20 new homes there. We're going  
14 to try to build our community back up. Yes, it went  
15 down, but we're going to rebuild our county and our  
16 community. If you remove our school, there will be  
17 one school left in the entire Dallas County. So  
18 please think about this seriously. When you have a  
19 county as large as Dallas County, one school --  
20 that's a disaster. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

22 And just so that y'all know, we are -- this  
23 group as a whole is not from Little Rock; we're all  
24 from rural areas, so -- not that there's anything  
25 wrong with being from Little Rock, but we get it.

1 Ms. Tupa -- yeah, Ms. Tupa. And then, after  
2 that, Nowlin -- Nowlin, yeah.

3 CODIE JO TUPA

4 MS. TUPA: Hello. My name is -- can y'all hear  
5 me good?

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Say your name.

7 MS. TUPA: My name is Codie Jo Tupa, and I'm a  
8 senior at Sparkman High School; I'll graduate this  
9 year. And --

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Congratulations.

11 MS. TUPA: Thank you. And I'm going to graduate  
12 with 30-plus college credit hours, and that's because  
13 I had Virtual Arkansas.

14 Sparkman has been put through a lot of tests and  
15 we haven't had a chance to relax and grow -- I'm  
16 sorry, I'm nervous.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: That's okay.

18 MS. TUPA: And Virtual Arkansas is a challenge.  
19 It's taught me how to be dependent on myself, taught  
20 me how to grow-up and understand that my work comes  
21 from hard work and from understanding it.

22 I drive to Harmony Grove. I drive 3rd period  
23 and I arrive 4th period, and I take plain  
24 trigonometry. I take that because I've taken all of  
25 the college classes that are available at Virtual

1           Arkansas, and I did not want to take a class that was  
2           not useful. And it has been a real challenge to  
3           adjust. I'm a real outgoing person in my group, but  
4           since I arrived at Harmony Grove I did not talk to  
5           anyone except for the person in the sign-in office  
6           for about five weeks. And -- sorry.

7           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: That's fine. You're doing a  
8           good job.

9           MS. TUPA: Anyway, Sparkman has been --  
10          basically been given the scraps. So like whenever  
11          the school gets money for new buses and other stuff  
12          like that we get the older buses. We get -- you  
13          know, we get all the hand-me-downs, it feels like.  
14          We get isolated and we get bullied on. I'm a 12th  
15          grader and I have to be walked to the bathroom every  
16          day. We get two minutes to go to the bathroom, three  
17          periods. I'm sorry; this is just nerves.

18          Even through the challenges, the presentation  
19          that Dr. Snow showed of the high school grades of  
20          being a D, we haven't dropped. It hasn't been -- it  
21          has been a real adjustment and really hard, but we've  
22          stayed in there; we haven't dropped a grade. And I  
23          think with more adjustment and allowing kids to grow  
24          up and realize that they have to grow up and  
25          understand how to do their own work that it will

1 help. There are changes that need to be made. Like  
2 the financial aid person said that if it keeps going  
3 like it is that -- then Sparkman is going to be in  
4 financial distress. But that's if nothing changes.  
5 There's been many things that have been proposed to  
6 help the changes and help the students in the  
7 community, and I think it just really needs to be  
8 looked at. And there's also been -- I'm sorry --

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You have about 15 seconds.

10 MS. TUPA: Okay. I'd just say thank you. We  
11 just -- we need a chance because it is a hard change.  
12 Especially if y'all decide not to keep our school  
13 open, it's going to be really hard on students. And  
14 we've just been through change after change after  
15 change, and I don't think we've been given the  
16 opportunity to grow and to learn --

17 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

18 MS. TUPA: -- how to take this. And I sent  
19 y'all an email about it. I'm much more adequate at  
20 writing than I am at speaking. But thank you for  
21 your time and thank you for listening.

22 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: The timer bell  
23 continues to ring.)

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Does anybody know how to turn  
25 that off? Here he comes.

1 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Secretary Key turns off  
2 the timer bell.)

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Now, then.

4 KATELYN NOWLIN

5 MS. NOWLIN: My name is Katelyn Nowlin, and I'm  
6 a 7th grader at Sparkman School. I have attended  
7 Sparkman School for five years, from 3rd grade to  
8 7th, and hopefully on to 12th.

9 When I was in the 4th grade, Harmony Grove  
10 School District made the decision to put students in  
11 Sparkman on computers in a program called MobyMax.  
12 This was a very poor decision. I did not benefit  
13 from the way I was being taught. The website for  
14 MobyMax states that MobyMax helps struggling learners  
15 quickly catch-up grade levels and closes learning  
16 gaps. It sounds great; right? Well, it did not do  
17 that for me. In fact, it did the opposite.

18 My 5th grade year, the District again made a  
19 poor decision that negatively affected my academics.  
20 On top of being on MobyMax throughout each day, the  
21 5th and 6th grade, along with other grades, were  
22 combined into one classroom where once again the  
23 teachers were not able to provide appropriate  
24 education.

25 After two years on MobyMax and one year in a

1 combined class, I entered the 6th grade last year  
2 with a 2nd grade reading level and my math was at the  
3 3rd grade level. So I guess it is safe to say  
4 MobyMax did not close my learning gaps.

5 Thankfully, last year I was not in a combined  
6 grade and the teacher, seeing the negative outcome  
7 caused by MobyMax, decided to stop using it. Last  
8 year I was able to get hands-on learning that I  
9 needed for the first time since 3rd grade and I  
10 automatically excelled. In a little over a year, I  
11 learned I can do hard things. My reading level has  
12 jumped up two grade levels and my math score is now  
13 greater than 10th grade.

14 On top of all of this, about a year ago my birth  
15 mother abandoned me and my brother. This was around  
16 the time that I started truly excelling. For most  
17 kids my age this would have negatively affected every  
18 area of my life. In my case, however, the teachers  
19 in Sparkman encouraged me and constantly reminded me  
20 that God has a plan for my life. My 4th grade  
21 teacher and her husband even stepped up and fought  
22 for custody over me and my brother. Sparkman School  
23 has truly shown me love like I've never known before.

24 I simply want to ask you today to do the same  
25 thing for Sparkman as it has done for me over the

1 last year. Please just give Sparkman a chance to  
2 gain stability, a chance to prosper, and a chance to  
3 have a hope and a future. Thank you for your time.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

5 Stracener, Christian S-t-r-a-c-e-n-e-r.

6 Okay. Franks.

7 LAUREN FRANKS

8 MS. FRANKS: If I could pass my -- oh, sorry.  
9 I'm Lauren Franks. I'm a mom, parent, whatever.  
10 But I would like to give my time to Ms. Taylor, who  
11 has the plan that she wasn't able to share earlier  
12 about a way to do it, if that's okay to give my time.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We typically don't --

14 MS. FRANKS: Okay.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- give time.

16 MS. FRANKS: And that'll be fine.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

18 MS. FRANKS: I'll just go ahead --

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

20 MS. FRANKS: -- and respect y'all's time. Thank  
21 you for the consideration.

22 Good morning. I mentioned that while ago.  
23 Thank you for the opportunity to speak to y'all. I'm  
24 from our community; I've lived there my entire life.  
25 And I'm real nervous because I'm a Nurse

1 Practitioner, so I'm normally one-on-one, so -- with  
2 the patient. While a little more about me may not  
3 make a difference today, it does tell the story of  
4 the importance of Sparkman School and the community  
5 and in my life. I graduated in 2002, with 17 people.  
6 Of those, half have graduated with a bachelor's  
7 degree and several with a master's degree. I'm  
8 currently in my last semester of Nurse Practitioner  
9 school and my goal is to open a clinic in Sparkman to  
10 hope that it will grow.

11 You may be thinking what does this have to do  
12 with the school. But it's because of the small  
13 school that helped me to become a caring,  
14 compassionate, educated and driven person I am today.  
15 Then and now, the teachers knew something -- knew if  
16 something were going on in our lives and they would  
17 try to help us. They gave emotional, mental,  
18 educational support because we were not one-on-one --  
19 a one-of-25. Two teachers you heard from previously,  
20 Ms. Bobbie Walker was my 5th grade teacher; Ms.  
21 Taylor is my son's 6th grade teacher, and he hates  
22 math but in one year -- in one semester he went from  
23 a 5th grade math level to greater than 9th grade and  
24 loves math. I'm thankful for them being here and  
25 thinking outside of the box, because the students do

1 matter and they love them.

2 I'm also a children's minister at Sparkman First  
3 Baptist Church where I get to see many of these  
4 students on a weekly basis. I also drive the church  
5 van and for five miles it's real hard sometimes. For  
6 some of them, they lack basic life needs at home.  
7 But at this small school their needs are met because  
8 of the teachers and the other staff that see their  
9 needs.

10 I pray that you will help us to continue to stay  
11 open with the new plan that Ms. Taylor has. We're  
12 just asking for the chance to continue to make  
13 educated, caring individuals.

14 In closing, we have always been known as the  
15 Mighty Raiders. But it was not for the numbers; it  
16 was for hearts and believing in doing what was  
17 impossible. Mr. Rogers once said -- and I love Mr.  
18 Rogers -- "Anyone who does anything to help a child  
19 in his life is a hero." Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

21 Clint Waller.

22 [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Is that not good?

24 MR. WALKER: It's Walker.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

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CLINT WALKER

MR. WALKER: My name is Clint Walker. I'm a citizen of Sparkman and a parent. There's just something special about small towns, the closeness, the slower pace of life. And a small town is a place where most of us call home; it's a place you always want to be able to go back to; it's a school where the teachers know you and love you, as your own parents do. It's still that way in Sparkman. My family, as well as others, moved back to the -- with the intent to raise their family, just as our parents did. We want a place to call home, to provide for our family. We want a reason for our kids to move back.

As you all know in your positions that your decisions affect our town in a much deeper way than just the school. You have the ability to uphold or condemn an entire community right now. We have an amazing school at Sparkman, as you can see -- small town, big heart. Our kids are educated well -- and with the ability to make a few adjustments, like we have, we could do even better. If Harmony Grove fought as hard to keep us open as they have to close us, we would be in good shape right now.

I work in Arkadelphia, and on my way to work I

1 drive by the school at 6:00 each morning, right after  
2 6:00, and there's a Harmony Grove bus sitting right  
3 there at the school to pick up our kids. He says  
4 we're not going to have a two-hour ride, but it's  
5 already happening. They pick them up, they -- two  
6 hours one way, two hours back. That makes a 10-hour  
7 day for students -- 10 hour days. I can't even  
8 handle that on a workday. This will create an  
9 educational desert, as Dr. -- as Mr. Askew said. The  
10 kids will have to travel 25 to 30 miles in each  
11 direction and that should almost be considered  
12 educational neglect. That is not the guarantee of  
13 equal access to public education, as mentioned in our  
14 state constitution. After all, Arkansas has  
15 described itself as the Land of Opportunity. What  
16 kind of opportunity is that providing?

17 I don't feel like this is a Sparkman-specific  
18 problem. With the minimum wage increase and the  
19 mandated teacher salary raises, this is just the tip  
20 of the iceberg for rural Arkansas. A solution has  
21 got to be found. It's not sustainable. I hope you  
22 will allow our school to stay open until this  
23 solution is found. And you know what's crazy about  
24 this? We're not even in the red right now; we're in  
25 the black, and this is all about shutting our school

1 down before it's -- we're given a chance. Right?  
2 What's the rush? This is an irreversible decision.  
3 And we ask that you leave our doors open for now,  
4 because once the doors are closed, the doors are  
5 closed. They're not coming back.

6 A viable plan has been presented to Harmony  
7 Grove in the past and they don't listen. They're too  
8 self-focused.

9 [TIMER BELLS RINGS]

10 MR. WALKER: I pray that you have compassion on  
11 us when making your decision.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

13 Mr. Sivens [sic].

14 MR. GIVENS: Givens?

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: S-i-v-e-n-s.

16 MR. GIVENS: Well, that's a G.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Oh.

18 ED GIVENS

19 MR. GIVENS: I'm Ed Givens. Can you hear me?

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We can.

21 MR. GIVENS: My dad graduated from Sparkman High  
22 School about 1938. I graduated from Sparkman High  
23 School in 1962. I've spent almost 76 years in that  
24 area, with the exception of going to school and the  
25 military. When I was a senior in high school I had

1 no intention of going to college, but I was fortunate  
2 enough some way to win a scholarship for \$1,000 from  
3 GP to go to Arkansas A&M, which is now UAM, to study  
4 forestry. I did that, and after the first year I  
5 said, "I'm not quitting now. I'm going to get it."  
6 So I ended up spending the balance of that \$1,000  
7 scholarship to buy books for the sophomore year.  
8 Times have changed. I have two sons that graduated  
9 from Sparkman High School in the early 1990 era.  
10 Both of them went to Henderson; one graduated with a  
11 bachelor's, one with a master's.

12 Back to my 1962 time, I have two brothers and  
13 three sisters that graduated from Sparkman High  
14 School. One brother graduated from UAM, degree in  
15 forestry, decided he wanted to teach; he went to SAU  
16 and then to the University to get his teaching  
17 degree. I have three sisters; one graduated from  
18 UAM, two graduated from Henderson. I have numerous  
19 nieces, nephews, and maybe great-nieces and nephews  
20 -- I don't know how that goes -- that have gone and  
21 are going to Sparkman schools. I think we have  
22 produced a pretty good educational system, and I  
23 think if given the credits that we'll continue to  
24 produce good students. I would like for you, the  
25 Board, to check into the situation of the Kingsland

1 consolidation and see who Kingsland was consolidated  
2 with and check the distance between those schools.

3 And then I'll run out of time on this one -- the  
4 demise of small schools started many years ago, when  
5 the school district boundaries was allowed to be lax.  
6 And if you check the students, the bulk of the  
7 students that's going to Harmony Grove School, and  
8 some even to Bearden, they live in a corner of the  
9 county that's about equal distance from the three  
10 schools -- Harmony Grove, Bearden, and Sparkman.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

13 [TIMER BELLS RINGS]

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Deborah Lewis. Then, the last  
15 one will be Candace Williams.

16 DEBORAH LEWIS

17 MS. LEWIS: My name is Deborah Lewis. My  
18 daughter was caught up in the bad decisions -- the  
19 bad decisions that Mr. Snow wasn't a part of it, but  
20 he did come back and give us a teacher. She was  
21 caught up in 1st grade with MobyMax; she was caught  
22 up in 2nd grade with combined classes; she was caught  
23 up in 3rd grade with combined classes. So she's had  
24 only one year of a teacher in all these years. When  
25 she got to 3rd grade, we had Ms. Harmon -- amazing

1 woman. He stepped in, he gave us all kinds of help;  
2 it was awesome. But she was still in a combined  
3 class. The teacher was having to teach two different  
4 grades, but she was at a 1.2. This year she had Ms.  
5 Taylor and Ms. Pennington. She has three teachers --  
6 and Ms. Carroll. She is at a 3.8 to a 4.5 grade  
7 point average now on her reading. But this is the  
8 first year she actually got to do it, she's actually  
9 had a teacher, she's actually got to thrive.

10 So Harmony Grove, their students have never been  
11 through this. They weren't put in a combined class;  
12 they weren't put on MobyMax -- so there's no data for  
13 their score to our score.

14 I started at Sparkman -- I was a P.E. aid --  
15 anyway, and I started when the -- in the combination,  
16 when they did all this consolidation. And we've  
17 always been their stepchild; we've always been "they  
18 had to take us" -- and as a result, some of the  
19 decisions to save money has hurt our kids. Now we  
20 just want the opportunity to let them grow. We don't  
21 have to close this year. Give them a chance, because  
22 most of these students my daughter started with have  
23 left because of the combined classes, because of  
24 these decisions. And everybody kept saying, "All  
25 you've got to do is just leave and go to Harmony

1           Grove." That's not the answer. Our teachers are not  
2           our problem. Our administration who implemented  
3           these decisions that they thought was the best thing  
4           to save money for Sparkman is what hurt our child;  
5           not that -- not the students. Our teachers -- last  
6           year in the 3rd grade they actually did tutoring.  
7           They tutored these kids after school and was not paid  
8           for it; they did it on their own dime. They stayed  
9           after to help our kids, to put our kids back to where  
10          they need to be, because they saw what happened and  
11          they went out of their way.

12                    And so I just want you to think about it and  
13                    give the opportunity to let us stay open for another  
14                    year and just see where we go. But anyway -- but  
15                    thank you so much.

16                    CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

17                    And Ms. Williams.

18                                CANDACE WILLIAMS

19                    MS. WILLIAMS: All right. The last one, I guess  
20                    -- I'm Candace Williams with Rural Community Alliance  
21                    and I just -- I sent an email to you-all.

22                    CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yes.

23                    MS. WILLIAMS: I just want to publicly show our  
24                    support to Sparkman.

25                    The bill that you referenced earlier, Act 377 of

1           2015, we advocated for that for 10-plus years. In  
2           2015, Governor Hutchinson heard us. We had Cozart  
3           and Clark, you know, on our side, and we were finally  
4           able to get schools some relief from that 350,  
5           feeling like there was a nail in the coffin. And as  
6           mentioned earlier, Kirby, they've been before you-all  
7           and they're making it work. They've gone to four  
8           days. This can work. So the census, 2020 census  
9           will show us what we already know: everything below  
10          Little Rock is -- you know, we have a few pockets  
11          where it's growing but other than that, we're losing  
12          population. So people are still there. Even with my  
13          personal experience -- I'm from the Elaine community,  
14          our school district -- I was part of the last  
15          graduating class from that school. And like you  
16          said, a community never heals from that. Nothing  
17          hurts a community -- a rural community like losing  
18          the heart or the nucleus of that community like  
19          closing our doors.

20                 So if at all possible, if you all could work  
21          some kind of way from the state point, the local  
22          point to really address not just today, Sparkman, but  
23          there are other Sparkman's out there. There are  
24          other schools that are in fear because of the teacher  
25          increase, the salary. We need that. We know we need

1 that. But schools are literally like grasping at  
2 their pearls because they're scared of their  
3 financial state when the money from the State runs  
4 out. So I don't think this could've happened at a  
5 better time with the adequacy study going on. Like  
6 Senator Maloch mentioned, we really need to look at a  
7 better way to fund our more rural schools.

8 So I just want to publicly show our support to  
9 Sparkman. Thank y'all.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

11 BOARD QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Do you have any further  
13 comments or questions, Ms. Newton?

14 MS. NEWTON: I guess I just have some comments  
15 that -- so we can kind of hear where the struggle has  
16 been.

17 First of all, I want to thank the community for  
18 your turnout and just to see how much you care and  
19 you love your kids and your community. And just no  
20 matter what happens I hope that y'all will continue  
21 to do that and to speak up and stand for your kids.

22 This is a very, very difficult decision that  
23 we're faced with, and I want y'all to realize that  
24 we're not taking it lightly. We understood, and I'm  
25 sure the rest of the Board, like I have, have made it

1 a matter of prayer, to pray about it, to think about  
2 it, and to study, and to ask questions.

3 And so some of my concerns are -- I see the  
4 progress that the elementary has made, but I know  
5 that we have a responsibility to make sure that every  
6 student in that district has a free and appropriate  
7 public education. And I don't know if all of you  
8 realize this but I took the time to go down and visit  
9 the Sparkman campus and to see for myself what was  
10 going on, and the elementary teachers were working  
11 so, so hard. And to me, that would've been a dream  
12 job because every class, you know, less than 10 kids;  
13 you can give them the one-on-one attention that they  
14 need. And I don't have a doubt about the rise in  
15 scores that you're going to see from that because  
16 you're able to spend so much time with those kids,  
17 catching them up and getting them on grade level, and  
18 it's a -- that's a great situation. But once I got  
19 to the 7th and 8th grade and the 9th and 10th and  
20 11th and 12th, I'm going to be honest, my heart broke  
21 for those kids; you know, it's not a good situation.  
22 It's not what those kids need. And, you know, they  
23 may get the academics they need, but there's more to  
24 education than sitting and getting knowledge put into  
25 you -- you know, learning communication skills,

1 learning to communicate, learning to work with a  
2 team, learning to get along with others, being in a  
3 situation of a group of peers and knowing how to  
4 communicate, being involved in extracurricular  
5 activities. I can go on and on. All of you that  
6 have been in high school, you know what all of those  
7 things are. So that's concerning to me.

8 The other thing that I think about is, you know,  
9 the progress that has been made at the elementary  
10 level. Several of you have said it's because this is  
11 the first year that we've had an opportunity for  
12 those kids to have a teacher. That breaks my heart  
13 again. You know, that's -- you know, what have we  
14 done to those students that they didn't have that  
15 opportunity? And then I look and hear them talking  
16 about finances and saying, "Well, if it stays open,  
17 then we're going to have to go back and do blended  
18 classes. We're going to have to go back and do those  
19 things." And then -- but then you've got a plan, but  
20 our hands are tied. We can't make anybody do  
21 anything. All we can do is say, "Yes, you're going  
22 to stay open" or "no, you're not." And so I hope you  
23 see the struggle that I'm having with this. You  
24 know, my total mindset is what is best for those  
25 students, and that's how I'm going to make my

1 decision; you know, how do I balance what I'm hearing  
2 on both sides, you know, and how do we get to where  
3 we need to be. You know, because this is not only  
4 affecting the kids, but it affects the adults. But  
5 I've got to keep my focus on the kids and I hope you  
6 realize that I've got to keep my focus on what is  
7 best for those students, what is going to give them  
8 the best opportunity whenever they leave high school,  
9 whenever they leave -- some of them are going to stay  
10 in the Sparkman community, but some of them are not.  
11 Some of them are going to go find opportunities  
12 elsewhere in the world. What is going to give them  
13 the best opportunity to succeed in the world as they  
14 go out?

15 So those are the things that I'm mulling over.  
16 Those are the things that I'm thinking about and  
17 wrestling with as we talk about this. And I hope  
18 some of the other board members will kind of give me  
19 your thoughts and what you're thinking --

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

21 MS. NEWTON: -- along those lines also.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Mr. Williamson, did you have any  
23 further comments?

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: No, ma'am, not right now.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And, Ms. McFetridge, did

1           you?

2                   MS. McFETRIDGE:   Yes, ma'am.

3                   I have to say also I am very concerned about how  
4 we're educating the high school students. I think  
5 we're doing them a huge disservice. And we have to  
6 think about their future employability in this global  
7 community. I'm just very concerned. I think that's  
8 my comment at this point.

9                   CHAIRMAN ZOOK:   Okay. Thank you.

10                  Dr. Hill, did you have anything further?

11                  DR. FITZ HILL:   I just want to -- Ms. Newton  
12 said she has visited.

13                  Do you think the progress though will be seen  
14 when you're looking at the -- this is 10 years of  
15 consolidation now -- how long?

16                  CHAIRMAN ZOOK:   Fifteen.

17                  DR. FITZ HILL:   Fifteen. All right. And the  
18 students in the pipeline -- do you think the learning  
19 will be enhanced because of the elementary school now  
20 with those students moving on? Because the  
21 foundation that they're getting, those other kids did  
22 not get.

23                  MS. NEWTON:   The elementary students this year

24                  --

25                  DR. FITZ HILL:   This year, yes.

1 MS. NEWTON: -- those -- you know, 8 to 10  
2 students in each grade, those kids are getting what  
3 they need. But once you hit 7th grade, all the way  
4 up --

5 DR. FITZ HILL: But I'm saying --

6 MS. NEWTON: Yeah.

7 DR. FITZ HILL: -- do you think that that cycle  
8 will be enhanced though because of the foundation of  
9 the elementary kids --

10 MS. NEWTON: Well --

11 DR. FITZ HILL: -- in the future?

12 MS. NEWTON: -- if --

13 DR. FITZ HILL: I'm asking --

14 MS. NEWTON: Okay, I know. And I guess what I  
15 will say to that is if the situation in 7 through 12  
16 as far as the instructional methods stay the same,  
17 then no.

18 DR. FITZ HILL: No. Okay.

19 MS. NEWTON: I don't think you're going to see  
20 progress if everything stays the same.

21 DR. FITZ HILL: Okay.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Chambers, anything else?

23 MS. CHAMBERS: I want to make sure that I  
24 understood. If a child in junior high or middle  
25 school -- junior high or high school in Sparkman

1           wanted -- for all the reasons that you just  
2           mentioned, Ms. Newton -- to have more services and  
3           more amenities, could they choose into Harmony Grove?

4           SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

5           MS. NEWTON: They're not -- this is not a  
6           separate district; this is -- they wouldn't have to  
7           choice. They're part of the Harmony Grove district,  
8           so they can -- they are -- they have I think -- was  
9           it 70-something students that are going there now?

10          MS. CHAMBERS: Right.

11          MS. NEWTON: So they can do that. Yes.

12          MS. CHAMBERS: So one of the things I was really  
13          listening for -- and it goes back to the threshold,  
14          the law that was previously set with the 350 -- and  
15          I'm a numbers person. And it's very compelling,  
16          looking at the numbers as a means of judging the  
17          efficacy, the efficiency of a dollar spent in the  
18          state on a student, because we're trying to make sure  
19          -- we have a duty of care to make sure every student  
20          -- you know, and we could all maybe agree that we're  
21          going to disagree on the definition of what it means  
22          to provide an adequate education. But I have to  
23          admit that over the years in this role getting a  
24          chance to hear communities come and make their  
25          statement about that threshold -- and that's only one

1 threshold, but it's the rural community threshold;  
2 right -- small school? And obviously this isolation  
3 element is -- geographically dispersed communities is  
4 a different issue. But the point is I've come to  
5 fully -- even more fully appreciate the importance of  
6 vital communities for a school. And I do sense -- I  
7 hope -- we can't have pride in the existence of a  
8 community being the justification of keeping a school  
9 open that maybe is not able to provide for our  
10 children. I don't hear that from you. I hear that  
11 you're -- because I was really lucky to be raised by  
12 -- if I was out on the street doing something I  
13 shouldn't have been doing, my mother and father would  
14 be sure to hear about it. So the community was a  
15 part of my upbringing and what it meant to be -- what  
16 a good person looked like. And so I think that's a  
17 really, really important part of an education in  
18 growing up.

19 As in most things in life, there are two sides  
20 to this story. I so appreciate what Harmony Grove,  
21 what the superintendent and the board are trying to  
22 do and what they're thinking about in terms of the  
23 numbers.

24 So in terms of signaling kind of my current  
25 thoughts, I'm not voting against Harmony Grove but I

1 am voting for Sparkman having a chance. This is not  
2 going to last indefinitely, not to make a pun. This  
3 isolated school is not an isolated issue for the  
4 state; it's a much broader issue for us. And I'm  
5 hopeful that this study and work that we'll continue  
6 to do will help us understand the longevity of having  
7 a viable school that's not near an urban area or an  
8 easily annexed situation. The one thing I would ask,  
9 if you could -- because I do think the vote is  
10 interesting, the 5-to-2, and where those were --  
11 those folks were, what they were representing. I did  
12 hear a lot of "we/they" today, and that's not good  
13 for the community, whatever you do. And so I'm very  
14 hopeful if it's one more year -- because the finances  
15 will catch up with this -- changes will have to be  
16 made. But I'm hopeful that the communities can take  
17 advantage of this time to come together and really be  
18 a "we" in maybe a way that the earlier consolidation  
19 did not cause, so that whatever decision you make,  
20 even though it may be difficult -- it will be  
21 difficult; that's just where -- where will you choose  
22 your difficulties, but that you make the decision  
23 together.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Dean, any more?

25 MS. DEAN: I agree with everything that's been

1           said so far, so I won't repeat it. My same struggle  
2           -- it's my same struggle: it looks like the students  
3           at the elementary school are finally getting an  
4           opportunity to thrive, and the junior high and high  
5           school students are really facing a challenge.

6           I can speak from my own experience once again.  
7           I have four children -- two girls, two boys. One of  
8           my girls does great with online courses, and my  
9           oldest child, who's very bright, always been very  
10          studious, always been advanced, she cannot do online  
11          courses. I don't know why, but she can't. She  
12          doesn't do well with online courses. But you put her  
13          in a classroom, she excels. So I think forcing  
14          students to have to learn from one way, that's not  
15          fair and it doesn't -- that's not the way to do  
16          education.

17          I think I agree I did hear a lot of "we/they."  
18          And I think as well you have an opportunity to  
19          actually bring some unity with the time allotted.  
20          Because I agree, I'm not voting against Harmony  
21          Grove, but I think Sparkman deserves an opportunity  
22          to do what is best for their students and do what's  
23          best for their kids.

24          And as I spoke to earlier, I -- this kind of hit  
25          home for me, it kind of pulled on heartstrings for me

1 because it took me back to my childhood and that  
2 experience being so far away from -- going to school  
3 so far away from home was not a good experience. My  
4 mom went -- who was a homemaker and a pastor's wife  
5 went from being the homeroom mom who was at the  
6 school almost every day -- everybody knew Ms. Camp --  
7 Mrs. Camp. She went from being a very active  
8 participant in being involved as a parent to hardly  
9 ever stepping foot on campus ever again. And not  
10 only was that hard for me, it was hard for her as  
11 well when you want to be -- you want to be involved.  
12 And if I take this from the community and parental  
13 involvement aspect, this does not -- this is not  
14 conducive for what I'm trying to do while I'm on the  
15 State Board, which is help parents to be more  
16 involved, to be more engaged, help the community to  
17 be more engaged. This works against that.

18 So for those reasons I'll be voting that  
19 Sparkman continues to stay open. I would encourage  
20 the superintendent to be open-minded, look for  
21 solutions, pray, ask God for guidance, because I  
22 believe there is a way. I believe there is a way to  
23 do it and to get it done. We just have to be open  
24 and look for solutions. Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Dr. Moore.

1 DR. MOORE: Yes. In echoing the difficult  
2 decision that we have at hand, I think we as a board  
3 are weighing our responsibilities under law and from  
4 the General Assembly of providing an excellent  
5 education for all students in the state. And one  
6 thing that just keeps echoing in my mind is the idea  
7 that all high school students should have -- every  
8 high school needs to have 38 courses for all  
9 students. And I believe that all students should  
10 have access to those 38 courses and four teachers is  
11 not going to do that. Now, obviously, they will  
12 still have 38 courses, but they'll be online. But  
13 this is not just a Sparkman issue; this is a greater  
14 issue in the state of how are we as a state  
15 supporting rural communities that aren't able to  
16 staff to that. But, again, echo a hard decision, and  
17 appreciate all the comments that have been said  
18 today.

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McAdoo.

20 MS. McADOO: I just wanted to let the students  
21 know that I am so very proud of you for having the  
22 courage and the strength to get up here and speak  
23 from your heart. I think you represented your  
24 community, your parents, the State of Arkansas very  
25 well. So, thank you.

1           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I've lived through two or three  
2 of these. I think I keep coming back to the fact  
3 that it's been a 15-year consolidation, so there has  
4 been some time. I too, as a former teacher, am  
5 concerned about high school students doing online.  
6 There might've been some courses -- math and science  
7 and English -- that would've worked well for me. I'm  
8 not so sure if social studies would, but you never  
9 know.

10           The facilities, we didn't talk about that. Are  
11 the facilities similar or are there issues or  
12 whatever with the facilities? I know when Violet  
13 Hill and Oxford consolidated they picked a central  
14 place for their high school. But are your facilities  
15 similar, equal, unequal, maybe -- yeah, please, come  
16 -- yeah, I'm asking you. And if you will, come to  
17 the microphone.

18           SUPT. SNOW: Basically, the Sparkman campus is  
19 in one building and there is no issues with that  
20 building.

21           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: They're warm, safe and dry?

22           SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

23           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

24           SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

25           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And Harmony Grove is as well?

1 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

3 And the capacity?

4 SUPT. SNOW: We're going to have to rearrange  
5 some things but, yes, we do have the capacity.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

7 Anybody else?

8 Do I have a motion?

9 MS. CHAMBERS: I'm happy to make a motion, but  
10 I'm trying to figure out what the --

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You'll make a motion to -- okay,  
12 go ahead.

13 MS. CHAMBERS: So I would make a motion to deny  
14 closing Sparkman K-12 at the end of the 2019-20  
15 school year.

16 MS. DEAN: Second.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I have a -- do -- I have a  
18 motion by Ms. Chambers, a second by Ms. Dean.

19 We need to take a roll-call on this -- no, I  
20 mean we have to.

21 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Moore.

22 DR. MOORE: No.

23 SECRETARY KEY: Mr. Williamson.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

25 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. McFetridge.

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: No.

2 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Dean.

3 MS. DEAN: Yes.

4 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Chambers.

5 MS. CHAMBERS: Yes.

6 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Hill.

7 DR. HILL: Yes.

8 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Newton.

9 MS. NEWTON: No.

10 SECRETARY KEY: Four votes for the motion, three  
11 against.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Motion passes. Sparkman will  
13 not be closed this coming year.

14 [AUDIENCE CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I will say this to the community  
16 -- and I have been a school administrator, as well as  
17 a teacher. There are a lot of things that -- doing  
18 school is hard and there are a lot of things  
19 administrators have to consider in addition to just  
20 the day-to-day, one-on-one instruction, all-be that  
21 is the most important. But they have to look at the  
22 finances, they have to look at the facilities, they  
23 have to look at the transportation. And it has been  
24 my experience that in those districts where, for lack  
25 of a better analogy, the Band-Aid was ripped off

1 quickly everybody then began to heal, and it took  
2 time. But to delay what may be inevitable may or may  
3 not be in the best interest.

4 And I'm sorry; I just realized that --  
5 Representative Womack, you were wanting to speak?

6 REPRESENTATIVE WOMACK: No longer necessary, but  
7 I appreciate it.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. I'm sorry. I saved you.  
9 Anyway, if you want to leave, then you're  
10 welcome to do so. And we understand the frustration  
11 on both parts.

12 Board and those of you who are in the audience  
13 for other --

14 [CHAIRMAN ZOOK BANGS HER GAVEL TO QUIETEN THE ROOM]

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- and those of us -- those of  
16 you who are in the audience for other items that are  
17 on the morning agenda, we are going to break for  
18 lunch now and we will be back at 1:20; so if you will  
19 plan around that.

20 Sorry, but these are not easy or decisions that  
21 can be made quickly.

22 (LUNCH BREAK: 12:37 - 1:22 P.M.)

23 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: The Board reconvened at  
24 1:22 p.m., with the exception of Dr. Fitz Hill who  
25 left the meeting during the lunch break.)

1           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We were supposed to reconvene at  
2           1:20. The Governor is going to have a press  
3           conference at 1:45; so we will wait until after that  
4           to convene, but we will finish up the schedule as  
5           scheduled today. I apologize to those of you who  
6           have come in from a distance. This is strange times  
7           and unusual. And so we will listen to the Governor's  
8           press conference; we will not listen to the part when  
9           the press asks questions because most of the time you  
10          can't hear their questions anyway. But we will live-  
11          stream it in here. If you want to stay in here or go  
12          out in the lobby, or if you have something you need  
13          to do in the next 40 minutes, then -- I apologize  
14          again, but we're all just doing the best we can on  
15          the fly.

16                   (OFF THE RECORD - 1:23 P.M.)

17                   (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: The Board and audience  
18          viewed the Governor's press conference re:  
19          Coronavirus and school closings.)

20                   (BACK ON THE RECORD - 2:02 P.M.)

21           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I'll call the meeting --  
22          afternoon session of the State Board of Education  
23          meeting to order. And our first item from this  
24          morning -- and thank you for your patience and  
25          continue to remember these people that are making

1 decisions and those who may be become infected; so  
2 keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

3 A-4: DISTRICT REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF WAIVERS GRANTED TO  
4 OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOLS: WESTERN YELL COUNTY SCHOOL  
5 DISTRICT

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Our first item this afternoon is  
7 Western Yell County. They're wanting to ask for an  
8 extension of their waiver.

9 Ms. McLaughlin.

10 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Good afternoon. Kelly  
11 McLaughlin with the Division.

12 I do have a district extension request for  
13 waivers for Western Yell County. As a reminder, this  
14 school district will have 20 minutes to make their  
15 presentation; any opposition will also have 20  
16 minutes, and the District will then have 5 minutes to  
17 respond before the question-and-answer begins.

18 Act 1240 of 2015 allows a school district to  
19 petition the State Board of Education for all or some  
20 of the waivers granted to an open-enrollment public  
21 charter school. We do have representatives of  
22 Western Yell County here to present the Board with a  
23 petition of waivers for Superintendent Licensure.  
24 The 90 days will expire on May 4th, and they are  
25 requesting for two years, which would end on June 30,

1 2022.

2 We have Superintendent Herschel Cleveland and  
3 Tommy Fink, the previous school board -- local school  
4 board president.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Previous?

6 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I believe so.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

8 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Mr. Secretary/Commissioner and  
9 Madam Chairperson and Members of the Board, I  
10 appreciate very much this opportunity to come and  
11 request the waiver. I apologize for my throat; it's  
12 just allergies, it's not anything else.

13 Now what we are doing at Western Yell, I had  
14 issued an invitation for a staff meeting for Monday  
15 to deal with the health issue, but I don't think it  
16 can wait till Monday. If I understood the Governor  
17 correctly, he was closing down the schools in these  
18 four counties because of the virus -- and if that's  
19 correct, I think our school district will have to  
20 prepare to deal with the situation in the event there  
21 is the virus found in Yell County. So we'll be doing  
22 that tomorrow instead of Monday. But these are very  
23 unusual times and I appreciate the Board's time in  
24 listening to our request for a waiver.

25 Now Western Yell County is a consolidated

1 school, and you get there by going straight up  
2 Cantrell, go through Perryville, through Perry,  
3 through Adona, through Casa, through Ola, Danville,  
4 and then you're there, and you're right at the  
5 southern foot of Mount Magazine. But the school  
6 district now has just under 350 students.

7 I think in order to appropriately discuss this  
8 need for a waiver we need to discuss basically three  
9 areas, and I'll add another one. We need to discuss  
10 the financial viability of Western Yell County; we  
11 need to discuss the ability of a child to get a good  
12 education in Western Yell County; and we also need to  
13 address the buses and the numbers. See, we've got  
14 just under 350 right now and we need to discuss how  
15 we got there and where we're going. And the one  
16 thing -- and I'll need to cover this a little bit  
17 later is the school board recently voted to go the  
18 four-day school route, and so we'll be doing that in  
19 the fall. We're making plans. We had a Zoom meeting  
20 with Mike Mertens and 13 other people yesterday that  
21 were either going on the four-day school or had --  
22 are looking at it. So this is a real important  
23 decision for us.

24 But we have a C rating for high school -- C  
25 grade. We have a D grade for elementary. And upon

1 my approval -- or your approval of me to be  
2 superintendent -- and when school started I made an  
3 appointment with each teacher, with the principal of  
4 each school accompanying me. We went and talked to  
5 each teacher, and we said, "What do you need in order  
6 to teach your class? How much technology do you  
7 have? Is your technology working?" And then I said,  
8 "These are the things that I want you to do: I want  
9 you to go back and look at last year's test scores  
10 and I want you to see -- make a list of all your  
11 students who were not up to grade level. That's the  
12 first thing you do. The second thing you do is you  
13 go pull your parents list and you make arrangements  
14 for them to come in or to visit with them on the  
15 phone. And after you do that, I want you to make a  
16 plan for bringing those students up to grade level."  
17 And then I did something -- I don't know if y'all  
18 will agree with it or not -- but I said, "I want you  
19 to make homework for each tested subject and I want  
20 you to send a little bit of homework home every day;  
21 so once that child gets home their mind will go to  
22 their schoolwork." And some people agree with that  
23 and some do not, but that's what we did trying to get  
24 our scores up.

25 Now as part of getting the scores up there is

1 required professional development. We now have 47  
2 dyslexia students and we deal with them with Barton.  
3 And we have -- the K-2 teachers all have gone through  
4 RISE, they have gone through Phonics. Our theory was  
5 if we start building at the lower levels then it will  
6 carry us on through later on and that that will help  
7 us. But, you know, everybody tells me that if you  
8 want to get anything done in education it takes you  
9 three years, and I tell them we don't have three  
10 years; you know, we've got to get on it now. So  
11 we've got our 3-6 teachers scheduled for Structures  
12 this next summer. They have had RISE on and off.  
13 And, Madam Chairperson, I get so upset when they take  
14 these teachers out of school for training. I really  
15 want them to stay there. So I have got with the  
16 Curriculum Coordinator and we are going to look at  
17 the professional development needed for each and  
18 every teacher in trying to work that in during the  
19 summer, because I do not want them pulled out and  
20 missing school while we need -- I mean we need them  
21 there.

22 The other thing is I have put in the calendar  
23 for next year a day in the fall and a day in the  
24 spring, and that's for professional development. And  
25 those have been there before, but what they've been

1 doing is saying, "Oh, we're all up-to-date; we get a  
2 day off," you know. But we're going to utilize  
3 those. But my teachers are working hard. We've had  
4 three interim tests -- the ACT Aspire test for grades  
5 3-6. They are at this point inconclusive. The third  
6 one has just been given. But see, you know, if y'all  
7 allow me to remain there I'm going to have to make my  
8 decisions on where I put everybody based on the third  
9 interim test because my April test won't be back till  
10 October, sometime like that -- and I would like to  
11 have it right away so I could deal with things. But  
12 I'm thinking that we're going to need to do away with  
13 the departmentalization of 3 -- or of 4, 5 and 6, and  
14 put them back into a contained classroom. But I'm  
15 just looking at those options because it's not quite  
16 time to make the decision. But we know that we have  
17 to make improvement in the academic area and we know  
18 that it has to be now. We cannot wait and say,  
19 "Well, we've got three years to do that," because I'm  
20 not sure we could.

21 Now I want to talk about the numbers. When I  
22 came down here in July to ask for this job, I didn't  
23 know what I was getting. And the first thing I was  
24 handed is I was handed a Freedom of Choice [sic] list  
25 of 39 children who wanted out of our school. They

1 wanted to leave our school and go to a surrounding  
2 school -- 39. So first thing I do is go look at the  
3 law and see what we do, and fortunately I found that  
4 3% clause. So when it was all said and done -- now  
5 30 of those children were coming from the elementary  
6 school; so that means not only are those children  
7 lost for this next year, but they're lost for the  
8 year after and the year after and the year after.  
9 It's a terrible thing. The way I looked at it, it  
10 was \$300,000 trying to walk out the door, you know.  
11 In the high school there were 9. But I think it's  
12 very important to stop that bleeding. Now five years  
13 ago -- I don't know if y'all know this or not, but my  
14 wife was superintendent at that school back six years  
15 ago now. And they were in fiscal distress, and she  
16 got them out of fiscal distress and turned it over to  
17 a younger person who was -- who handled paperwork.  
18 But the numbers from the time she left them, they  
19 went down from 422 down to 340. So when those  
20 numbers reached 340 I got a call or letter from Ms.  
21 Cindy back here -- Cindy Smith -- and she says,  
22 "We're going to look over all of your expenditures  
23 that are \$500 or more, except fuel and stuff like  
24 that." And that was really kind of a blessing to us.  
25 But we've gone through eight months and I don't think

1 I have asked for anything that she hasn't approved.  
2 The hardest thing I had to get -- to ask her was an  
3 ALE program. I applied for -- Commissioner Key, I  
4 applied for ALE for elementary because we were having  
5 some children in elementary who were having some real  
6 problems, and then I was told, "Well, no, you're too  
7 late; March was your deadline." And I said, "But I  
8 couldn't ask for it in March. I need to do it now."  
9 And I really want to thank the Department for -- and  
10 Jerry Hogg [sp] for allowing me to have that program.  
11 We contracted with Arch Ford to come and deliver  
12 those services, those ALE services to Western Yell  
13 County School. And I sat through each of those  
14 conferences with the parents and the teachers to  
15 decide who was qualified to go in there, and I was  
16 really amazed at really the problems that some of our  
17 students had. And it's not fair to ask a regular  
18 classroom teacher to deal with those and at the same  
19 time deal with their class. So I am thankful to the  
20 Department for having the ALE. I'm also thankful to  
21 the Arch Ford for supplying our teachers and our  
22 supervision, and I think that's making a difference.  
23 But in the numbers, what did we do? I had to let 15  
24 of them go under the law, Freedom of Choice. So that  
25 left 24. And out of those 24 -- I started notifying

1           them that they were not allowed to leave the  
2           District, and out of those 24, 13 of them left  
3           anyway. They were upset with our school for one  
4           reason or other. The reasons that I got from the  
5           parents, "Well, I went up to the school with an issue  
6           and they didn't take care of it," or, you know, "I'm  
7           afraid of your academics because of your scores."  
8           And I tried to talk some of them into staying, but 13  
9           of those 24 left anyway. They either moved out of  
10          the district or they home-schooled or they cheated.  
11          And I don't know; I didn't follow-up on them to see  
12          whether they did or not because, you know, you don't  
13          want to make people do things that they don't want to  
14          do. But what we did in trying to get the numbers up,  
15          we tried to get the academics up. I think the  
16          academics is the key to any school. I went to the  
17          school board and said, "What do y'all want me to do?  
18          What is your goal for this year?" Each and every  
19          school board member said, "We want to improve our  
20          academics." Now y'all can't imagine what a blessing  
21          that is to a superintendent to have the board fully  
22          behind the academics. And so we have gone forward,  
23          visited with every high school teacher; we've got our  
24          technology fellow to go in and fix those things that  
25          are broken at the elementary, fix those things that

1 are broken. And we got a \$17,000 prize, and with  
2 that \$17,000 prize we bought new computers and we  
3 instituted an online program. So we can take  
4 students online in our own school district, give them  
5 a computer, internet, and hook them up to one of our  
6 teachers. And that's brought in a few students and  
7 it's been really good.

8 We look at our finances. Now our finances --  
9 when I went over that I looked at the ending, July  
10 30th ending, and we were \$156,000 in the red. So our  
11 \$156,000 had to be transferred from the building fund  
12 to operating in order to close out the 2018-2019  
13 school year. So the treasurer and I started to work  
14 on the 2019-2020 budget. The closest we could get to  
15 breaking even was \$69,000; so we submitted a budget  
16 with a \$69,000 deficit. With that \$69,000 deficit we  
17 thought we could transfer from operating over and  
18 even up. And this year we'll have to make some cuts  
19 in staff. I mean you can't just make -- you only get  
20 a limited amount of money and you've got to take that  
21 money you get and make it work for your school  
22 district. So, we have been checking every month with  
23 our expenditures, our income, and if everything holds  
24 -- my treasurer tells me, you know, "Things may come  
25 in." But if everything holds we're going to come out

1 about four or five thousand dollars in the black. So  
2 that's the effort we made on the financial end.

3 Another thing we've done -- and, Madam  
4 Chairperson, could you let me know when I've got  
5 about five minutes left and I'll --

6 SECRETARY KEY: I didn't start the timer.

7 CHAIRPERSON ZOOK: Okay. Well, three more  
8 minutes.

9 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Three more minutes.

10 We have an eight-man football team and we go to  
11 Hermitage, we go to Texarkana, we go to all sorts of  
12 places to -- because there's not very many eight-man  
13 football teams. So I started looking for internet on  
14 the bus, and so we have put internet on our travel  
15 bus so that the students can go on that bus and do  
16 their lessons. And it's good internet. We tested --  
17 we tested it on our route buses too, but we couldn't  
18 get good enough service back there to warrant the  
19 expenditure. The expenditure is only about \$800 a  
20 year for internet. We have one of our teachers that  
21 are looking at drones. We're planning on offering a  
22 course in drones, because we've got all that  
23 farmland, all those cattle, and all those things to  
24 look at.

25 But the other thing that we're looking at is

1 we're looking at taking our four-day school and using  
2 Fridays as a promotional or an enrichment time. And  
3 we plan on offering -- anybody that wants to come --  
4 you know, K-12 can come, and we're going to do math  
5 and English in the morning and then we're going to do  
6 some sort of project in the afternoon. One thing  
7 that I'm looking for, I'm looking for a piano teacher  
8 because we don't have piano players for our churches  
9 in our area. So I want to get a piano teacher in  
10 there who can teach those kids in the afternoon.  
11 Well, I already think I've found a guitar teacher.  
12 And then I've got Mr. Tom Harget [ps], who was a  
13 college professor, he wants to come and talk about  
14 conservation. So we want to take those Friday days  
15 and make them something special for the school, and  
16 that's what we're looking at for next year. I'm  
17 looking to get the test scores up. The test scores  
18 follow me so far, it's frustrating in getting the  
19 feedback I need.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

21 SUPT. CLEVELAND: The community has been really  
22 supportive and we've -- my three minutes is up?

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: (Nodding head up and down.)

24 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Okay. Let me say one thing.

25 I did something I might not should've. I turned

1 school out for our school to go to the Girls' State  
2 Tournament, which was the first time in 28 years our  
3 kids have gone. And we have 14 kids going to  
4 National Beta for the first time. So I'm trying to  
5 get things going. Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Uh-huh.

7 I have a question for the school board member.  
8 I noticed that you knew you had a one-year waiver --

9 MR. FINK: Yes.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: But, according to the people in  
11 your community who have contacted us by email, there  
12 was no effort that they're aware of to look for a  
13 superintendent. Can you address that?

14 MR. FINK: Yes. We were going -- when we hired  
15 Mr. Cleveland we were needing someone. And when --  
16 as it progressed along, he was doing a real good job.  
17 And we have had people before that we were -- before,  
18 when we were needing a superintendent -- small school  
19 -- and we interviewed them and offered them a  
20 position and they'd take it; they'd call us back the  
21 next day, they didn't want it. And we got to talking  
22 four-day school and what he can do and different  
23 things he was wanting to do. The community is really  
24 behind him. We decided, well, we'd wait and see.  
25 And he's decided if he could stay awhile and help us

1 with this project that's what we wanted. The board  
2 is backing him a hundred percent, if we can get this  
3 extension on his waiver. We have reports to the  
4 public from the school every year and we'd have five  
5 or ten people. Since Mr. Cleveland's been there, we  
6 had a report and then we had a meeting on the four-  
7 day school; we had over 100 people. He gets along  
8 real well with the community; the people support him  
9 and he's someone you can talk to. And I'm saying 95  
10 to 100 percent of the -- everyone likes him. You're  
11 not probably going to get a hundred percent. As  
12 everyone knows, you know, some people -- if you're a  
13 good boss and they don't want to work, they're not  
14 going to have a lot -- but he does, he's a good boss;  
15 he knows what he's doing. The board really would  
16 like to keep him.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

18 MR. FINK: That's why we're here. And, of  
19 course, small school, and we feel like changing right  
20 now, going in with a four-day school and some  
21 community things going on that he's done with the  
22 buildings and different things it would be to our  
23 best interest if we could keep him.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

25 MR. FINK: But that's why I'm -- we didn't

1 pursue another candidate right now.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

3 Ms. Newton.

4 MS. NEWTON: Whenever you made this decision to  
5 not seek even -- I guess not to even seek -- not to  
6 even look at anyone else, was this unanimous with  
7 your board?

8 MR. FINK: Okay. Do what? I'm sorry.

9 MS. NEWTON: When you decided that you weren't  
10 even going to look for anyone, was this unanimous  
11 within your board?

12 MR. FINK: Okay. We had -- it's a five-member  
13 board. Four members are for him; one was not. He  
14 has a friend in the school system that's interested  
15 in the job. Okay. This person is not certified yet  
16 either and he can't do the job yet. That's our  
17 evaluation of him. This person also evaluated --  
18 when we evaluated the Superintendent this year, he  
19 gave him a good evaluation. He's doing a good job.  
20 It's just that he was wanting to see his friend get  
21 the job is the only reason it was a 4-1 vote.

22 MS. NEWTON: I have a question for the  
23 Superintendent.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

25 MS. NEWTON: You talk quite a bit about your

1 teachers and what professional development you've  
2 done with your teachers and trying to improve your  
3 teaching staff. What have you done personally to try  
4 to improve your skills as a superintendent?

5 SUPT. CLEVELAND: When y'all granted me the  
6 waiver to be superintendent, then you said, "I'm  
7 going to" -- "We're going to require you to have a  
8 mentor and go through the mentoring program." And  
9 then Mark Gotcher and myself, from Russellville,  
10 selected each other to be the mentor, and he has been  
11 wonderful. I've gone to every AAEA training that I  
12 could go to. I go to the co-op superintendents  
13 meeting every month that I can. Sometimes school  
14 business keeps me from going.

15 But I was the one in the Legislature that  
16 oversaw the adequacy hearings from the House. I  
17 appointed all of the people who went through the  
18 adequacy hearings. The adequacy thing came out -- in  
19 my opinion, what you saw this morning was a result of  
20 the Legislature and the courts not doing exactly what  
21 they should've done. What Odden Picus did is they  
22 came in and they laid out the way that schools were  
23 supposed to operate. Now the difference in how it is  
24 now and how it was before and how it should be is the  
25 difference between staffing students and staffing

1 buildings. What Odden Picus did is they went through  
2 and they said, "Sparkman, how many buildings do you  
3 have? How many principals do you" -- and you can't  
4 do half-a-principal; so if you need a principal, you  
5 put a whole one there. So what they did is they did  
6 everything that they needed to do in order to have  
7 school. But David Matthews, who's a friend, he came  
8 down and Jodie Mahony, me, and Bill Stovall, Olin  
9 Cook, Fred Milligan, Paul Weaver, and there may have  
10 been another one or two -- the Department of Ed.  
11 didn't write the funding formula after the Lake View  
12 case; the Governor's office didn't write the funding  
13 formula. So we spent several nights till midnight  
14 over at the House writing the funding formula for the  
15 school, and the funding formula exactly followed  
16 Odden Picus. Now once -- and Jodie Mahony presented  
17 it, got it passed, and it went to the Senate. Once  
18 that thing went to the Senate -- Matthews was down  
19 there from Northwest Arkansas, and his schools have  
20 all of the efficiency in the world.

21 I talked to my son last night at Springdale;  
22 he's got 23,220-something children. We've got 350 at  
23 Western Yell. If we could fill our building with  
24 people and then fund those people, we would have an  
25 adequate education in Arkansas and we wouldn't have

1 to be doing what we're doing now.

2 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

3 SUPT. CLEVELAND: And --

4 MS. NEWTON: Can I ask you another question?

5 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Yeah.

6 MS. NEWTON: Okay, one other question. You  
7 mentioned several changes that you wanted to make as  
8 far as instruction and different staffing, the way  
9 that you were going to departmentalize and take that  
10 away or whatever. How much research are you doing to  
11 make sure that these decisions are research-based?

12 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Well, I am bad about doing  
13 research on everything I try to do. This changing up  
14 resulted -- my thinking -- now, I haven't researched  
15 it and I haven't decided. But we are on Level 3 as  
16 far as the literacy goes, so we have support from --  
17 and that's another letter I got, you know, that kind  
18 of -- "What in the world is this." I found out what  
19 it was. But we have some very wonderful ladies from  
20 Arch Ford and we have one or two from the Department  
21 of Ed. And the Arch Ford ladies came, and I said,  
22 "How are we doing?" And they've been working with  
23 our teachers, and I said, "How are we doing?" And  
24 they said, "Well, we need to talk about scheduling."  
25 So they came by my office and talked about scheduling

1 and we discussed the various ways that we could  
2 change and make things better.

3 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

4 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Now what they were saying is  
5 that our current schedule does not allow enough time  
6 to adequately present the subject matter; so we're  
7 going to have to go to longer minutes in our  
8 schedule. And they also say if we have self-  
9 contained classes that the teacher has more  
10 flexibility on finishing what they're into. I mean  
11 they can shorten math one day and lengthen another --

12 MS. NEWTON: So you're getting input from  
13 instructional specialists?

14 SUPT. CLEVELAND: I'm getting input from --

15 MS. NEWTON: Okay. All right. Thank you.

16 SUPT. CLEVELAND: The worst things I've ever  
17 done in my life is not accept the advice of  
18 consultants and of experts.

19 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Chambers? Ms. Dean? Dr.  
21 Moore? Ms. McAdoo?

22 Okay. Are y'all ready with a motion?

23 MS. NEWTON: Can we discuss maybe a little bit?

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Absolutely.

25 MS. NEWTON: Okay. I am just a little bit

1 hesitant on this waiver in that the District has not  
2 even attempted to find a -- you know, if they'd come  
3 back and said, you know, "we have tried to look for  
4 someone and no one is" -- but they're going on past  
5 experience. And so, you know, that's my hesitation  
6 on this one is that we are not even attempting to  
7 find a --

8 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Madam Chairman --

9 MS. NEWTON: -- certified. So that's my  
10 comment.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Ms. McFetridge, do you  
12 have a comment -- or Mr. Williamson?

13 [MOMENT OF SILENCE]

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Ms. Chambers? Ms. Dean?  
15 Dr. Moore? Ms. McAdoo?

16 DR. MOORE: Let me ask this, so just to get a  
17 better understanding. So the board voted 4-to-1 to  
18 go under contract again for the next year. Is that  
19 correct?

20 MS. NEWTON: Uh-huh.

21 DR. MOORE: But there was no open process. It  
22 was not posted, is your concern?

23 MS. NEWTON: Yeah.

24 DR. MOORE: Okay. But it's -- I guess it's not  
25 typical to re-post a position every year. But in

1           this instance, since he was just given the initial  
2           approval, I see your thinking.

3           MS. NEWTON: Right. And then, you know, he  
4           doesn't have the credentials or qualifications, and  
5           so we would have to grant another waiver. But we've  
6           not -- you know, to me, when we have these teaching  
7           positions come open they always tell us we make every  
8           attempt to make sure that we put a certified teacher  
9           in that classroom. But it doesn't feel like we're  
10          making that attempt here. Does that make sense?

11          SUPT. CLEVELAND: Madam Chair, may I speak to  
12          that issue?

13          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Briefly.

14          SUPT. CLEVELAND: I understand that. We have a  
15          young man in our school district and we have a young  
16          lady in our school district and we have a third  
17          person pursuing administrative credentials. And the  
18          young man that has been wanting this position is not  
19          ready for the position at this time. But we would  
20          like an opportunity to take and mentor him and work  
21          with him and be able to hire from within. Because we  
22          are a small school district it's very difficult to  
23          get a really good superintendent in that wants to  
24          stay with us. And we feel like if we can get a home-  
25          grown one and then at that point -- now the board

1 knows that any time they find somebody they want, if  
2 it's a day notice or a week's notice or whatever,  
3 I'll go home. I did not ask for this job. This --  
4 my wife was asked to take this job, and she has a  
5 mother in the nursing home and could not do it. And  
6 she said, "Those people are really good people. Can  
7 you go help them?" And I said, "I'll try." But I've  
8 got so many things going that I would like a chance  
9 to mentor these other folks. And we do want to hire  
10 from within, if at all possible. I'm not  
11 guaranteeing that. But I have told that young man  
12 that I will work with him, and I said, "I'll teach  
13 you everything I know." Because the last thing I  
14 would want to happen at this school is for there to  
15 be a failure when I leave. And that's -- I mean I  
16 didn't say much about that, but that's kind of  
17 internal and the board has talked about it. But  
18 that's what our plan is. I mean if you go and hire  
19 somebody from without, then at that point you hire  
20 him and they like him, and then the young man we've  
21 got -- you know, he didn't get an opportunity.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

23 SUPT. CLEVELAND: But I think --

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: We have one more question up  
25 here.

1 Ms. Dean.

2 MS. DEAN: So this young man that you're  
3 speaking about, how long would it take before he's  
4 ready? Is he in -- is he taking some classes, some  
5 courses? Is he almost done with a degree?

6 SUPT. CLEVELAND: He's taking classes. But,  
7 folks, I've been around long enough to know that it  
8 takes more than classes to be able to handle people,  
9 you know.

10 MS. DEAN: Of course.

11 SUPT. CLEVELAND: And I was over at DIS and I  
12 had 260 people to look after.

13 MS. DEAN: But how long before his -- before  
14 he's certified?

15 SUPT. CLEVELAND: He'll be through with his  
16 credentials this year.

17 MS. DEAN: Okay.

18 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Now whether he can learn  
19 enough about handling people -- well, his  
20 principalship is where these 30 people came out of  
21 that wanted out of the school. So he's got to --  
22 he's got lots of ability, but he's got to learn to  
23 take care of the principalship. And I'm thinking  
24 about doing some things that would help him for next  
25 year.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

2 SUPT. CLEVELAND: So I mean, you know, if y'all  
3 don't want me to serve another year, well, you know,  
4 I can go home and be retired. But I would love to  
5 serve it. Because I've also got a -- I've got an  
6 application in for some building improvements which  
7 will take the 350 before I'll even be eligible.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thanks.

9 SUPT. CLEVELAND: So that's where we're headed.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

11 MS. DEAN: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Dean, do you have any more  
13 questions?

14 MS. DEAN: No.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Newton?

16 MS. NEWTON: I do for Mr. Fink.

17 I have a question for you, so if you can come  
18 ahead.

19 MR. FINK: This is the person that the one vote  
20 was on. The board member thought that he ought to go  
21 ahead and get the position now. It's the gentleman  
22 he's talking about. He was put in that position two  
23 years ago, with the previous superintendent, with  
24 plans of moving him up. And lots of things that just  
25 -- he's not ready yet. And lots of --

1 MS. NEWTON: When you say he's not ready, with  
2 coursework or he's not ready --

3 MR. FINK: To be a superintendent.

4 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

5 MR. FINK: He's -- things he still needs to  
6 learn about running the school.

7 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

8 MR. FINK: And the board member that voted no  
9 was his friend. But he gave him a good -- the board  
10 member gave Mr. Cleveland a good evaluation. It's  
11 just that he was wanting to move him up, and that was  
12 -- that was the reason that we came back to try to  
13 get another --

14 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

15 MR. FINK: -- try to help get him ready.

16 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Is everybody ready for a  
18 motion now?

19 Mr. Williamson, Ms. McFetridge, do you have any  
20 further questions?

21 (MOMENT OF SILENCE)

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Not hearing of any, do y'all  
23 want to do a voice vote and then see --

24 MS. NEWTON: We don't have a motion yet.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. But my question before we

1 have a motion is do you want to take a voice vote  
2 first and then a roll-call if it's not clear, or do  
3 you want to take a roll-call from the beginning?

4 MS. NEWTON: It doesn't matter.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Does it matter to anybody?

6 Ms. Newton, are you ready with a motion?

7 MS. NEWTON: How about I do a tentative motion  
8 and see what everybody thinks about it.

9 Since the board is thinking about a particular  
10 person and would like time to get that person ready  
11 to take the position, I think that I'm real  
12 uncomfortable with the waiver. Instead of a two-year  
13 waiver, maybe a one-year, and they have that one year  
14 to get that person ready. And then at the end of  
15 that one year then --

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Or open it up for other people?

17 MS. NEWTON: Yes.

18 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

19 MS. NEWTON: That's my motion, if that makes  
20 sense.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Do I have a second to  
22 that motion?

23 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Chambers.

25 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

1 MS. CHAMBERS: Or Ms. McFetridge.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McFetridge did. Okay. You  
3 have a second. Okay.

4 All in favor?

5 Do we have to do voice?

6 MS. CHAMBERS: Can we modify?

7 DR. MOORE: They have to.

8 MS. NEWTON: Oh, do they have to agree to the  
9 one year? Okay.

10 SECRETARY KEY: Yeah. I believe this is a  
11 situation where the District would have to agree to  
12 the modification of their request. And Mary Claire  
13 can help.

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Mary Claire, our attorney.

15 DR. MOORE: And is there anything that prevents  
16 them from coming back next year if --

17 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt with the Division.  
18 Thank you for catching that. I was operating in my  
19 head under the new 1240 rules that aren't in place  
20 yet.

21 Yeah, so since our new 1240 rules aren't in  
22 place yet, they'll have to agree to the modification  
23 of the 1240 waiver, which they may or may not want to  
24 do.

25 And to answer your question, Dr. Moore, no, if

1           they do choose to modify it to a one-year there's  
2           nothing that prevents them from coming back next year  
3           with another extension request. And that process  
4           will look different in a year when those new rules  
5           are in place, but it's still an option.

6           MS. CHAMBERS: When it comes back next year,  
7           will it be more or less onerous? How would you  
8           compare it?

9           MS. HYATT: The process?

10          MS. CHAMBERS: Yes.

11          MS. HYATT: Well, it's going to -- so the --  
12          one, the form will look different and it's going to  
13          require evidence of stakeholder engagement, such as  
14          like your teachers, your family, your community, and  
15          board approval -- a resolution that indicates your  
16          board approval request for the extension. And also I  
17          think on the extensions there's an additional piece  
18          that will require the District to show how they used  
19          the waiver and what, if any, positive outcomes came  
20          from the use of the waiver.

21          MS. CHAMBERS: I was just going to make a  
22          comment. I was thinking the exact same thing. I was  
23          trying to even make sure if I was remembering  
24          correctly if this was a two-year or a one-year  
25          request. But as you can imagine, and as you would've

1           listened to this morning, we try so hard to divine  
2           between where you must be consistent for  
3           predictability's sake and consistency's sake and  
4           where you have to really listen for and opine on the  
5           things that are unique to a community or a situation.  
6           I think everyone is very appreciative of your service  
7           and what you have stepped forward to do, but mindful  
8           that we hold school districts accountable for having  
9           people that -- if they're granted a waiver, that  
10          they're working on then what it would take to  
11          complete the requirements for the position that  
12          they're in. This is a unique situation. But I don't  
13          anything would prevent you, if we were to approve a  
14          year, if you were willing to put that forward as the  
15          recommendation and we approved it, to come back next  
16          year. You'll be more informed on where this other  
17          person is or the broader open process to see what  
18          candidates come forward, or maybe you are still the  
19          right person to stay in for yet a second year. But  
20          it gives you and it gives us an opportunity to come  
21          back together a year from now, if that's the case.

22                   CHAIRMAN ZOOK: So I guess the question is, are  
23                   you all willing to modify your request to one year or  
24                   do you want to stick with the two year?

25                   SUPT. CLEVELAND: Madam Chairperson, I don't

1 think we have any choice at this time but to agree --

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yes. Yes, sir, you do.

3 SUPT. CLEVELAND: -- it sounds to me.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You do have a choice.

5 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Because I can read this board  
6 pretty good and I think they say that that'll work.  
7 I would prefer the two-year, but that did not mean I  
8 was planning on staying two years, if that makes  
9 sense to y'all.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I still need to know if you're  
11 willing to modify to one year as opposed to two.

12 SUPT. CLEVELAND: I will. I will adhere to --

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Defer to your board?

14 SUPT. CLEVELAND: I would adhere to the Board's  
15 request for one year. And I'll probably be tired by  
16 then. If I keep working like I'm working now, I know  
17 I'll be tired.

18 But, Mr. Fink?

19 MR. FINK: I'm sure the board will accept that.

20 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Okay. We're good with that.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

22 SECRETARY KEY: Madam Chair, you don't become  
23 Speaker of the House without knowing how to count  
24 votes. And so I think Speaker Cleveland can probably  
25 count votes pretty well.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Or at least read minds.

2 Okay. All in favor of the motion to extend the  
3 1240 waiver for one year and then hear back from them  
4 or not?

5 I have a motion for that. And did I have a  
6 second from Ms. Chambers or Ms. Dean?

7 MS. CHAMBERS: It was Ms. McFetridge.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Or Ms. McFetridge. I had a  
9 second.

10 MS. CHAMBERS: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. All in favor?

12 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

14 Okay. Motion passes.

15 Sorry. And I did appreciate your patience as we  
16 went through a lengthy day.

17 The next thing --

18 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Well, I appreciate the Board's  
19 service. I really do, because I understand.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yes.

21 MS. DEAN: Thank you.

22 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

23 SUPT. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Board.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

25 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

1 A-5: CONSIDERATION OF CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL DECISIONS

2 a) HOT SPRINGS JUNIOR ACADEMY

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Next is Ms. McLaughlin, the  
4 Charter Panel decisions.

5 MS. McLAUGHLIN: On February 18, 2020,  
6 representatives of Hot Springs Junior Academy  
7 appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel  
8 requesting an amendment to their charter. By a  
9 unanimous vote, the Panel approved the request. No  
10 request for the State Board of Education to review  
11 the Panel decision has been submitted. But the State  
12 Board may exercise a right of review and conduct a  
13 hearing on the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision  
14 at the next State Board meeting, if you so choose.

15 We do have Dr. Stephanie Nehus, the  
16 superintendent of Hot Springs School District, on the  
17 line.

18 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. If anybody has any  
19 questions?

20 Do I have a motion?

21 DR. MOORE: Motion to approve.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Motion to approve by Dr. Moore.

23 MS. NEWTON: Second.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Newton.

25 All in favor?

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(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

b) HOT SPRINGS WORLD CLASS HIGH SCHOOL

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And now Hot Springs World Class High School.

MS. McLAUGHLIN: On February 18, 2020, representatives of the Hot Springs World Class High School appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel requesting an amendment to their charter. And by a unanimous vote, the Panel approved the request. No request for review has been submitted for the State Board. However, you do have the right to review and conduct a hearing on the Charter Panel's decision at the next State Board meeting.

Again, Dr. Nehus is on the line.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: This was an extension of that because they went from 7 to 9, and so this will be 10 to 12. So it's just reconfiguring their high school and junior high.

Do I have a motion or discussion?

MS. NEWTON: Move not to review.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved not to review by Ms. Newton.

MS. DEAN: Second.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Dean.

All in favor?

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(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

Motion carries.

A-6: CONSIDERATION OF A ONE-YEAR STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION  
WAIVER REQUEST: IZARD COUNTY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Next, Ms. Coffman.

MS. COFFMAN: I am not Tracy Webb.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No, you're not.

MS. COFFMAN: Deborah Coffman with the Division.

This is a consideration of a one-year Standards for Accreditation waiver request from Iazard County Consolidated School District. The school district finds itself with an extra kindergarten student, and this is above the numbers that they've traditionally ever had. And so they're asking for a waiver this year to help them get through the year.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Just till the end of May is my understanding.

MS. COFFMAN: Yes. And Superintendent Fred Walker is on the line if you have questions.

CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Hello, Mr. Walker. We're taking up your item now.

Do we have any discussion or questions of Mr. Walker?

Do I have a motion?

1 MS. CHAMBERS: So moved.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Chambers.

3 MS. DEAN: Second.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Dean.

5 All in favor?

6 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

8 Okay. Your motion passed, Mr. Walker. Thank  
9 you for your patience.

10 A-7: CONSIDERATION OF ONE-YEAR STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

11 WAIVER REQUEST: FLIPPIN SCHOOL DISTRICT

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Next we have Flippin  
13 asking for permission. And you're going to present  
14 it as well?

15 MS. COFFMAN: I will.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Ms. Coffman.

17 MS. COFFMAN: This is another consideration of a  
18 one-year Standards for Accreditation waiver. Flippin  
19 School District is requesting the waiver for 178 days  
20 of student-teacher interaction time. The  
21 Superintendent is here, Kelvin Hudson, if you have  
22 any questions.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Does everybody understand  
24 the request? Do any of you have questions or  
25 discussion?

1 MS. DEAN: Move to approve.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Dean moved to approve.

3 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Chambers.

5 All in favor?

6 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: All opposed?

8 Motion passes. Your patience paid off. I know  
9 that was a great loss to your community.

10 He was a mentor to a lot of us.

11 SUPT. HUDSON: Thank you.

12 A-8: REVIEW OF SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Here we are again, Ms. Coffman.  
14 Now then, the Southeast Arkansas --

15 MS. COFFMAN: Southeast Arkansas Preparatory --

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- Arkansas Preparatory High  
17 School presentation.

18 MS. COFFMAN: On January 24, 2020, the State  
19 Board voted to allow Southeast Arkansas Preparatory  
20 High School to remain open until the end of the  
21 school year and to return to the State Board in  
22 March. And today we have Superintendent Jeremy  
23 Cegers and ASP -- APSRC Executive Director Scott  
24 Smith.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Did everyone get a copy

1 of the booklet that APSRC sent out? Okay.

2 Good afternoon again.

3 SUPT. CEGERS: Good afternoon. I would like to  
4 begin by first thanking you all for allowing the  
5 opportunity for Southeast Arkansas Preparatory High  
6 School to be able to continue to educate our students  
7 for the remainder of the year. In spite of the  
8 obstacles and challenges, you all saw fit to give our  
9 students and parents an educational option in Pine  
10 Bluff, Arkansas, and that is to be commended. We've  
11 had to overcome a lot of barriers and are in the  
12 process of overcoming others to insure that our  
13 students continue to receive a quality education, a  
14 safe environment, and an opportunity to have a choice  
15 in their educational future.

16 In our last hearing, on January 24th, there were  
17 many concerns that were raised that I would like to  
18 address at this time.

19 One of the areas of concern was the area of  
20 Standards for Accreditation. We have two areas that  
21 were addressed, one was in human capital. We've had  
22 some turnover, and so we had to replace some  
23 teachers. And one of those was a background check  
24 that needed to be cleared; that was submitted almost  
25 a month ago, and we're waiting on those results.

1           The second one was a District Support Plan which  
2           has been also submitted. It was submitted and  
3           approved on February 28th.

4           Lastly, in the area of Standards for  
5           Accreditation we spoke a lot about child nutrition  
6           last time I was here. That has changed. We've  
7           already submitted our February claim already for this  
8           month, and that is something that we are proud of  
9           moving forward.

10          Compensatory Services was also another area of  
11          concern because that required finances and that was  
12          one of our main issues. Our special education  
13          department has grown tremendously this year. We --  
14          our students are receiving proper services and also  
15          are being provided services that they had previously  
16          missed. We've actually had Ms. Stacy Kratky to be at  
17          the school this year -- well, this week. And she  
18          gave us a very positive review and stated about the  
19          amount of work that has been done in such a short  
20          amount of time.

21          There also were concerns about costs associated  
22          with compensatory services. We have made the  
23          necessary budgetary adjustments and the cuts  
24          necessary to be able to provide our students with the  
25          services that need to be provided.

1           Last -- well, also, next, we have graduation  
2           status. On January 24th it was stated that we only  
3           had one of our students that would graduate at that  
4           time. Well, the wording was a little bit tricky on  
5           that, because as of January 24th your average senior  
6           is going to have to be required to take a fourth year  
7           English course and that's why we wouldn't have had  
8           more seniors to graduate as of January 24th.  
9           However, I stand before you proudly to say that as of  
10          now all of our students, not only our seniors, have a  
11          full course to -- has a pathway to graduate. And our  
12          seniors, we have four to five that will require  
13          summer school but everyone is prepared to graduate at  
14          this time. We had 21 as of January 24th; as of now,  
15          we have 19 seniors that are on pace to graduate.

16                 Another area of tremendous growth at SAPHS is  
17                 our financial outlook. In our initial hearing with  
18                 the CAP it was reported that we wouldn't be able to  
19                 make it through the end of the school year. Our  
20                 finances were -- yeah, they were pretty bad. The  
21                 projection was that we wouldn't be able to end 2019  
22                 in the black. I am proud to say that we have  
23                 improved financially every month since then. We've  
24                 gone from being projected to end the school year --  
25                 we've gone from not being able to finish the school

1 year to actually having more money budgeted -- well,  
2 projected at the end of the year now than we started  
3 with. We started the school year with \$69,000. We  
4 are now projected to have at least \$70,000 at the end  
5 of the school year. That is a lot of growth in a  
6 very short amount of time. This is due to switching  
7 financial companies, making appropriate budgetary  
8 cuts and adjustments, getting appropriate  
9 reimbursements, and simply working as a team for the  
10 good of the students.

11 Lastly, when I was here before you all, I took  
12 it personally when some of the panel members, board  
13 members said that "you need some help. It's a lot of  
14 things going on and you're doing entirely too much;  
15 you need some help." I took it personally when that  
16 was said to me. Some of the members even emailed and  
17 said, "You need to acquire some help. APSRC needs to  
18 be a lot more involved in what you all are doing."  
19 And I agree, I wholeheartedly agree. That advice was  
20 received and acted upon immediately. SAPHS has been  
21 working tirelessly with the APS -- well, SAPHS has  
22 been working tirelessly with APSRC in various areas  
23 and the work has been evident. And we look forward  
24 to the opportunity to work with Friendship also to  
25 insure that our students graduate, but also are

1           successful in life.

2                     At this time I'd like to call Mr. Smith and let  
3 him speak, expound upon some of the things that we've  
4 been working on with -- in terms of Southeast  
5 Arkansas Prep and APSRC.

6           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Let me pause just a  
7 minute.

8           Ms. Freno, should I have sworn these people in?

9           MS. FRENO: (Shaking head from side to side.)

10          CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No, okay. Thank you.

11                     I didn't think of that just because you stood  
12 up.

13          MR. SMITH: It's okay. You can't swear me in  
14 anyway, so --

15                     Madam Chair, Members of the Board, thank you for  
16 the opportunity to come back. At the January special  
17 board meeting you asked APSRC to help provide some  
18 support services and look for a potential partner to  
19 assist this charter school going down the road and  
20 then to report back to the Board at a subsequent  
21 date.

22                     We had already begun to work with them to  
23 provide some back-office support. As you heard at  
24 that meeting, since then we've been extensively  
25 involved in trying to help support them. And we have

1 a small PowerPoint that we can run through with you  
2 today to give you more information on that. We did  
3 file a report with you and with the Department of  
4 Education on March 2nd that tried to list our support  
5 and our findings, and I think you have that  
6 information before you.

7 In addition to that, we worked with Friendship  
8 Charter Schools, who already currently has a charter  
9 school in Pine Bluff -- an elementary with a grade-  
10 span of K-5, to look at coming in as a potential  
11 partner to assume control and management of this  
12 school going forward. And on February 25th the Board  
13 of Directors of the Southeast Prep Charter School and  
14 Mr. Joe Harris, representing the Board of Directors  
15 for Friendship Charter School, entered into an MOU  
16 agreement, with this Board's approval, allowing them  
17 to begin to take over immediate management of the  
18 school for the remainder of this school year and to  
19 request that the charter be transferred to Friendship  
20 with the start of the next school year. They also  
21 have some amendment requests they would like to add  
22 to that charter: basically add a grade-span K -- 6-8,  
23 to eventually create a continuous K-12 corridor. And  
24 they wanted to add approximately 500 more students,  
25 to allow more students to come into that grade-span.

1 So we could go over more of that information in the  
2 PowerPoint. We'll just give that to you.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Let me interrupt you just a  
4 minute. Will this need to go to the Charter Panel  
5 before it comes to us or is this appropriate for us  
6 to hear today?

7 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt with the Division.  
8 So if you'll remember, just a little bit of  
9 procedural posture, this came to you originally  
10 because it was revoked by the Charter Authorizer. It  
11 came to you on review. You conducted a review  
12 hearing. At the review hearing you voted to allow  
13 the school to stay open until the end of the year,  
14 but reserved the right to continue to act on it after  
15 today's presentation. So you still kind of have  
16 jurisdiction, for lack of a better word, over this  
17 charter in front of you. The law would allow you to  
18 transfer the charter today without it going back to  
19 the CAP and to make amendments to the charter only to  
20 Southeast Arkansas Prep Charter in front of you today  
21 as well.

22 So you could -- and I'm sure they're going to go  
23 into what their requests are, but you can do most of  
24 them. The one that I want to note is -- one of the  
25 requests is to increase the cap and to add the

1 additional grades. When a school does that,  
2 typically if it were going through the Charter  
3 Authorizing Panel they would give appropriate notice  
4 to the traditional district; they would submit a  
5 desegregation analysis; the Division would do a  
6 desegregation analysis; and then it would come to you  
7 through that way. It is appropriate to do that here.  
8 The only issue is we didn't receive the desegregation  
9 analysis from the school until this morning, and the  
10 rules say that the Division has to complete a  
11 desegregation analysis within -- before -- 10 days  
12 before it's heard. And since I just got that this  
13 morning I haven't had an opportunity to do a  
14 desegregation analysis. So that piece of it, the  
15 rules and the law say you can't make a decision on  
16 that piece if you have not analyzed the impact on  
17 desegregation efforts, and part of that is reviewing  
18 the information the Division gives to you 10 days  
19 before you hear the matter. And since you don't have  
20 that before you that component I think is  
21 problematic. The other components I believe are fine  
22 to be heard and acted upon today.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: So we would need to hear things  
24 in part, in pieces, or you could do all of one and  
25 then hold off on that? Or we should hold off on all

1 of it?

2 MS. HYATT: You can hear it. And probably the  
3 way that I would prefer you do it is, first, vote on  
4 whether to approve the transfer itself; then vote on  
5 the amendments. You can do those amendments  
6 together, except that one piece that I would like you  
7 to use, what I just said; consider what I just said  
8 about the desegregation analysis for that piece, so  
9 --

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And that would -- could  
11 that information affect our decision on the other  
12 amendments?

13 MS. HYATT: And I'm not trying to do your  
14 presentation.

15 But I believe that the three amendments that  
16 they plan to request are (1) a name change; (2) three  
17 waivers that they need to kind of bring the model in-  
18 line; and then the --

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Increase the cap?

20 MS. HYATT: -- increase and the added grades.

21 So I don't think the increase and added grades  
22 will really impact the other two things, the name  
23 change and the additional waivers. I don't think  
24 they will -- and Mr. Smith might have a different  
25 opinion.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

2 Excuse me for interrupting.

3 MR. SMITH: No problem. Thank you very much.

4 No. We are content to make the request today  
5 subject to the Department's review. And assuming  
6 there's no problems with their review, just hold your  
7 -- I'd ask you to make your approval contingent upon  
8 receiving proper review from them.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

10 MR. SMITH: I think you can hear everything on  
11 that contingency and we would base it on that going  
12 forward.

13 I would at this point in time have some of our  
14 people step up and walk you through the Power  
15 presentation. I do want to say thanks to the  
16 Southeast Prep Board of Directors who has been great  
17 to work with. There are some representatives here  
18 from that board today; I think they should be heard  
19 from. I also want to thank the Department staff --  
20 Deb Coffman, Tracy Webb, and Mary Claire -- for  
21 assisting. We've met with them a couple of times  
22 this week to walk through the accountability issues  
23 and things of that nature, and they've been very  
24 helpful -- and as far as I know we're all on the same  
25 page with what we've worked out. And then,

1 obviously, Friendship who's been a great neighbor and  
2 a great partner to try and work through this  
3 difficult situation and get it taken care of.

4 So at this time I would ask JoAnna Lever and  
5 Tripp, or whoever is going to do the PowerPoint  
6 presentation, to just walk you through some of that  
7 information to give you some more details.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. When you come to the  
9 microphone, please identify yourself.

10 MS. LEVER: Good afternoon. JoAnna Lever,  
11 Director of Charter Development for APSRC.

12 Over the course of the past month-and-a-half --  
13 Yes?

14 MR. SMITH: Also, Representative Flowers, I  
15 believe, is here as well. So I just want to  
16 recognize her as being here in support.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah, I didn't see her.

18 MR. SMITH: Ferguson. I'm sorry.

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

20 MS. LEVER: Over the course of the past month-  
21 and-a-half, we have been providing technical  
22 assistance from various departments at APSRC to  
23 provide support in the areas of finance, academics,  
24 dyslexia screening, and special education.

25 Right now -- or sorry, excuse me -- at the end

1 of February -- as of February 29th, the balance for  
2 SAPHS was \$64,949. At that time all invoices were  
3 current. All compliance reports have been submitted.  
4 And their projected year-end balance, according to  
5 our department, is approximately \$70,000. Technical  
6 assistance was provided to support Southeast Arkansas  
7 Prep in getting their District Support Plan and  
8 budget submitted in Indistar. We also checked their  
9 Standards for Assurance portal. As of February 23rd,  
10 all standards exceptions had been corrected, with the  
11 exception of one, and that was the one that Mr.  
12 Cegers referred to for the background checks.

13 On February 23rd, a transcript audit was  
14 completed and we were able to identify many areas  
15 that needed to be corrected. And the school is --  
16 they're taking steps to correct all of those areas  
17 identified right now. We were also able to create a  
18 pathway to insure that all students will be able to  
19 graduate, with the exception of the one that he  
20 referred to earlier.

21 On February 17th, we took a team of three APSRC  
22 staff down to complete the Developmental Spelling  
23 Assessment, or DSA, as a pre-screener, per the DESE  
24 dyslexia specialist's recommendation. 59 of those  
25 students were identified as needing the screener by

1 analyzing ACT Aspire summative data, along with the  
2 DSA results from the assessments that were  
3 administered that day. Ms. Branch, their LEA  
4 supervisor, has been administering the screeners to  
5 those students who have been identified and will  
6 continue with the help of Friendship's staff to  
7 complete those by the end of this month.

8 In the area of special education, Ms. Branch,  
9 the LEA supervisor, reported that compensatory  
10 education services began for all students who  
11 accepted those. Compliance training was provided to  
12 Ms. Branch by APSRC staff. Technical assistance was  
13 provided for insuring student-focused IEPs, teaching,  
14 and planning. And they're currently clearing all of  
15 the monitoring pieces and intend to have everything  
16 done by March 15th.

17 And at this time I'll invite Tripp to come and  
18 give you updates about the transition plan.

19 MR. WALTER: Good afternoon, Madam Chair,  
20 Secretary Key, Members of the Board. My name is  
21 Tripp Walter; I'm a staff attorney with the Arkansas  
22 Public School Resource Center.

23 And let me advance the -- Ms. McLaughlin handed  
24 out a one-page document which is essentially -- which  
25 is a slightly updated version of the slide that you

1 have presented in front of you on the transition  
2 plan. We felt it important for you to be able to see  
3 a diagram of how this is going to play out, if you  
4 decide to grant the transfer. I will just hit on a  
5 couple of things about it now.

6 As you see at the top, that's where we are now,  
7 is we have two separate LEAs that are operating in  
8 Pine Bluff. We have SAPHS, which of course is a  
9 standalone 9-12, and Friendship Aspire, which, if  
10 you'll see on the transition plan that was handed  
11 out, that has been corrected to K-5; that's what  
12 their charter is authorized for. The K-2 piece  
13 refers to what they're currently -- the population  
14 they're currently serving now. Next year, if you  
15 grant the transfer and the name-change, we will go to  
16 Friendship Aspire Southeast Pine Bluff, which will  
17 have an authorized grade level span of 6-12 with an  
18 additional enrollment cap. And then Friendship  
19 Aspire Pine Bluff will move to serving grades K-3.

20 Skip the amendments for now.

21 The eventual plan is to merge both LEAs, both  
22 charters into one seamless K-12 continuum.

23 Now at this time while I'm up here I'd like to  
24 take a minute and expand on the amendment requests,  
25 get the legal verbiage out there and make sure that

1           it's understood exactly what's being requested. When  
2           it says there in the middle "amend current waiver  
3           list," as Ms. Hyatt said, there are three specific  
4           waivers that we wish to see added to the SAPHS  
5           charter and, as she said, to bring those in line  
6           really with the way -- with Friendship's operational  
7           model. Two are employment pieces, and the cites for  
8           those are Arkansas Code Annotated 6-17-1501 et seq.  
9           -- that's the Public Employee Fair Hearing Act, and  
10          essentially what that will allow is those non-  
11          licensed persons to be treated as at-will employees  
12          in Friendship's employment hiring and retention  
13          model. 6-17-701 et seq. of the Arkansas code, that's  
14          the piece for licensed teacher at-will employment.  
15          And as I noted in the waiver sheet so-to-speak that I  
16          gave to Ms. Hyatt this morning, the reason for that,  
17          besides what I just mentioned, is -- and you've heard  
18          others use this same indication too, or rationale --  
19          is the benefit of that is if there is poor  
20          performance going on that enables in this case  
21          Friendship to recognize that at an early date, make  
22          appropriate changes if necessary, and thereby  
23          increasing student growth and achievement, especially  
24          for those licensed staff, and efficiency if it's  
25          somebody who's non-licensed, say an aid or cafeteria/

1 food service worker, somebody like that.

2 We wish to add grades K-8 to the current  
3 charter, and with that a corresponding enrollment cap  
4 increase of 500 students.

5 And then, finally, to change the name of the  
6 school to Pine Bluff Aspire Academy Southeast Pine  
7 Bluff.

8 And then, finally, to add a Seat Time waiver,  
9 and the legal references for those are Arkansas Code  
10 Annotated 6-15-216 and Section 1-8.2 of the  
11 Division's Standard for Accreditation rules. And  
12 those will allow some flexibility going forward in  
13 the methods of instruction, more specifically if  
14 there's a digital component to be added.

15 Thank you.

16 MR. SMITH: So at this time most of the major  
17 issues that we discussed at that January meeting have  
18 been addressed or there's been a pathway for them to  
19 be addressed and been put in place. In addition, one  
20 of the essential components that you wanted to see  
21 was a change in management. There has been entered  
22 into an agreement for that to take place where Mr.  
23 Cegers would continue to work at the school but under  
24 the oversight and management of Friendship, and they  
25 would provide staff and resources to take on that

1 role moving forward in many ways.

2 So with regards to high school graduation,  
3 there's pathways for those credit recoveries to take  
4 place.

5 With regards to special ed., those evaluations  
6 are in place with a proper budget.

7 With regards to dyslexia, there's a pathway for  
8 all those dyslexia screenings to be accomplished by  
9 the end of the month.

10 With regards to finances, as projected, their  
11 ending year balance has gone up rather than down at  
12 this point in time, and so that seems to be in good  
13 shape.

14 And in addition to that, we've brought in what  
15 we think is a well-recognized partner who's had some  
16 success academically in the Pine Bluff market most  
17 recently.

18 And so at that -- with that said I would like to  
19 recognize Mr. Harris from Friendship at this point  
20 and stage and have him speak to you a little bit  
21 about their involvement and the fact that they've  
22 already met with the parents and other folks in the  
23 community and the excitement that's been created  
24 around this.

25 So, Mr. Harris, if you'd come at this time.

1 MR. HARRIS: Good morning. My name is Joe  
2 Harris. I'm the CEO of Friendship Education  
3 Foundation. It's a nonprofit charter management  
4 organization.

5 We've been asked by the community and the  
6 parents of Southeast Prep to support and be a partner  
7 in this transition. We've outlined our transition  
8 plan in two phases. In the short-term we will -- we  
9 have already entered into a Memorandum of  
10 Understanding with the board to provide day-to-day  
11 management operations of the school through the end  
12 of this school year.

13 I see a few of the board members here and I'd  
14 just like to acknowledge the board members. And  
15 there's also a few parents.

16 One of the first things that we did when we were  
17 asked to consider this is we met with the community.  
18 We met with the mayor, who sends her regards. She  
19 submitted a letter of support; I don't know if you  
20 received it. But given the challenges today, she  
21 could not make it but she sends her full support.  
22 We've also met with stakeholders, Go Forward Pine  
23 Bluff, other parents, communities. We recently held  
24 an all staff, parent, and student community meeting  
25 in order to get their feedback and their support for

1 this. The support was overwhelming. And what was  
2 most impressive is that the kids were very vocal  
3 about wanting to see their school remain open, and  
4 the 9th graders wanted to see that they have the  
5 opportunity to graduate from that school. So we  
6 began to really kind of look at how we can create a  
7 pathway to do that.

8 The transition plan begins with day-to-day  
9 oversight that we will -- we are prepared to operate  
10 -- or implement immediately. We have the capacity  
11 and experience to do so. You may recall the last  
12 time I was here we did something similar with  
13 Covenant Keeper. I'm really proud to say that that  
14 transition, given its exterior kind of issues,  
15 internally we have made some wonderful strides. 97%  
16 of the kids that transitioned from Covenant Keeper to  
17 Friendship are still with us, except for the 8th  
18 graders that transitioned on to 9th grade, and they  
19 are really doing exceptionally well. So we have  
20 experience in doing this, not just in Arkansas, but  
21 across the U.S. Friendship in Washington, D.C., our  
22 parent company, was just named the largest charter  
23 entity in Washington, D.C. And we took -- just took  
24 over in the last four years a very similar situation,  
25 four different schools that were facing similar

1 challenges. We also did something similar in Baton  
2 Rouge, Louisiana. So we have experience in doing  
3 this. I think that us being a partner will really  
4 bring experience and additional capacity in what I  
5 think is a deliberate and well-thought-out approach  
6 to insuring that not just the kids that are currently  
7 at the school have a pathway to graduation, but some  
8 of them will have the ability to look beyond just  
9 graduating from high school and looking at college.  
10 That is our model.

11 I met two young ladies who are on their way to  
12 college at UAPB and I committed to them if they bring  
13 back their grades we will hire them for the summer as  
14 interns. That's an example of the Friendship model.  
15 But our school in Pine Bluff has really established  
16 itself as a community partner. I'm really proud of  
17 the strides we've made in our elementary. And what's  
18 most important here is I think the ask for our  
19 involvement came from parents. They trusted their  
20 kids at the elementary level. And one of the most --  
21 kind of what tipped us over the top on this was one  
22 of the parents said, "I have no other choice where to  
23 send my child once they graduate from your school."  
24 And so this arrangement where after we assume the  
25 management and the school itself or the charter is

1 transferred, it will allow continuity, not just of  
2 Friendship and the charter, but it will also be a  
3 choice and better educational options for all of the  
4 kids in Pine Bluff. So we're excited about this.

5 The transition plan, I think you've heard a lot  
6 of the details. We are prepared to really lend  
7 experience in taking on the educational needs of the  
8 -- of instruction of a high school. We have  
9 experience in doing that. I know that some of the  
10 concerns around the community -- and this was raised  
11 around how will scheduling -- we're -- one of the  
12 waivers we're asking for is around Seat Time. We  
13 want the flexibility to move from block scheduling to  
14 what we call normal scheduling, and we want to do so  
15 because it allows greater flexibility. We'll be able  
16 to teach classes every day versus every-other-day.  
17 That's just an example of how we've given thought to  
18 what is going to be -- we hope to be a successful  
19 educational approach.

20 You're going to also hear our primary goal is to  
21 insure that the existing students have a pathway to  
22 graduate. You heard Principal Cegers talk about the  
23 number of kids that are on task to graduate. Well,  
24 we want to do a double-hit; we want to go in and  
25 evaluate and make sure that they have all of the

1 credit. For those that are falling short we want to  
2 offer them the credit recovery opportunity, both  
3 online and summer school, and we see ourselves having  
4 the bandwidth to do that immediately when we walk in.

5 When we begin to transition the school itself,  
6 in honor of the school we wanted to keep the name.  
7 Tripp said it a little bit differently. It's  
8 actually Friendship Aspire Southeast Campus. That's  
9 going to -- well, Southeast Arkansas -- Southeast  
10 Pine Bluff is going to be the formal name we'd like  
11 to change it to.

12 We think that this is going to be -- as best it  
13 can, be a seamless transition. We see it long-term  
14 benefitting not just the high school students but the  
15 entire educational bandwidth of K-12 in the city of  
16 Pine Bluff.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

18 MR. HARRIS: Thank you.

19 MR. SMITH: Madam Chair, at this time I would  
20 ask if there's anybody from the Southeast Prep board  
21 that would like to speak or --

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I think you also have -- well,  
23 we had two Representatives, but now we have one. So  
24 --

25 MR. SMITH: Yes.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- if they want to speak.

2 MR. HARRIS: We'll let them speak last.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. No, go ahead.

4 REPRESENTATIVE FERGUSON: Thank you, Madam  
5 Chair. I'm just so happy to be here to be in  
6 support. This institution is in my House district,  
7 as well as a number of the kids who go there. One of  
8 the reasons I've been so supportive of this  
9 situation, I had a kid who I met when I visited the  
10 school sometime ago. She reminded me that she met me  
11 when I was campaigning in 2014, and she said, "I was  
12 a kid then and I couldn't vote for you then, and I  
13 can't vote for you now. But I tell you what, you  
14 said that you would fight for folk who couldn't fight  
15 for themselves." She said, "I can't fight for me, so  
16 you said you would do that." And so, she's holding  
17 me to it.

18 So I'm so happy and hope that this Board will  
19 grant these requests that this institution is  
20 requesting.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

22 REPRESENTATIVE FERGUSON: With that, I've got to  
23 go make a vote in Joint Budget. Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Representative Flowers, do you  
25 need to speak now too?

1           REPRESENTATIVE FLOWERS: I just wanted to thank  
2 all of you for affording the administration an  
3 opportunity to take corrective action. I think that  
4 this is a great example of how working with and  
5 listening to the community can work to benefit  
6 everybody involved. You know, they've had a little  
7 bit of time to do a lot of work -- and as a result,  
8 they're ending in the black and I think all but two  
9 -- one or two students will be graduating, which is  
10 how they came to us and what they told us it would  
11 be. And, you know, with that, I just want us to do  
12 what's best for our kids. And, you know, a lot of  
13 times it's not the institutional format, you know,  
14 that matters as much as it is that we have good  
15 teachers who are there for the kids and a safe  
16 environment. And I think that's what we have here  
17 and I just think that we ought to make sure that we  
18 are giving them everything they need to succeed so  
19 that the kids can succeed. And that's it. Thank  
20 you.

21           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you very much.

22           MS. HART: My name is Pat Hart. I'm the current  
23 board chair for Southeast Arkansas Preparatory. I'll  
24 be brief. I just want to say that from the very  
25 beginning our objective was to offer a viable,

1 quality alternative in Pine Bluff for our students,  
2 and that control and who's in charge is irrelevant;  
3 the objective is what's important and seeing the kids  
4 be able to succeed. So we support the transition for  
5 the benefit of our kids and our community.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

7 MR. SMITH: Madam Chair, just one other point to  
8 mention. I think the Board had asked the Southeast  
9 Prep board to check on community support. They did.  
10 The community was in a position and willing to  
11 provide grant support, if necessary. Hopefully,  
12 based on the financial balances we suggested that's  
13 not necessary. But I just want to make sure you know  
14 how much community support was behind this school,  
15 because the community was willing to stand behind it  
16 with some grant support if necessary. So I thought  
17 that was worth mentioning as well.

18 So I think at this point in time that concludes  
19 our presentation. I'm sorry for the short oversight;  
20 it should've been picked up in our meeting with the  
21 Department earlier this week. But we're confident  
22 it's not an issue because Friendship has already been  
23 approved to operate in Pine Bluff; so that should not  
24 be an issue going forward. And we would request your  
25 approval, contingent upon final review by the

1 Department and its staff. But, again, we think that  
2 will be a non sequitur. Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you.

4 Ms. -- oops, Ms. Smith slipped away. I was  
5 going to ask -- last time Finance and APSRC and the  
6 schools' numbers did not match. So I was wanting to  
7 check it, but she's not here right now.

8 Go ahead, Ms. Hyatt.

9 MS. HYATT: One thing that was -- that I --  
10 unless I just misheard, I believe that the intention  
11 is to not backfill the 9th, 10th, 11th grades as this  
12 school goes up. I didn't hear them discuss that  
13 today. And I think it would be an important piece of  
14 this for you guys to hear what their intention is  
15 moving forward, unless they've changed their mind  
16 about that.

17 MR. SMITH: Yes, that's correct. The intent is  
18 to let the current high school class, beginning with  
19 the 9th grade through the 12th grade, have a pathway  
20 for graduation, but not to backfill that high school  
21 class except with the elementary kids that are in  
22 school now moving forward. So obviously we just  
23 dealt with a model that was a high school alone and  
24 with no feeder schools coming into it and no long  
25 runway of working with those kids. So this intent is

1 to fill the middle school and the high school grades  
2 coming out of elementary grades coming up and going  
3 forward. So that's the intent going forward.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. I have some questions.  
5 Does anyone else?

6 Ms. Newton.

7 MS. NEWTON: I just have some comments at the  
8 end.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Go ahead and comment.

10 MS. NEWTON: I just want to thank the community  
11 for voicing their concerns, and the staff and Mr.  
12 Cegers at Southeast for your hard work and  
13 willingness to take help, and then all the hard work  
14 at APSRC. Because when adults can get things right  
15 it benefits students, and so that's our main goal.  
16 And so I really -- I know we hear in just a few  
17 minutes things that are going on, but I know it took  
18 hours and hours and hours of hard work to get us to  
19 this point and it took give-and-take on both sides.  
20 And I appreciate that and the willingness of the  
21 board at Southeast to be willing to say who's in  
22 charge doesn't matter; what matters is kids. And so  
23 that's -- when we can think like that, kids benefit.  
24 And so I appreciate all of your hard work and your  
25 concern for these students. So, thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Chambers? Ms. Dean?

2 MS. DEAN: I too want to thank all of the  
3 parties involved. I just want to echo what Ms.  
4 Newton said, and Representative Flowers. This is a  
5 great example of what can happen when a community  
6 advocates for itself and parents advocate and  
7 students advocate, and community and business members  
8 work together and there's partnership; so that we all  
9 work together so that our students get the best  
10 opportunities, the best education. And I hope that  
11 other districts that -- or other entities that find  
12 themselves in similar situations are watching to see  
13 how solutions can be brought to the table and how  
14 things can be worked out for the benefit of the  
15 students. So I'm excited about the future of this  
16 partnership -- and keep up the good work. Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McFetridge?

18 MS. McFETRIDGE: I don't have any comments right  
19 now. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Dr. Moore?

21 DR. MOORE: Yes, I have a few clarifying  
22 questions -- I don't know if for him. But as far as  
23 high school grades go -- so the next coming-up school  
24 year, grades 10, 11 and 12 will be served?

25 MR. HARRIS: Yes.

1 DR. MOORE: Is that correct? And can new  
2 students apply to serve in those grades?

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Can you get a little closer so  
4 Ms. McFetridge can hear you?

5 DR. MOORE: Can new students apply to the school  
6 in those grades next year?

7 MR. HARRIS: What we're trying to do is just  
8 graduate the first -- the existing kids. To answer  
9 your question directly, it's not our plan. It would  
10 be based on capacity in the individual classrooms.  
11 But we want to create a runway for these -- the kids  
12 that are there to get all of our efforts focused on  
13 getting them out of school. And then in the same  
14 year that the graduating class -- the 9th graders'  
15 current graduating class, a new 8th grade will move  
16 in. At that time it will be, of course, open-  
17 enrollment. We're looking at a full enrollment of  
18 the 8th through 12th grade to be a full 700 kids --  
19 100 kids per grade. So when that new grade level  
20 comes in, 100 kids would be part of that system.

21 I think you guys are familiar with the  
22 Friendship model, a slow-growth model. We believe  
23 that's going to be the best long-term way to make a  
24 difference and see our kids grow through and have a  
25 higher graduation rate and college attendance rate.

1           So to answer your question, it's not our plan  
2 right now. We expect to have the full open-  
3 enrollment where we open up the 8th grade level,  
4 which would be in three years after the 9th grade  
5 class graduates.

6           DR. MOORE: Okay. As far as facilities, is  
7 there plans to move facilities or will it remain --

8           MR. HARRIS: No. We intend to utilize that  
9 existing facility and grow out as needed.

10          DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. That makes sense. I  
11 guess there -- I do have a little bit of concern  
12 because I do think there is a need for a small-option  
13 high school. And so there will be a few years of a  
14 gap, but I understand your model in that sense.

15          MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt with the Division.

16                 And I'll have to double-check just to make sure.  
17 I don't know that there is a legal avenue that would  
18 allow you to not enroll kids in an open-enrollment  
19 charter school. So if they have 10th, 11th and 12th  
20 graders in an open-enrollment and they haven't met  
21 their enrollment cap, then I think they'd be required  
22 to enroll students if they apply. There could be an  
23 exception that I would have to research. But that's  
24 the first time I heard that, so I haven't had an  
25 opportunity to look at that. But usually how it

1 works is open-enrollment charter schools are required  
2 to enroll kids, unless they're at their cap.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. So, but there's no increase  
4 in cap?

5 MS. HYATT: So they have requested an increase  
6 and the addition of the grade 6 through 8. Again,  
7 just to reiterate my concerns there, we just received  
8 the desegregation analysis this morning. The rules  
9 require you to receive the analysis from the Division  
10 10 days prior to making a decision. We haven't had  
11 the opportunity to do one. The rules also allow the  
12 opportunity for the Superintendent of the district,  
13 the traditional district in which the charter is  
14 located the opportunity to present their own  
15 desegregation analysis. I'm not sure if Dr. Owoh has  
16 even been notified of this amendment request, because  
17 we're doing it through not the traditional amendment  
18 request pathway, and they might want to speak to  
19 that. But on the 6-8 addition and the increase in  
20 enrollment cap, I think until you have all of the  
21 desegregation information in front of you and Pine  
22 Bluff School District is able to exercise or not  
23 their option to supplement that, I don't think it's  
24 appropriate to move on that piece. All of the other  
25 pieces, it's completely appropriate for you to make a

1 decision on.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

3 DR. MOORE: And just to clarify -- is that  
4 desegregation report typically given to the charter  
5 authorizer panel?

6 MS. HYATT: So, and we're kind of in new  
7 territory because of this new legislation that was  
8 passed in the last legislative session. So this will  
9 be the first transfer under the new transfer/assign  
10 legislation that was passed in the session.  
11 Typically how this would work is the charter  
12 authorizer would hear an amendment request; the  
13 superintendent of the local district is given 35 days  
14 notice; we do a deseg analysis, and all those pieces  
15 work, and they're presented to the charter  
16 authorizer. In this case, probably what I would  
17 suggest is you table that piece -- that piece of the  
18 amendment until the next month; give Dr. Owoh the  
19 opportunity to, if he wants, present information;  
20 given the Division time to put together that deseg  
21 report; have time for them to present to you the  
22 information that they submitted as well -- and you'll  
23 hear that piece, not go back to the CAP.

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Anything else?

25 DR. MOORE: No. Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McAdoo?

2 Okay. I have some questions -- and one of them  
3 you answered. I wondered if there was any objection  
4 from the local district, and you're saying because  
5 they may not -- may or may not have known of the  
6 request --

7 MS. HYATT: So --

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Obviously their board did, but  
9 --

10 MS. HYATT: We have no evidence that there's  
11 objection, but I'm not sure what, if any, notice was  
12 given to the local district because of this very  
13 unique, new situation that we're in. So --

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

15 MS. HYATT: They would be better suited to  
16 answer that.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. This would be for  
18 Friendship. And if you will, come to the microphone.

19 When I looked on My School Info, it did not list  
20 that you were currently serving a dyslexia  
21 population. Is that accurate?

22 MR. HARRIS: No.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

24 MR. HARRIS: We follow the SPED requirements, as  
25 well as provide for accommodations for dyslexic

1 students.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. If I didn't mis-look,  
3 then under state required information I did not see  
4 it there. So you may want to check that.

5 MR. HARRIS: Okay.

6 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Sometimes things fall through  
7 the cracks.

8 MR. HARRIS: Okay.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Do you know what the -- and I  
10 realize sometimes at your level you don't know the  
11 details of what went on at the other level. But do  
12 you know what screeners you use to identify your  
13 dyslexia students?

14 MR. HARRIS: Well, what I do know is that we  
15 follow the standard accreditations for that, as well  
16 as the state guidelines, law and rules around special  
17 education. We contract out our services, and I know  
18 that we are using a licensed firm. I'm not sure. My  
19 superintendent is standing behind me.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: There's a young man coming up to  
21 be helpful.

22 MR. TRAN: Phong Tran, superintendent of  
23 Friendship. So just to answer your first question,  
24 the dyslexic piece, we didn't have any kids because  
25 the student that was receiving the dyslexic service

1 was a special education student. So that student is  
2 receiving those services anyway.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. So they showed markers --

4 MR. TRAN: Yes.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- but they in fact were  
6 qualified as --

7 MR. TRAN: Yes. Under special education.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Specific learning --

9 MR. TRAN: Correct.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- disability, not dyslexia  
11 separate from that?

12 MR. TRAN: Correct. Yes, ma'am.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

14 MR. TRAN: And we follow the dyslexia handbook,  
15 where we provide the DIBELS intervention -- the  
16 DIBELS screening first. So we did that for K, 1st  
17 and 2nd grades. And then after that, depending on  
18 the results that come back from the DIBELS, then we  
19 take the next steps to provide the second screening.  
20 So this year we did the same thing. And last year we  
21 did the same thing. And, again, the child that  
22 exempted the -- I think it was two children that  
23 exempted the symptoms were actually special education  
24 students.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

1 MR. TRAN: Yeah.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I think if the website showed  
3 these were screened and then --

4 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am.

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- that would be helpful,  
6 regardless --

7 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am, most definitely. We'll  
8 go ahead and update that for the next term.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And I know a lot of districts,  
10 as the second step to that, are saying -- and because  
11 often dyslexia occurs in families -- so if -- like a  
12 next good step is to then screen any siblings --

13 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am.

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- that those K-2 children have.

15 MR. TRAN: Most definitely.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: So anyway -- and what is the  
17 literacy curriculum that you're using in your general  
18 population? Is it aligned with state standards? And  
19 then, what are you using as your reading curriculum  
20 with your dyslexia students and special ed.?

21 MR. TRAN: So at this moment in time we're using  
22 the Foundations curriculum, which is research-based.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Foundations?

24 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am. At the same time we're  
25 also using Wit and Wisdom, as well as (inaudible).

1 So those are the curriculums that we're using within  
2 the school at the lower elementary level and at the  
3 middle school level. So that's what we -- we  
4 incorporate the reading, kind of like a reading --  
5 50-minute reading blocks into our schedule every day  
6 to insure that -- you know, that the Science of  
7 Reading is getting implemented within our schools.

8 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

9 And my last question may be for you; I don't  
10 know who can answer it.

11 I noticed that Friendship does not serve  
12 breakfast and lunch. Is that correct?

13 MR. TRAN: No.

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Incorrect?

15 MR. TRAN: Yes. So we actually do serve  
16 breakfast and lunch, and at the same time we also  
17 give them a snack in the afternoon for those that are  
18 actually going to the afterschool program.

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

20 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Well, the question was going to  
22 be if they were getting it one way -- okay. Then  
23 those things you may want to check on your --

24 MR. TRAN: Most definitely.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- My School Info --

1 MR. TRAN: Yes.

2 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- because that's the only way I  
3 have of accessing --

4 MR. TRAN: Most definitely. Yeah. I mean, you  
5 know, our population at the Little Rock campus is  
6 actually about 96 free-and-reduced.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Right.

8 MR. TRAN: So they -- and we're actually  
9 Provision 2 as well. So being Provision 2 we have to  
10 provide free --

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Sure.

12 MR. TRAN: -- lunch, breakfast to all of our  
13 students. So, yes.

14 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I just wanted to be sure that if  
15 the parents who currently were expecting and getting  
16 breakfast/lunch that they understood if you were not.  
17 But since you are --

18 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am.

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- then all is good.

20 MR. TRAN: Yes, ma'am.

21 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I still don't have the answer to  
22 the finance question, but --

23 MS. NEWTON: I saw Ms. McLaughlin nodding her  
24 head a while ago. So maybe someone over there has an  
25 answer.

1 MS. BARRICK: It's pretty much the same as  
2 APSRC.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you. That's  
4 helpful.

5 Okay. Any other questions or discussion by the  
6 Board?

7 Okay. Would you come and specifically tell us  
8 each part that we're going to be voting on?

9 MS. HYATT: Mary Claire Hyatt with the Division.  
10 I think it would be appropriate to fust -- first  
11 -- excuse me, it's been such a long day -- first vote  
12 on whether to approve the transfer, effective July  
13 1st -- that first.

14 Then, second, vote to approve the amendments,  
15 which, again, just to reiterate, would be the name-  
16 change and the three waivers that they went through  
17 of Teacher Fair Dismissal, Public School Employee  
18 Fair Hearing Act, and the 120 Clock Hours provision.  
19 Those are the three additional waivers.

20 The Board can choose to then, in a third motion,  
21 vote on how they want to handle the increased  
22 enrollment in the additional grades. Again, I think  
23 it's most appropriate, judging by what the law and  
24 the rule says about the desegregation analysis, to  
25 table that piece until next month. You can make that

1 as a motion; you could approve it or deny it,  
2 whatever. I would just like you to handle that in a  
3 separate motion.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. If everybody made a note  
5 about the three motions, let's deal with them one at  
6 a time.

7 So do I have a motion to approve the transfer of  
8 the charter?

9 MS. NEWTON: So moved.

10 MS. DEAN: Second.

11 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Newton.

12 MS. DEAN: Second.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by -- Ms. Dean?

14 MS. DEAN: Uh-huh.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. All in favor?

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

18 Okay. Motion passes.

19 And the name-change and the waivers that were  
20 mentioned by the presenter and reiterated by Ms.  
21 Hyatt, do I have a motion there?

22 MS. DEAN: Move to approve.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Dean.

24 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Chambers.

1 All in favor?

2 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. And then the enrollment  
4 increase. Ms. Hyatt suggested doing it one way, and  
5 Mr. Smith asked that we do it a different. Do I have  
6 a motion on one way or the other?

7 DR. MOORE: I mean if we do it -- if we wait  
8 till next month there's no ramifications to  
9 enrollment for the next school year, is there?

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No, because they're doing high  
11 school and right now is the time of year when you  
12 schedule and do a master schedule. So I don't see  
13 any, unless somebody can bring up something of which  
14 I am unaware.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay.

16 MS. NEWTON: Does the charter have any reason  
17 that we -- that you would have to have it today  
18 versus next month?

19 MR. SMITH: (Shaking head from side to side.)

20 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

21 So I move we table the grade additions and the  
22 increase in enrollment cap until next month.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.  
24 Newton.

25 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Chambers.

2 All in favor?

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Motion passes.

5 Okay. Thank you all, especially Friendship and  
6 APSRC and those of you in the Department, and for the  
7 receptiveness of you and your board for just wanting  
8 what's good for kids. We appreciate you.

9 DR. MOORE: Can we take a break?

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yes.

11 Okay. We are now at the end of the morning  
12 schedule. We're going to take a 10 -- we're going to  
13 take a 10-minute break, and then we'll be back at  
14 3:50 -- a 9-minute break.

15 (BREAK: 3:41 - 3:53 p.m.)

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. We'll come back to order.  
17 And now we will start the afternoon agenda.

18 First up -- oops, is Mr. Hernandez going to come  
19 and talk?

20 Okay.

21 MR. DAN DAVIS: He just ran just right down the  
22 hall real quick and he's coming right back.

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Then we will wait on him,  
24 unless you want to go ahead, Mr. Hoy.

25 MR. HOY: I'm good.

1           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I don't know if any of y'all  
2           were on the Board when Mr. Hoy worked here. Anyway,  
3           he used to be over in the office that Deb Coffman is  
4           now in and he was assigned to Helena-West Helena as  
5           the superintendent over there, and then he retired.  
6           And that's what happens when we get good people who  
7           retire; we just bring them back.

8           We're waiting on Mr. Hernandez -- or Dr.  
9           Hernandez.

10          SECRETARY KEY: Well, let me, if I may, while  
11          we're waiting on him anyway -- if you could give me a  
12          few minutes, as we're transitioning, to make a few  
13          remarks. And I know we have a live-stream audience  
14          around the state, school personnel that listen in to  
15          this or watch. And I know that as we came back from  
16          lunch we listened to the Governor's press conference.  
17          So many of you have heard this information, but I  
18          don't think we were live-streaming at the time of the  
19          Governor's press conference.

20          We were? Okay. So folks may or may not have  
21          heard this. But also I've noticed -- or have gotten  
22          some information in the last couple of hours that  
23          there's a little bit of confusion out there amongst  
24          the school community. So in the Governor's press  
25          conference he announced that there will be closure of

1 public schools in four counties: Grant County, Saline  
2 County, Jefferson County, and Pulaski County. And  
3 that is due to the risks associated with the new  
4 presumed confirmations of the COVID-19 virus, plus  
5 direct contact with those individuals. And we've not  
6 -- you know, you cannot just isolate the schools  
7 because of family connections and community  
8 connections and all; so that's why the decision was  
9 made on a county basis. So that includes our charter  
10 schools, our traditional public schools, and we're  
11 also making that call for the Arkansas School for the  
12 Deaf and School for the Blind since they are located  
13 here in Little Rock. It is not a statewide closure.  
14 That's the thing that needs to be reinforced is it's  
15 not a statewide closure.

16 As additional information comes in to the  
17 Department of Health and to the Department of  
18 Education, that information will be evaluated and  
19 analyzed to determine what next steps need to be  
20 taken. And that is ongoing. So Dr. Pfeffer just  
21 sent out guidance to superintendents this afternoon  
22 with an updated number. The Health Department has  
23 established a hotline that is specifically for  
24 schools that they can call with information  
25 concerning any possible exposures, fear of exposure,

1 anything like that.

2 But the advice at this point is still the same  
3 -- you know, closures, according to the Executive  
4 Order -- closures due to COVID-19 will be determined  
5 by the Secretary of Health in consultation with us  
6 and with me here at the Department of Education. But  
7 we also want superintendents to know that as they get  
8 information they need to follow that guidance and get  
9 that information to the Arkansas Department of  
10 Health. We will have ADE staff with the Health  
11 Department staff; so there will be someone there with  
12 that hotline that speaks the language of educators,  
13 understands the issues that educators deal with, and  
14 understands the questions that may be coming in and  
15 any of the logistical issues that may be associated  
16 with this.

17 So in the meantime, we're encouraging the  
18 schools that are not affected to look at  
19 preparations. But at the same time, it's continue  
20 with school and make sure that the learning  
21 environment is what we always want, which is a  
22 positive learning environment, minimizing fear,  
23 minimizing any decisions made that are not based on  
24 the scientific and medical evidence -- and that's the  
25 key. These decisions need to be made based on

1 scientific and medical evidence, and that's why we  
2 rely on our experts at the Health Department to  
3 assist us in that -- with those issues.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And I think we need to be sure  
5 people know it's the public -- traditional and public  
6 charter. We're not in charge of the private schools,  
7 and that will be individual choices that they can  
8 make.

9 SECRETARY KEY: Yes. Thank you, Ms. Zook.  
10 That's a good point. The State has no authority over  
11 the private schools. Some have made decisions to  
12 close. But we do not have -- we do not control what  
13 they do. But we would hope that they would follow  
14 the same advice and the same guidance. We have been  
15 in contact with ANSAA, the -- you know, don't -- I  
16 forget what that stands for, but the private school  
17 organization. We have been in contact with them to  
18 make sure they're aware of the guidance that we're  
19 issuing. And, you know, hopefully they will work  
20 with us in that regard too.

21 The other question that we get often is about  
22 the colleges and universities. They are independent  
23 entities, so they make those decisions on their  
24 campuses on their own. We don't have any influence  
25 on those decisions.

1           The other question that has been a common  
2 question, since we've been sitting here this  
3 afternoon, is when schools are closed what about the  
4 food programs. And we have submitted a waiver  
5 request to the USDA to get approval to conduct the  
6 feeding programs that would be similar to like summer  
7 feeding programs, so schools could provide grab-and-  
8 go meals, things of that nature. So, you know,  
9 schools -- while schools are -- in these four  
10 counties are closed from the standpoint of holding  
11 classes, we would still encourage those districts to  
12 have essential staff on-hand for those type of  
13 duties, for administrative issues, finance issues.  
14 And then hopefully we'll get confirmation of this  
15 waiver from the USDA soon and we'll be able to  
16 maintain some level of nutritional programs for the  
17 students and families in those areas.

18           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

19           MS. NEWTON: I have one question.

20           SECRETARY KEY: Yes, ma'am.

21           MS. NEWTON: Since Higher Ed. is not under this  
22 umbrella -- but pre-K would come under this, where  
23 they would close under this also?

24           SECRETARY KEY: Well, so pre-K/ABC programs that  
25 are associated with public schools would fall under

1           this category, but privately run programs would not  
2           necessarily be. But we, again, would ask them to be  
3           aware of the advice and guidance they're getting.  
4           They are getting guidance from the Division of Child  
5           Care and Early Childhood Education, because we have  
6           kind of a joint relationship with working with those.  
7           So, not just ABC programs but also traditional  
8           daycare providers. So that -- you know, same  
9           information in referencing Health Department guidance  
10          is going out to those entities as well.

11           MS. NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

12           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Dan, would you put the  
13          public comment statement up so that, as we start into  
14          these schools, that you will -- we'll have that in  
15          front of us --

16           MR. DAVIS: Yes, ma'am.

17           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- just briefly.

18                           LEGISLATIVE REPORTS

19           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And then Mr. Hernandez -- Earle,  
20          the patient people. Dr. Hernandez, sorry.

21           DR. HERNANDEZ: Yes, ma'am. Dr. Mike Hernandez,  
22          State Superintendent for Office of Coordinated  
23          Support and Service.

24                           I do want to start out by just asking what the  
25          Board's pleasure will be on these legislative

1 reports. We do have Earle and Lee County that is in  
2 attendance. Due to what's happened in Pulaski and  
3 Jefferson County, we asked those superintendents not  
4 to participate today. So we can continue on with the  
5 reports. I know there's some who expressed interest  
6 in having some conversation with the superintendents,  
7 and so we can do Earle and Lee County today and  
8 postpone the others till next month. But whatever  
9 you guys want to do on that.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Why don't we -- in case  
11 there are people here that may want to speak to  
12 those, and if we decide not to hear them --

13 Do I have a motion about whether or not we go  
14 ahead and hear the reports from Dr. Hernandez on Pine  
15 Bluff, Dollarway, and Little Rock, or whether we  
16 postpone his presentation, as well as any questions  
17 that you might have for the superintendents or other  
18 staff at those schools?

19 MS. NEWTON: Can I ask a question?

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Sure.

21 MS. NEWTON: Do we have any public here to give  
22 public comment on any of those issues?

23 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I have not had anybody sign up  
24 that I've been given. Nothing at this point. No,  
25 not from the public at this point.

1 MS. NEWTON: Then I'm okay with postponing, if  
2 that's the pleasure of the Board.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: So postpone the presentation and  
4 any questions we may have.

5 I have a motion by Ms. Newton.

6 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Chambers.

8 All in favor?

9 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

11 Okay. We'll add that to the April -- okay.

12 B-1: CONSIDERATION OF LEGISLATIVE REPORT: EARLE SCHOOL  
13 DISTRICT

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. So we'll start out with  
15 the Earle School District. Ms. Knowles is here to  
16 answer any questions as we go through the  
17 presentation.

18 The first thing we want to start off with is the  
19 TESS observations. We've been working with the  
20 District and you can see that from August through  
21 January we have seen an increase in -- a drastic  
22 increase in the number of observations that have been  
23 done and put into EdReflect. Some of the comments  
24 that our team has made is that we need to work closer  
25 to make sure that the feedback that is given by the

1           Districts -- we need to make sure they align with the  
2           evidence that they're seeing in the classroom.  
3           That's something that we'll be working on ongoing.

4                     There is -- has been a slight increase, as you  
5           can see from the 20.2 to the 21.4 in chronic  
6           absenteeism. And the District is working to  
7           diligently try to get that lower. We hope to see  
8           that that chronic absenteeism, as we trickle towards  
9           the end of the year, that that is being decreased.

10                    From an assessment perspective, we do see that  
11           overall in reading we're not seeing the kind of  
12           growth that we are hoping for on the K-2 reading  
13           literacy assessments. On the upper levels in terms  
14           of literacy we did see growth from fall to winter on  
15           grades 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9, with the highest growth  
16           being in grade 6. In math, same story with K-2;  
17           we're not seeing the growth we would like to on the  
18           math part related to K-2. But we are seeing growth  
19           in grades 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9, with again the biggest  
20           grade being grade -- or biggest growth being in grade  
21           6.

22                    When we look at Standards for Accreditation,  
23           during the report we had 11 active exceptions. We do  
24           have -- that's down to eight. All of those are  
25           related to a waiver that's been requested for

1 kindergarten. We had an additional student that came  
2 at semester. What we're -- what the District is  
3 asking for is to have a waiver from Class Size  
4 because we were faced with that dilemma which we  
5 struggled to get certified teachers. It didn't make  
6 sense to bring in another possibly non-certified  
7 teacher with the classes up at semester. And so when  
8 that waiver is done then that will actually clear off  
9 their exceptions for the year.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Is that something we'll need to  
11 vote on?

12 DR. HERNANDEZ: Deb, is that right, they've  
13 submitted for the kindergarten waiver?

14 MS. COFFMAN: It was submitted. It will be on  
15 the next one.

16 DR. HERNANDEZ: It will be on April's agenda.

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Thank you.

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: So it's a one-year standards  
19 waiver. Is that correct?

20 MS. COFFMAN: Yes.

21 DR. HERNANDEZ: The next thing related to  
22 special education, we are continuing to work with the  
23 new LEA supervisor. Their corrective action plan is  
24 complete. We did have a February monitoring that was  
25 done and we're awaiting those written findings that

1 will be shared in the next legislative report. We  
2 don't have any major concerns that we've seen in  
3 terms of special ed. at this time.

4 Dyslexia -- one of the things that, you know, we  
5 haven't seen -- we've done a lot of screening, we've  
6 done a lot of training; we just aren't at a point  
7 where we're doing a lot of the intervention pieces of  
8 that, and that's going to be critical. With all of  
9 our districts we're trying to move -- Little Rock is  
10 probably a lot further ahead, but in Earle and some  
11 of the others we're trying to get that intervention  
12 piece. And some of it is personnel, not having the  
13 personnel trained and ready to go in terms of  
14 intervention. But there are several -- they're in  
15 the process of doing the Level 2 assessments in  
16 Earle, and then we'll be working towards doing the  
17 intervention pieces for those students.

18 One of the things related to Science of Reading,  
19 we've had several days of interaction helping support  
20 the staff and coaching and modeling within the  
21 schools. What kind of ties into the finances is  
22 because we've had a very difficult cash-flow issue  
23 that we've been struggling with. We've kind of had  
24 to postpone purchasing decodable texts, but we have  
25 purchased those. And my understanding those have

1           come in?

2                   SUPT. KNOWLES: (Nodding head up and down.)

3                   DR. HERNANDEZ: So that'll be another added tool  
4 in the tool belt the districts will be able to use in  
5 regards for Science of Reading.

6                   The Solution Tree -- the District did not start  
7 out using -- working with them extensively. They  
8 have since started some contract work with the  
9 District to start establishing -- they already had a  
10 process together where they were doing teams and  
11 working through an initial part of that process. But  
12 now that they have the embedded coaching it will help  
13 them really stand up and identify central standards  
14 on a lot of that work that will help move the  
15 District along. But one of the things we do continue  
16 to face with that district is the staffing piece. At  
17 the elementary level it seems to be a lot better, but  
18 at the secondary we're really struggling getting  
19 certified teachers in the classroom.

20                   I did provide in the report -- there's a human  
21 capital report in there, and it probably looks very  
22 convoluted. But what we tried to do is give you a  
23 picture of seeing, you know, what are the courses  
24 that are associated -- because sometimes you may see  
25 they have an emergency teacher permit, but you don't

1 see the actual courses that they're tied with. So we  
2 tried to provide some of that additional information  
3 just to give you an idea of typically where you see a  
4 lot of math, literacy type classes that are -- we're  
5 not able to cover at this time with certified staff.

6 As far as the teachers' attendance, we have 10%  
7 of them that have missed somewhere between 5% and 10%  
8 of the school days this year, and then also 1% that  
9 have missed above that in elementary and 5% in the  
10 high school.

11 The --

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I'm having trouble seeing that.  
13 Let me look -- turn around so I can see it better.

14 DR. HERNANDEZ: You see it okay?

15 Okay. So as far as community engagement  
16 efforts, I can let Ms. Knowles speak a little bit  
17 more to that. But some of the interaction that I've  
18 directly had is related to the student government  
19 association. And Ms. McAdoo was able to be in a  
20 meeting, along with Mr. Hoy. They've really got a  
21 good group that was established last year with Dr.  
22 Wilde, very active; have a lot of good suggestions,  
23 but have also brought a lot of concerns to us related  
24 to the digital delivery of education, child nutrition  
25 concerns, and just, you know, a lot of things that

1 were good information that we've tried to take into  
2 account. Ms. Knowles has continued to meet with them  
3 and try to generate ideas about how they can solve  
4 some of these issues. And I think it's important  
5 when we're hearing the students -- that really gives  
6 us good context. And I'll just share -- I'll share  
7 one briefly: in the District one of the things that  
8 -- because we've had kind of a series of uncertified  
9 teachers and things like that, sometimes when you  
10 replace that with digital education it's hard to --  
11 for students to grasp what to do with that. And  
12 sometimes -- in a lot of cases it's more rigorous.  
13 So we had students that expressed, you know, they  
14 would come home a lot with A's and B's and when they  
15 got to the digital education they're coming home with  
16 a lot less -- less appealing grades. And so having  
17 to explain that -- it's hard for them to explain it  
18 to their parents, but it's also us -- you know, to  
19 try to communicate that with the student that that's  
20 just one of the byproducts of doing something more  
21 rigorous and something that they may not be  
22 accustomed to doing in getting a digital type  
23 education. And so we talked through a lot of those  
24 issues in trying to find ways to help those students.  
25 And so that was kind of a big thing we didn't think

1 about in terms of, you know, how does that affect a  
2 student specifically when they see those lower grades  
3 and, you know, how -- in comparison to the way it  
4 used to be. We didn't get into discussion of whether  
5 -- when they were getting A's and B's what the level  
6 of education was, because we didn't know those  
7 answers. But that is a byproduct of moving into  
8 digital education; you can't have those kind of  
9 circumstances.

10 In regards to the District finances, you know,  
11 to give you a little bit of context, when we took  
12 over the District there was always those -- having to  
13 pay back federal funds. We've had -- there were a  
14 lot of bills that were outstanding, and so last year  
15 we were paying back previous years' bills. This  
16 year, we're paying some of last years' bills and  
17 trying to get to a place where the District is  
18 stabilized, but we continue to battle things like  
19 loss of enrollment. And so we've had -- right now,  
20 based on first quarter ADM and second quarter ADM,  
21 we're on track somewhere to be -- having 25 to 30  
22 less students next year. And so just when you get  
23 things to a place where we're working on trying to  
24 correct the academic structure, we have to also start  
25 looking at how to minimize costs now that we've lost

1 this enrollment.

2 MS. NEWTON: So would their enrollment -- what  
3 would their enrollment be K-12?

4 DR. HERNANDEZ: So it is roughly about six --  
5 almost 600 right now; so it'll be close to around  
6 470, 475 is what we're looking at.

7 Is that about right?

8 SUPT. KNOWLES: 575.

9 DR. HERNANDEZ: 575. I'm sorry. Yeah. I said  
10 the wrong number. But that's what it'll probably be  
11 looking like next year. We don't have any indication  
12 that they've seen a large bump in enrollment at  
13 semester. So when we see that second quarter ADM  
14 average, just to estimate we say, okay, at first  
15 semester this is what the first two quarters averaged  
16 out to be; now let's look at semester -- did they  
17 gain students? If they didn't, there's a high  
18 likelihood that that second quarter average is going  
19 to be probably pretty close to what the district will  
20 have.

21 MS. NEWTON: Do you know where -- are they  
22 choicing out or are they moving out? Is it a problem  
23 -- regional problem? Do you know what's going on?

24 SUPT. KNOWLES: We only lost three of the  
25 children --

1 DR. HERNANDEZ: Do you want to come up and --  
2 yeah, I'll let you come up and answer that one.

3 SUPT. KNOWLES: Tish Knowles, Superintendent,  
4 Earle School District.

5 We only lost three last year.

6 MS. NEWTON: So they're actually moving away?

7 SUPT. KNOWLES: So we graduated more students  
8 than we got in for kindergarten.

9 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

10 MS. CHAMBERS: Dr. Hernandez --

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. CHAMBERS: -- if you run out your expenses,  
13 at least the ones that are known, and you anticipate  
14 this drop in enrollment that you're talking about, at  
15 the end of this year are you about where you started  
16 the year? Are you better off? Can you predict that  
17 yet?

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: So as far as financially, if  
19 everything kind of goes to where the budget is --  
20 and, of course, it's one of those things because we  
21 don't have a fully certified staff -- we've got a lot  
22 of long-term subs, waivers, and stuff in the high  
23 school -- that that's a cost savings, if that makes  
24 sense.

25 MS. CHAMBERS: Yes.

1 DR. HERNANDEZ: But at the same time it's at the  
2 jeopardy of, you know, not having certified teachers  
3 in the classroom. And so, the way -- the purple page  
4 that we provide shows it being about a \$76,000  
5 increase above where they were last year, but that's  
6 if everything goes according to budget. If we have  
7 anything that comes up that might be unanticipated --  
8 you know, we are trying to -- there's a lot of things  
9 from a maintenance aspect, like the parking lot that  
10 was originally part of the master plan, some of the  
11 roofing issues -- there are some things we need to  
12 take care of, but we're deferring a lot of that  
13 maintenance right now. And just like I mentioned,  
14 the decodable text, that's something that can be paid  
15 for out of ESA funds potentially or other fund  
16 sources. But because the cash-flow issue has kind of  
17 been a problem, because we're paying the previous  
18 years' bills, that's been -- we anticipate ending a  
19 little bit better than we ended last year. But at  
20 the same time, we're going to have to compensate. So  
21 when you just take 30 students, times, you know,  
22 \$7,000, that's a big hit to the District that we're  
23 going to have to compensate for next year in addition  
24 to that.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: You're still not losing that

1 money for several months. It used to be, and maybe  
2 still is, that you didn't lose the money for 18  
3 months. Is that not still --

4 DR. HERNANDEZ: So the way the funding formula  
5 is set up is that this -- these -- this enrollment,  
6 this three-quarter ADM average was what will set the  
7 stage for what money they'll have next year. There  
8 will be some balance of money coming back in the  
9 District through declining enrollment, but that's not  
10 an ongoing source. It's kind of a, you know, half,  
11 one-year shot in the arm --

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

13 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- to make sure -- to help you  
14 to adjust to that.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

16 MS. NEWTON: When we're talking about the purple  
17 pages -- this is just because of my lack of  
18 understanding -- when I look at it, it's got the  
19 negative balance --

20 DR. HERNANDEZ: So the very top line --

21 MS. NEWTON: Right.

22 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- that you're looking at is  
23 kind of the current to-date stuff. So they may have  
24 not have posted some revenue or some expenditure.

25 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

1 DR. HERNANDEZ: Or some revenues may have not  
2 been posted. It's that second line that has the  
3 arrow that shows --

4 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: -- the 70-something. I believe  
6 it's \$76,000. That's what the budget says. And so  
7 as long as we're staying on track with that we should  
8 be reasonably okay.

9 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

10 DR. HERNANDEZ: So any questions that you may  
11 have related to --

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McAdoo? Dr. Moore?

13 DR. MOORE: Yes. I mean as you're looking at  
14 staffing for next year --

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Pull your mic up.

16 DR. MOORE: -- staffing for next year and what  
17 that looks like, in addition to online courses, what  
18 -- I know y'all have tried different things in the  
19 past with training and whatnot. You have waiver  
20 teachers. What are those conversations looking like?

21 DR. HERNANDEZ: I'll try to answer that and then  
22 defer to Ms. Knowles.

23 We did have -- we've had some conversations with  
24 various digital providers and have a planning session  
25 that we're trying to get organized, to see what are

1 the availabilities. What -- we have actually met  
2 with Ms. Knowles earlier this week to try to have her  
3 look at some possibilities and other models related  
4 to high school delivery. I think that's where our  
5 biggest concern is, is that, you know, as you try to  
6 reduce costs then that comes at the expense of  
7 programs and opportunities for students. And so, you  
8 know, we want to make sure that as we move towards  
9 some possible opportunities for digital delivery that  
10 we don't have the circumstance that the student  
11 government was talking about and how can we provide  
12 them with access to multiple courses, whether that be  
13 in conjunction with some neighboring school  
14 districts. So we're looking at a lot of those  
15 options and even trying to think outside the box on  
16 some of that.

17 So if you have anything you might want to add to  
18 that?

19 DR. MOORE: Well, I know we've talked about that  
20 some. But I think certainly, in working with  
21 students at your school, thinking outside the box I  
22 encourage and thinking about other ways to provide  
23 digital education so it's not just a student and a  
24 computer by themselves the majority of the day.

25 SUPT. KNOWLES: Yes. As Dr. -- Tish Knowles,

1 Superintendent, Earle School District.

2 As Dr. Hernandez said, I did have conversation  
3 with the Department this week about possibilities.  
4 We already go to ASU-MidSouth, so we take about 45  
5 students there. So there might be some opportunities  
6 to go a little bit farther with that and maybe do  
7 some personalized learning, maybe just a different  
8 model for us. I feel that the elementary model is  
9 sound and I feel like we will see improvements when  
10 we take test scores. I see those things working.  
11 And as we observe and see what's going on, we can see  
12 that. But at the high school we have just those  
13 underlying issues, and mainly it's because of not  
14 having those certified staff members. So if you look  
15 at what we have, we cannot sustain without certified  
16 staff members. And so we really need to be  
17 innovative when we're recruiting teachers, and part  
18 of that would be the way we rearrange our salary  
19 schedule. And so that's out right now in the PPC as  
20 they're looking at it, and for public comment, to see  
21 what we need to do and how we need to change that.  
22 And we're trying to be innovative while we're looking  
23 at neighboring districts that have -- like our size,  
24 that we can compete with those salaries. But when  
25 you talk about the West Memphis and the Marion and

1           Wynn, we can't compete with their salaries, and so  
2           we're trying to be innovative on the front-end of  
3           that. We have talked about some incentives to get  
4           people there.

5           The new Commissioner's Memo that came out about  
6           the special education being able to go through a  
7           different program, that was -- that pathway, that was  
8           good for us. So I think those will be some things  
9           that will help. But I think maybe just a different  
10          model and what that looks like, and that's going to  
11          take some time to have that community interaction and  
12          that engagement with the community so that we can see  
13          how they feel about that.

14          And so Dr. Hernandez mentioned that we're  
15          meeting with the community and I think just maybe  
16          getting the word out there this is what Virtual  
17          Arkansas is, this is what they do. We had those  
18          meetings. We had an initial advisory board meeting  
19          where we had standing room only. People came out and  
20          we addressed some concerns having to do with Virtual  
21          Arkansas. And then at the building level the  
22          principal and the leadership team met with parents,  
23          and that has really calmed that storm. And I think  
24          maybe just having those conversations -- part of  
25          working with Solution Tree is helping us to build

1           that internal, as well as external, communication.  
2           We're lacking there, and they're helping us with  
3           those pieces. So we just put out our first district  
4           newsletter and put that on Facebook; hence, the  
5           public -- social media coming up with a lot of  
6           different things. And so I think just having those  
7           conversations is a big thing.

8                        I would like to share a little bit on the  
9           finance side, because as we're looking at finances I  
10          feel good about where we are compared to what I --  
11          where I thought we would be at the end of the year.  
12          We have been really digging, working with the ADE  
13          Fiscal Unit, our internal people, and our bookkeepers  
14          and just everybody to try to find money -- where can  
15          we find some money, what can you cut. And sometimes  
16          it's not about what you can cut, but how you can save  
17          in certain areas. So changing our phone system over  
18          -- we've realized a savings of about \$500 a month in  
19          phones by changing over to a different phone system.  
20          We found three water bills that we should not have  
21          been paying because we were no longer using those  
22          buildings, and so we have had the water cut off. We  
23          had two dumpsters that we found out were on grounds  
24          where the school wasn't using them, but people in the  
25          community were using them. And then we worked with

1           Entergy; we had \$11,000 in deposits from previous --  
2           before State takeover where they tack on deposits  
3           when your bills are paid late. And we found \$11,000.  
4           We worked with Entergy. We had a phone conference  
5           yesterday with the Fiscal Unit and my folks and  
6           myself, and Entergy is crediting back \$11,000. So  
7           it's going to be two months' worth of bills. They're  
8           crediting that \$11,000. So we found \$11,000 in that  
9           area, and then \$268 with the dumpster, \$140 in water,  
10          and \$500 a month on phones. We also found out Monday  
11          that going with the same company that we used our  
12          phones, our e-Fax for our copy machines, we were  
13          paying about \$400 a month in faxes; we can pay \$86 a  
14          month. So we found some savings. And so just  
15          finding those little pieces like that takes time, but  
16          we are working to -- with everybody, trying to do  
17          that.

18                 DR. MOORE: That's great. Thank you for sharing  
19                 that.

20                 I do have one more question --

21                 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Sure.

22                 DR. MOORE: -- which I know the fiscal, but  
23                 academic issue as well -- are there plans for summer  
24                 school in the elementary or middle school grades?

25                 SUPT. KNOWLES: We've not discussed those plans.

1           When we talk about the staffing, we have talked about  
2           the staffing piece. But we have found traditionally  
3           that our students have not come to summer school;  
4           they don't come to afterschool tutoring. And so what  
5           we've been trying to do is on Wednesdays we've been  
6           having What I Need Wednesdays, and at the elementary  
7           that looks like their electronics. They're using --  
8           any of the skill areas that they're low in, skill  
9           areas -- they're working on IXL and MobyMax and some  
10          different things in the classroom on that skill-set  
11          where they're having problems. And we find that  
12          maybe in the middle of the day that's better to use  
13          that, rather than an afterschool. Not to say that we  
14          would not be open to that, but -- we would certainly  
15          be open to that. But that's just not something that  
16          we've discussed right now.

17                 And the other piece that I'd like to share is we  
18                 have so many mental health needs. We have just a  
19                 host of people coming in and out, in and out, as far  
20                 as mental health facilities -- or mental health  
21                 people. But we have looked at the possibility of  
22                 school-based mental health, but many of the companies  
23                 are local and local people and they have -- but  
24                 they're established. So we have had discussion about  
25                 the possibility of maybe adding a social worker and

1 using that in-house. We are going to lose some  
2 people to attrition this year and we could pull a  
3 social worker in and maybe use that in our in-school  
4 suspension room and maybe as a more -- less-punitive  
5 approach. So we are thinking about some things like  
6 that; just trying to think a little bit outside the  
7 box.

8 DR. MOORE: That's great. Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. Dean? Ms. Chambers? Ms.  
10 Newton?

11 MS. NEWTON: I had a question for Dr. Hernandez.  
12 I know y'all have had a rough day.

13 But just thinking about the process of this --  
14 and I know fiscal distress is different than, you  
15 know, moving Level 5 because of academic or other  
16 issues. So I know we're about two-and-a-half years  
17 into this. Is -- I know on Level 5 we have a five-  
18 year time limit, but they chose to go into Level 5.  
19 So are we dealing with any kind of time issue with  
20 Earle?

21 DR. HERNANDEZ: So my understanding is we're  
22 not. We didn't -- when they came and requested Level  
23 5 we didn't take an action to reaffirm State  
24 authority under Level 5. That's my understanding.  
25 So we're still on the five-year timeline related to

1 --

2 MS. NEWTON: Just fiscal issues?

3 DR. HERNANDEZ: Just fiscal. Yes, ma'am.

4 MS. NEWTON: Okay. So if the fiscal issues are  
5 resolved, they could stay under Level 5 by choice,  
6 but it wouldn't be because of anything else?

7 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right. And just one of the  
8 things that I want to make sure that -- just so you  
9 know, in that process one of the things that we  
10 really struggle with and having some decisions is  
11 related to just because fiscally they may be getting  
12 better, the big issue is still the loss of students  
13 and, you know, the access to the teaching staff. And  
14 so we can make budgets look good, but it may not --  
15 it may be at the expense of what it looks like  
16 academically.

17 MS. NEWTON: Right.

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: And so one of the questions that  
19 we asked, and we've asked Ms. Knowles, is, you know,  
20 given the struggles, especially at the high school,  
21 you know, we want to have future conversations about  
22 the viability of having the set-up like it is now.  
23 And so that's something that we're going to be, you  
24 know, actively watching and reporting on and talking  
25 to you guys as we work through that. But that is a

1 concern, is that, you know, just like Ms. Knowles  
2 said, you cannot continue to operate with -- and  
3 expect different results.

4 MS. NEWTON: Right.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: And so we're going to have to be  
6 thinking, you know, differently, and that's what  
7 we've challenged Ms. Knowles is to help us talk  
8 through some models and look at some various ways  
9 that this could be done a little bit different.  
10 Because we owe it to the students to make sure that  
11 we're offering the best quality we can.

12 MS. NEWTON: I agree. Okay. Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Two things, compliments.

14 I think the graphic that you provided on the  
15 RISE progress is wonderful. That was easily read; it  
16 was visible; it just -- everything about it. And  
17 also the graphic on student attendance that I noticed  
18 was in each district now.

19 What I'm wondering -- and this may be something  
20 that Dawn's group can take care of -- is do we ever  
21 compare student attendance information for Level 5  
22 districts with student attendance for those in 4 and  
23 those in 3 to see if there is some correlation  
24 between teacher and student attendance and districts  
25 who wind up needing more and more and more support?

1 But I don't know if that's something that could be  
2 done or not, but I always figure Arijit can figure  
3 out how to do almost anything, so --

4 DR. HERNANDEZ: Just --

5 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Mr. Key?

6 SECRETARY KEY: Well, yeah. So just keep in  
7 mind that these levels aren't progressive and they're  
8 not for a specific period of time. So if a district  
9 is receiving Level 3 support, you know, they --  
10 depending on the reason, you know, they could be in  
11 for a number of reasons and getting that support,  
12 unless it's because of their reading levels. And,  
13 you know, that's a new statute that we're just now  
14 getting that underway. So I don't know that we would  
15 have the kind of data to have that delineated.

16 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Maybe one of our administrators  
17 who's working on a doctorate could have that be their  
18 project.

19 SECRETARY KEY: Well, I mean --

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: I mean --

21 SECRETARY KEY: -- even if they have it, I mean  
22 the data system does not track students and schools  
23 by the level of --

24 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Well --

25 SECRETARY KEY: -- of the school --

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah.

2 SECRETARY KEY: -- that they're in, so -- or the  
3 support they're receiving. So, you know, and that's  
4 where we've really tried to be not like the old  
5 accountability system.

6 MS. NEWTON: Right. Not a label.

7 SECRETARY KEY: Not a label. It really defines  
8 the relationship between the Department and the  
9 support the Department is giving you. So, you know,  
10 there might be other metrics that would track that,  
11 but I don't know that tying it to the level is really  
12 in alignment with our ESSA plan and what we've said  
13 we wanted to do in supporting our districts. But  
14 there could be some other way to look at that.

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Or just maybe a random sampling  
16 of, you know, here are districts and here's what  
17 their attendance is. And, anyway, that's --

18 SECRETARY KEY: And that was --

19 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- all from Earle, so --

20 SECRETARY KEY: Yeah. And that was definitely a  
21 strong part of the previous accountability system  
22 with those 45-day reports and the attendance, number  
23 of students that were getting B's and F's, and that  
24 sort of thing. And that system just didn't work for  
25 us. So, you know, we could try to find -- somebody

1 could try to find data. I just don't know that the  
2 system we have now lines up with trying to tackle  
3 things in that manner.

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Yeah. I know with OEP they do  
5 like discipline and all that, which doesn't really  
6 track with that either, but at least we have some  
7 data that helps us --

8 SECRETARY KEY: Right.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- understand on discipline and  
10 attendance. Or maybe just the individual school  
11 would like to know that information.

12 DR. HERNANDEZ: I will take this opportunity to  
13 give a plug for My School Info since Dawn's back  
14 there. But there is a feature as part of that that's  
15 referred to as Analyzer and you can actually do a lot  
16 of things in just trying to see what correlations may  
17 be out there. So you could pick a student engagement  
18 piece off the ESSA School Index, compare it to some  
19 other component that's related to anything that they  
20 have in that dashboard, and you can kind of see by  
21 subsets the schools, by co-ops, and all that, and  
22 kind of just, you know, look at and see are there any  
23 correlations that can be made or things like that.  
24 So that's just a, sorry, shameless plug for My School  
25 Info.

1 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: No, they do such a great job.  
2 It's not shameless at all.

3 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. Any --

4 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Mr. Hoy, did you have anything  
5 that you wanted to add?

6 MR. HOY: No, ma'am, but thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Anybody else?

8 Do I have a motion to accept the report?

9 MS. CHAMBERS: Move to accept.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Chambers.

11 MS. DEAN: Second.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Second by Ms. Dean.

13 All in favor?

14 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

15 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Opposed?

16 Okay. Accept the motion. If y'all need to get  
17 on the road, I certainly understand. And, again,  
18 thank you for your patience.

19 SUPT. KNOWLES: We're playing ball.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Oh, that's right. And so is  
21 Melbourne.

22 SECRETARY KEY: You might want to check that.

23 DR. HERNANDEZ: We won't say who they defeated  
24 to get there -- will we, Dr. Bowles?

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Do you think they've changed?

1           SECRETARY KEY: I think anybody with schools in  
2 that, they need to check with Triple-A before making  
3 any plans.

4           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Before you go to Hot Springs.

5           SECRETARY KEY: Yeah.

6           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Congratulations.

7           DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay.

8 B-2: CONSIDERATION OF LEGISLATIVE REPORT: LEE COUNTY SCHOOL  
9 DISTRICT

10           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Next up is Lee County.

11           DR. HERNANDEZ: All right. So we'll next move  
12 on to Lee County School District.

13           One of the things that we are reporting is that  
14 we have seen a significant increase in the amount of  
15 observations in the classroom. One of the things  
16 that we are pushing the District to look at is that  
17 right now the -- again, like in Earle, the alignment  
18 -- to make sure of the alignment to the evidence.  
19 Alignment to the TESS components are important, and  
20 then also kind of the length. You know, what we're  
21 seeing is the length of the time in the classroom has  
22 been anywhere from one to six minutes. And so we  
23 want to make sure that we're spending ample time, and  
24 that's something the team will continue to work with  
25 the District in that vein.

1           In regards to chronic absenteeism, we did see an  
2           uptick in that from the 15.9% to the 19%. The  
3           District has provided some information about how  
4           they're working to combat that and get that number  
5           lower.

6           In terms of literacy testing, we did see an  
7           increase in the early literacy for students that were  
8           tested in early lit. And then also in the 2nd grade,  
9           where most of the 2nd graders are now doing the STAR  
10          reading, is that we also saw some increases there as  
11          well.

12          In the -- another thing to note is that there  
13          was a decrease in the number of students that were in  
14          the urgent intervention piece of that, and so that's  
15          kind of important to look at. And in the information  
16          we provided there's some nice graphics that kind of  
17          look at year-over-year to be able to see, you know,  
18          how the urgent intervention students are decreasing  
19          and the ones that are above are meeting the benchmark  
20          piece that those are increasing. In 3-10 we didn't  
21          have that fall-to-winter comparison. This is kind of  
22          the baseline, this first one that we've taken. And  
23          so we're hoping that when we got our next report that  
24          that'll kind of be in tandem when they're completed  
25          with their test. But that'll be able to -- we're

1 looking to see some increases in that as well.

2 MS. CHAMBERS: I should know this, but in terms  
3 of the calculations, when we have percentages,  
4 whether it's an increase or decrease, on any of the  
5 things that are listed here, sometimes the base  
6 changes and so there's more of an accentuated spike  
7 or fall. And so -- like if the population changes.

8 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right.

9 MS. CHAMBERS: On these where we are looking at  
10 percentages instead of actual numbers, is any --  
11 because I'm looking at chronic absences, as an  
12 example. If you had a smaller base but you had the  
13 same students that were absent last year absent this  
14 year, it's going to skew to a higher percent.

15 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right.

16 MS. CHAMBERS: Is there any part of that that  
17 plays into this?

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: I know on the assessment -- I  
19 know JJ was here. Is she still here?

20 Okay. My understanding is that those students,  
21 they're the same students in the cohort. So there  
22 shouldn't --

23 MS. COFFMAN: For the assessment.

24 DR. HERNANDEZ: For the assessment piece. Now  
25 in the chronic absenteeism piece, I'll have to check

1 on how we're calculating that, if the base is  
2 changing in between numbers of students that might've  
3 influxed in and out of the school. We kind of have a  
4 standard report that we're pulling now. That's why  
5 they all look the same out of all school districts.  
6 But I can check on that piece.

7 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you.

8 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. All right. So the next  
9 thing, you know, when we provided our report there  
10 were at the time only three exceptions -- well, let  
11 me go back to the student attendance. One of the  
12 things that we do have a little bit concerns of is  
13 data quality, and you'll kind of see that throughout.  
14 You know, we do have lots of people that are new  
15 within the District and not -- and learning a lot of  
16 these processes, and sometimes struggling with these  
17 processes. And so, you know, we are seeing some  
18 instances of when we're looking at absenteeism or  
19 attendance reports that there are some discrepancies  
20 in, you know, what may be taken in the classroom  
21 versus what's making it into this system. And so  
22 even when we pull these chronic absenteeism reports,  
23 you know, we do have some concerns about accuracy and  
24 making sure that those -- that that information is  
25 exact and what it's supposed to be.

1 MS. CHAMBERS: Well, I'm sure this is not a  
2 pattern that correlates, but looking at some of the  
3 other reports, like Little Rock -- J.A. Fair, I think  
4 and McClellan, had significant spikes.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yes.

6 MS. CHAMBERS: If there's something else -- is  
7 it the formula or how we're calculating that they're  
8 unrelated, but it's an increase that is significant  
9 and concerning.

10 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right. And I think what we're  
11 seeing in some of those are ones that are just  
12 realities. In some schools they are seeing an  
13 increase in chronic absenteeism in those schools.  
14 And so that's what we ask the districts to look at  
15 and investigate -- and they can probably be better at  
16 reporting why they're seeing those upticks. But  
17 those are based on what they're putting in, what's  
18 being used as far as enrollment. You know, what  
19 we're seeing a lot of with Lee County is that there's  
20 been such a flux of staff -- you know, moving staff  
21 around, new staff, staff leaving, new staff coming  
22 in. And so having that accuracy sometimes -- if  
23 you're a long-term sub you may not be -- you know,  
24 may not have access to the system. And so those are  
25 all things that have just kind of plagued this and

1 we're kind of concerned about how the data quality is  
2 there with attendance.

3 Same thing kind of with the Standards for  
4 Accreditation. You know, we did see some minimal  
5 things that were part of our system. We've moved a  
6 lot to this monitoring of systems. You know, we have  
7 these systems; districts are entering information.  
8 So we were trying to monitor those without having to  
9 do a lot of the on-site work. And so, of course,  
10 last year, you know, when we did take over the  
11 District there was a lot of concerns over  
12 transcripts, graduation rates, and things like that.  
13 And so in one of our meetings with the District there  
14 were some concerns and things about grades not being  
15 entered and stuff like that that were shared with us  
16 by the District. And so in working with the  
17 Department there was a decision to go on-site, and  
18 that on-site visit took -- happened this week, on  
19 Tuesday. And I do have Deb here that's going to  
20 share some of -- a little bit of those preliminary  
21 findings. We still have some monitoring that we need  
22 to do to figure out what are all the core issues.  
23 But I'm going to let her kind of share a little bit  
24 of that preliminary information with you and let you  
25 ask any questions.

1 MS. COFFMAN: Deborah Coffman.

2 So I'd like to start with a positive, and the  
3 positive is it appears that all of the seniors are on  
4 track to graduate. So that's a different  
5 conversation than we had last year at this time.  
6 There are some students that are taking credit  
7 recovery classes, but if they complete those  
8 everything is in place. However, transcripts for  
9 9th, 10th and 11th are not as cleaned up as we would  
10 like, and that was an issue, remember, last year. We  
11 still see some of those issues this year.

12 We do have -- we did find preliminarily four  
13 probationary violations. We will need to go back and  
14 visit. We brought home a lot of information with us  
15 that we need to work through and then go back and ask  
16 additional questions to verify, and we'll be in touch  
17 with the District.

18 One of those probationary violations is  
19 regarding the statewide student assessment system.  
20 An assessment was not given during the school year  
21 for English learners, and so that is a probationary  
22 violation;

23 Maintaining those student records that I talked  
24 about;

25 Not offering a language instructional education

1 program. That was only confirmed by one person. We  
2 need to go back and confirm that with some other  
3 people to make sure that that is accurate;

4 Producing timely reports -- there's a couple of  
5 background checks, as Dr. Hernandez mentioned, that  
6 one of them looks like they should've been cleaned up  
7 a long time ago. Some that look like maybe people  
8 are renewing their license. So we'll investigate  
9 that a little more;

10 We found classroom teachers that were not in --  
11 teaching the class for which they were licensed for.  
12 So they're licensed individuals but they're not in  
13 the appropriate classes;

14 And we did not find a library media specialist  
15 -- the half-time library media specialist in the  
16 elementary. They have one, but she's teaching  
17 another class. So there are a lot of good reasons  
18 for that.

19 Those are things that we will investigate more,  
20 but that's just the preliminary work that we're doing  
21 right now. And we will plan to revisit to finalize,  
22 and then we'll bring you a final report.

23 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. So moving on to special  
24 education, they do have a new LEA supervisor that  
25 they've contracted out. Their corrective action plan

1 is almost complete. They have one item we still have  
2 -- Ms. Amstutz, that works closely with the District,  
3 we haven't been made aware of any concerns or seen  
4 anything that's concerning about special ed.

5 As far as dyslexia, we are -- we've got a lot of  
6 work to do around the high school. If you look at  
7 the report, there are several places where 9-12, they  
8 haven't been able to do some of the screenings and  
9 things like we need to. We also need to be looking  
10 at staffing and that -- you know, that probably is  
11 one of the single most factors.

12 A lot of this always comes back to human  
13 capital, is when you don't have the people, you don't  
14 have the access to people, and there's a constant  
15 churn trying to cover these things that it makes it  
16 hard for people to have to take on multiple jobs.  
17 And I think that's a result, a lot of the standards,  
18 is that you've got a lot of people doing the work,  
19 that's doing additional work on top of their work and  
20 not -- you can't -- you know, when we took over it  
21 was a standards issue, but there's also finance  
22 issues, there's also academic issues. And so there's  
23 just a whole big thing; it's a very large  
24 undertaking. And we're -- you know, as a team we're  
25 providing, you know, lots and lots of support, and

1 I'll get to that probably on the last slide, talk a  
2 little bit more about that.

3 In terms of the Science of Reading, we've been  
4 working on a coaching plan. I think there was some  
5 meetings that happened -- virtual meetings that  
6 happened last week and some additional ones this  
7 week. Right now, what we're trying to work through  
8 is there's a lot of the need for the District that  
9 wants -- kind of the outside coaches to do a lot of  
10 observations. But we're really trying to push to  
11 make sure that we're doing a lot more modeling  
12 because you have a lot of teachers that -- you know,  
13 being uncertified and things like that. So we want  
14 to make sure that we're getting to that place where  
15 we're doing more modeling and less observing and  
16 reporting. And so we'll continue to work with the  
17 District on that as well.

18 From a teacher attendance, we didn't have any  
19 teachers that were reported as missing 5%, and then  
20 we had 24% at the high school. But as we started to  
21 review some of those things a little bit deeper --  
22 again, there's that data accuracy on the one side, is  
23 making sure that when people are out that that data  
24 is being correctly sent in the actual system. And  
25 the people that you have doing -- putting things in

1 the system, again, are brand-new people that haven't  
2 done this role before.

3 MS. NEWTON: Do --

4 DR. HERNANDEZ: And so -- did you have a  
5 question?

6 MS. NEWTON: Yeah. Do you think some of the  
7 high school could be that -- you said you had  
8 teachers not doing what they were actually qualified  
9 or had been trained in. Do you think that's part of  
10 it? Because sometimes when you don't feel good about  
11 what you're doing, you know, it's just easier to stay  
12 home that day, you know.

13 DR. HERNANDEZ: I think that probably is one of  
14 the culture pieces within the school. I mean when  
15 there's so much things that are having to be covered  
16 and people to be moved around that that can lead to  
17 people -- one, it can be a factor in why they do  
18 leave the District all together; it can be a factor  
19 in why they might not come to work that day, because  
20 it is -- you know, I think we did have a report of a  
21 science teacher that -- Deb, correct me if I'm wrong  
22 -- was a seventh science teacher in that class. So  
23 when you have those kinds of things that -- you know,  
24 not only for the staff but also for the students, it  
25 can be an issue. But, you know, if we could

1 manufacture people and send them down there to do  
2 that, you know, that would be the -- that would be a  
3 great thing.

4 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: But we -- it is truly a struggle  
6 that kind of leads to a lot of those things as well.

7 As far as the fiscal concerns and budget and  
8 contracts, that's something that both our team and  
9 the District team -- you know, we own that. We're  
10 the -- we really struggle together in working, trying  
11 to get those things corrected. We're getting ever  
12 closer. Obviously, when you have contracts and  
13 things that need to be adjusted in terms of pay,  
14 whether there be overpayments of underpayments for  
15 staff, that causes problems as well with that culture  
16 piece with the staff. And so we are continuing to  
17 work with that as well.

18 One of the big issues, I'd referenced about the  
19 staff not having the -- being new and knowing these  
20 things. It's really hard for any new person in the  
21 finance area to, one, fix the things that -- not  
22 necessary "fix" -- to do their normal operation jobs  
23 of accounts payable, payroll, all of those things,  
24 but in addition to that, they're having to go back  
25 and clean up things as well. And so -- and then on

1 top of that, when they're taking care of daily tasks  
2 and make a mistake, they have to get that fixed as  
3 well. And so a lot of that is just very difficult at  
4 this time, to kind of get people to be able to fix  
5 old things and also keep up with the current demands  
6 of the job on a daily basis. And so that's something  
7 that we're -- we are all struggling together  
8 definitely on that and trying to get those things  
9 done. But, you know, every time somebody moves or  
10 some responsibilities change and stuff like that,  
11 that causes an issue as well.

12 I did mention the staffing turnover. Currently,  
13 to date, Dr. Bowles, there are no counselors in the  
14 district. And so we're having to pull staff -- I  
15 think Ms. McIntosh -- Dr. McIntosh, the one here, is  
16 having to -- as the curriculum person is also having  
17 to fill some of those roles. And so you can imagine  
18 what things, you know, are having to be put to the  
19 side to focus on these things as well. And not being  
20 a trained counselor and having to, you know, pick up  
21 that slack, that is hard to do. We recently had a  
22 child nutrition director that also has resigned and  
23 we're trying to figure out ways to help support that  
24 as well, because, you know, it's not just anybody can  
25 go and pick up that job; they've got to go get the

1 required training and start in that process. And  
2 then also the non-certified staff that we -- you  
3 know, through the churn that we've struggled with.

4 I think one of the take-homes for the State  
5 Board is that, you know, whenever you have a district  
6 under State takeover you want everything to be as  
7 right as possible, because we don't want to come in  
8 here and say, "Hey, all these things are failing."  
9 But because of the newness of many of the staff  
10 members each one of them needs their own type of  
11 support on a regular basis. Lots of boots on the  
12 ground, and sometimes when you think about having  
13 lots of support sometimes it's too much support. But  
14 it's needed and if that support is not there -- and  
15 what we find ourselves having to do is be there on  
16 such a regular basis that -- to do the work that  
17 we're, you know, having to do, that -- and sometimes  
18 there's struggles with that, you know, having to make  
19 sure that all those efforts are coordinated and  
20 things like that. And so this one -- this district  
21 has very much been a challenge in trying to get our  
22 arms around all of those various aspects that are  
23 struggles.

24 We did -- according to October 1st enrollment,  
25 we were looking at -- and that means October 1st to

1           October 1st, from previous year -- we were on track  
2           for about a 74-student loss. But based on the ADM  
3           numbers that I mentioned, as of second quarter ADM we  
4           have seen a 40-student drop, which is still  
5           significant in a 600-student district, but not as  
6           much as we hoped to. So as we think about adjusting  
7           pay schedules for staff and all those things, we've  
8           also got to be mindful of -- kind of in the same boat  
9           with Earle -- is that we've got to make cuts, but  
10          also try not to do that in terms of quality. And so  
11          that as well is one of our concerns.

12           CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Other than the co-op, do they do  
13          itinerant where they can serve like two districts?  
14          Maybe there's not enough -- I don't know -- speech  
15          therapy kids in one district, but they could serve  
16          over in the other -- or with counselors or whatever.  
17          Or is there nothing close enough to make that  
18          feasible?

19           DR. HERNANDEZ: We are doing that with special  
20          ed. In the past -- I'm not sure what the status is  
21          now, but the GT Coordinator was somebody that was  
22          shared between districts. And I think the District  
23          is definitely open to any of those arrangements. And  
24          that's some of the conversation, even with Earle and  
25          the co-op, is we're actually going to come together

1 to talk about digital options and deliveries to see,  
2 you know, is there a way -- and thinking of the old  
3 compressed video models -- is can we have a certified  
4 teacher in one district that we then pipe to another  
5 one; and maybe one week they're in this location,  
6 another week they're in another location. So all of  
7 those are on the table and being looked at as to  
8 what's viable. But Lee County being a countywide  
9 school is, you know, right there, and so it's hard  
10 to, you know, get people to travel in between one  
11 district and another.

12 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Right.

13 DR. HERNANDEZ: So we have to think of other  
14 ways to do that.

15 MS. NEWTON: Just because I don't know the  
16 region as far as distances, how far apart are Lee  
17 County and Earle?

18 DR. HERNANDEZ: Lee County and Earle is probably  
19 --

20 Can you answer that, Dr. Bowles?

21 SUPT. BOWLES: About an hour.

22 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

23 MS. NEWTON: Oh, it's a good ways then. Okay.

24 DR. HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it's kind of -- Lee County  
25 is kind of in between Forrest City and Helena-West

1 Helena.

2 MS. NEWTON: Okay.

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: And I may have missed it, but  
4 the literacy curriculum is it aligned with state  
5 standards and -- I call them foundational literacy  
6 skills or Science of Reading? I know with all the  
7 things that need to be done you're going to have to  
8 prioritize what --

9 DR. HERNANDEZ: Right.

10 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- you can get done.

11 DR. HERNANDEZ: And we are actively working -- I  
12 mentioned the coaching plan. So, they do have the  
13 materials and have been going through the training,  
14 and so that's kind of what we're -- the coaching  
15 model is trying to move them past having the stuff  
16 and the training and moving it towards  
17 implementation. And so that's why we talked a lot  
18 about, as opposed to just strictly observing, moving  
19 more into the modeling aspects of that.

20 But, you know, when a teacher leaves -- like we  
21 had -- or Dr. Bowles went out and worked and tried to  
22 bring in some other teachers from the -- same as like  
23 Forrest City did -- and, you know, we then had those  
24 teachers that have -- or at least one of those that  
25 have also left. And so it's just how much you can

1 keep them stable enough to make sure that they're  
2 there to implement. So --

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Any questions?

4 DR. MOORE: Yeah. Looking at the literacy  
5 report, I was going to ask about the Foundations  
6 implementation and if there --

7 DR. HERNANDEZ: I'll let Dr. McIntosh answer  
8 that one.

9 DR. MOORE: It says K-2 is Foundations for  
10 literacy. Was that new this year?

11 DR. McINTOSH: Yes.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay. How is that thing going?

13 DR. McINTOSH: Our K-6 teachers are actually  
14 implementing Foundations and Heggerty's. And we're  
15 also utilizing our support teachers to implement  
16 those as well.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Ms. McAdoo? Ms. Dean?  
19 Chambers? Newton?

20 Okay. Do I have a motion to accept the report?

21 MS. DEAN: So moved.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Moved by Ms. Dean.

23 Second by --

24 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: -- Ms. Chambers.

1 All in favor?

2 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

3 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Thank you. And thank you,  
4 again, for your patience. Be safe going home.

5 DR. HERNANDEZ: All right. I think we're  
6 pausing on the other ones; is that correct?

7 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Uh-huh.

8 DR. HERNANDEZ: Okay.

9 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Uh-huh, till April.

10 DR. HERNANDEZ: Till April. Thank you.

11 MS. CHAMBERS: Thank you.

12 NEW BUSINESS/PUBLIC COMMENT

13 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Do we have any new business?  
14 And we have no public comment; correct?

15 MS. FRENO: No.

16 ADJOURNMENT

17 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay. Do I have a motion to  
18 adjourn?

19 MS. DEAN: So moved.

20 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Okay.

21 MS. CHAMBERS: Second.

22 CHAIRMAN ZOOK: Meeting adjourned till tomorrow  
23 morning.

24

25 (The meeting was concluded at 4:54 p.m.)

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A-8: SOUTHEAST PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL

EXHIBIT ONE (1)



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