

Minutes
State Board of Education Meeting
Thursday, March 31, 2016

The State Board of Education met Thursday, March 31, 2016, in the Arkansas Department of Education Auditorium. Chair Toyce Newton called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Toyce Newton, Chair; Mireya Reith, Vice-Chair; Vicki Saviers; Diane Zook; Dr. Jay Barth; Susan Chambers; Brett Williamson; Charisse Dean; Ouida Newton, Teacher of the Year; and Johnny Key, Commissioner.

Absent: Joe Black.

Action Agenda

Public Comment from Elected Official Lieutenant Governor Tim Griffin said he spoke as an elected official and parent. He said his children attended traditional public traditional schools. He said he supported choice. He said choice led to competition, innovation, and excellence. He said parents with means have choice. He said he wanted everyone to have choice. He said he received many emails and only one opposed the expansion of the charters. He read a few of the emails. He said parents should not sacrifice one day of a good education for another school to improve. He said the people on the side of choice would be on the right side of history. He asked the Board to support the expansion for e-Stem and LISA Academy.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Douglas House said he recognized the good faith of the persons that opposed the expansion of the charters. He said the time for waiting is over. He asked the Board to support the parents' choice.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Grant Hodges urged the Board to approve the expansion and give students choice.

Public Comment from Elected Official Senator Blake Johnson said he was in supports of school choice and expansion.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Mark Lowery said he has a background in education. He said he has served on the Education Committee. He said parental involvement is important for success. He said the Board has an opportunity to give parents choice. He asked the Board to affirm the recommendation from the Charter Authorizing Panel.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Donnie Copeland said the parent involvement at LISA Academy was amazing. He said the parents are asking for

access to a good school. He said LISA Academy's demographic is 68 percent minority students. He encouraged the Board to provide access to these students by supporting the expansion.

Public Comment from Elected Official Senator Cecile Bledsoe said 7000 plus students on a waiting list demonstrates the need for school choice. She asked the Board to support the expansion.

Public Comment from Elected Official Little Rock City Vice-Mayor Lance Hines said he supports the expansion of charters. He said Ward 5 is growing and parents needed good schools in Little Rock. He said students in Ward 5 are in the Pulaski County Special School District and are not permitted to apply for school choice. He said the charter school option is the only option for the families.

Chair Newton recognized letters in support of expansion from Senator Jake Files, Senator Jane English, Representative Andy Davis, Representative David Meeks, Representative Bob Ballinger, Representative Charlene Fite, Representative Marcus E. Richmond, Representative Bruce Cozart, Representative Ken Bragg, Representative Mickey Gates, and Senator Ronald Caldwell.

Chair Newton said there are strong opinions on both sides. She requested that all adults consider the students. She said the impact of the decisions would affect the community.

Ms. Zook moved, seconded by Ms. Reith, to allow public comment. The motion carried unanimously.

A-1 Hearing on Open-Enrollment Priority Status AND Renewal Application: Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School

Charter School Director Ms. Alexandra Boyd said that on February 17, 2016, representatives of Covenant Keepers appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel requesting a renewal of their charter and to address the charter's priority status. She said by a 6-2 vote, the Panel approved the request, granting the charter a three-year renewal. She said on March 10, 2016, the State Board of Education voted to review the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision.

Staff Attorney Ms. Jennifer Davis reviewed the hearing procedures.

Ms. Boyd said Covenant Keepers' charter was authorized in January 2008. She said the school is under the leadership of a new principal.

School Improvement Director Dr. Richard Wilde said the school was identified as a priority school and classified in academic distress. He said the majority of students entering the school are below proficient levels. He said the school leadership had

embraced the school improvement process. He said the school has employed an external provider with significant experience. He said the school has requested assistance from the ADE School Improvement Specialist.

Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School Data Coordinator Ms. Jenna Jones said 90 percent of students entered the school below grade level in mathematics.

Office for Education Policy Executive Director Dr. Sarah McKenzie said the data were examined to see how attending Covenant Keepers impacted students' academic performance. She said students are demonstrating increases in growth in mathematics and literacy. She said the comparability of statistical twins indicated that Covenant Keepers' students outperformed the statistical twin in literacy.

Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School Teacher Ms. Laurette Whipps said classroom teachers use formative assessments, a structured lesson planning format, interventions and after school tutoring. She said the school uses Engage NY literacy curriculum. She said the school needs to improve in mathematics.

Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School Principal Mr. Leonard Blocker said the school implemented programs that assisted students with building personal competencies.

Ms. Rosalind Washington said the school uses a wrap around model that consists of four phases. She said the school partners with mental health professionals.

The Salvation Army Director of Development Mr. William Tollette said the organization has a strategic plan to partner with Covenant Keepers.

LULAC President Dr. Andre Guerrero said Latino students are mentoring other students. He said the ESL program has progressed.

Public Comment Mr. Brant Collins spoke in opposition to Covenant Keepers. He said he was in support of the Little Rock School District. He said he chooses was to keep his children in traditional public school. He said public school is important to his family. He said every school should be the best school for students.

Public Comment Chairman of the Urban League of Arkansas Mr. Sherman Tate spoke in favor of Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School.

Public Comment Little Rock City Director Ms. Joan Adcock said she attended a presentation by the students at Covenant Keepers. She said she spoke with the students, and the students expressed that the school cared about them. She said the community has embraced the school. She requested the Board support the charter.

Public Comment Student Lorriona Scarver said the school has helped her.

Public Comment Covenant Keepers Preparatory School Board President Mr. James E. Jones said Covenant Keepers is a pillar in Southwest Little Rock. He said he has seen tremendous growth in the school. He said the staff is committed to student progress.

Public Comment Parent Ms. Carolyn Hill said her daughter needs the staff at Covenant Keepers.

Public Comment Student Mr. Auimael Hernandez said he has developed trust in the students and staff at Covenant Keepers.

Public Comment Through a translator, Parent Ms. Guadalupe Nepals said the Hispanic community needs Covenant Keepers.

Public Comment Former employee and translator Ms. Paola Rodriquez said the school supported her when transitioning to a new country.

Public Comment Teacher Ms. Patrice Womack said the teachers really care for the students. She said that the school culture is why the staff appreciates the school.

Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School Director Dr. Valerie Tatum said the school has a waiting list because the school is at building capacity.

Ms. Whipps said the curriculum is cross-curricula. She said she taught social studies during literacy and literacy during social studies.

Ms. Jones said the students are taking the ACT Aspire interim assessments. She said the school will be able to track the progress in science.

Dr. Wilde said the interim and annual assessment data will be the baseline for a common measure.

Arkansas Public School Resource Center (external provider) Ms. Barbara Hunter Cox said the curriculum coach has worked in literacy. She said a leadership coach has been assigned to Covenant Keepers. She said the partnership between APSRC and ADE has demonstrated progress within the school.

Dr. Barth moved, seconded by Ms. Saviers, to affirm the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision regarding the Open-Enrollment Priority Status AND Renewal Application for the Covenant Keepers College Preparatory School. The motion carried unanimously.

A-2 Hearing on Open-Enrollment Amendment Request: LISA Academy

Charter School Director Ms. Alexandra Boyd said that on February 19, 2016, representatives of LISA appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel requesting an

amendment to their charter. She said by a 7-1 vote, the Panel approved the request, contingent upon availability of the proposed location. She said that on March 10, 2016, the State Board of Education voted to review the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision. She said the school has received notification that the building will be available.

Staff Attorney Ms. Jennifer Davis reviewed the hearing procedures.

LISA Academy Superintendent Mr. Atnan Ekin thanked the Board for holding the hearing.

LISA Academy West Middle School Principal Ms. Luanne Baroni said LISA requested to add a new campus at 12200 Westhaven Drive; to change the grade levels at the West campus; and to expand the enrollment cap. She said the new location was selected because it was convenient for parents. She said the school offered free transportation to all students. She said 2957 students are currently on a waiting list. She said the list is purged annually by contacting parents. She said the expansion would permit the school to increase the academic and athletic programs. She said LISA Academy has been recognized for student diversity.

LISA Academy Student Mr. Omar Salas said LISA has supported his progress. He said he has connected with his teachers.

Consul of Protection and Legal Affairs from the Consulate of Mexico in Little Rock Mr. Victor Valtierra said LISA has strengthened the relationship with the Hispanic community.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Clarke Tucker said the Board could create an opportunity for traditional public schools and charter schools to work together. He recommended a qualitative analysis. He said LISA and e-Stem are doing a great job educating students. He said the Board has a larger impact on the city of Little Rock. He encouraged the Board to take more time to gather additional data and develop a broad vision for Little Rock.

Public Comment from Elected Official Representative Charles Blake said there is a lack of risk analysis and long-range planning for Little Rock. He said there are many vacant seats in Little Rock schools around the proposed location of the charter expansion. He asked the Board to pause and evaluate the data.

Public Comment from Elected Official Senator Joyce Elliott said Little Rock patrons are waiting for improvement in Little Rock schools. She said her work in the General Assembly has supported charter schools as a part of the education system with public and private collaboration for innovation. She said a coherent long-range plan is needed for all students.

Little Rock School District Superintendent Mr. Baker Kurrus said the Board granted a charter to LISA in 2004. He said the majority of students who left the Little Rock School

District to attend LISA or e-Stem are proficient or advanced. He said he would work with the charter schools. He said he needs a plan of how to move the district forward.

Ms. Baroni said 53 percent of LISA students are from the Little Rock School District. She said many students came to LISA to attend middle school and then returned to Central High School.

LISA Test Coordinator Dr. Kevin Durand said the demographics reflect the city's demographics.

Public Comment Little Rock Public School Foundation Chairman Mr. Antoine Phillips asked to Board to develop a strategic plan. He identified Arkansas Code that gives the Board authority to make decisions related to charters. He asked the Board to vote against the expansion at this time until more data are available.

Public Comment Parent Ms. Meredith Martin Moats said her children previously attended a charter school but returned to the Little Rock School District. She asked the Board to develop a comprehensive plan for all students.

Public Comment Student Ms. Emily Phifer shared some of her experiences at LISA Academy.

Public Comment Parent Ms. Stephanie Fox said her children have special needs and have thrived at LISA Academy. She asked the Board to approve the expansion. She shared a written statement from her son.

Public Comment Ms. Cindy Dawson said she supports both traditional public and charter schools.

Public Comment Ms. Mariah Reescano asked the Board to oppose the expansion. She said that many students are not able to access charter schools, and the resources are being taken from the Little Rock School District.

Public Comment Graduate of LISA Academy Mr. John William Hall said LISA Academy prepared him for college.

Public Comment Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee Co-Chair Mr. Greg Adams said the Board should look at the big picture. He asked the Board to delay the expansion of the charters until data and risks are assessed.

Public Comment Student Ms. Maricela Valadez said LISA Academy has prepared her for the future.

Public Comment Mr. Sam Ledbetter said the state takeover has moved the Little Rock School District in a positive direction. He said the Board is responsible for preventing segregation in the Little Rock School District. He said the Board is charged with a

constitutional requirement for efficiency.

Public Comment Mr. Randy Jumper said LISA Academy offers opportunities for many students.

Public Comment Dr. Naveen Patil said LISA Academy provides competition that strengthens the education system in Little Rock.

Commissioner Key said all of the charter and traditional school leaders need to come together. He said the community must also come together to support the city. He said he has been in communication with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) regarding strategic work in middle schools and high schools.

Ms. Zook moved, seconded by Mr. Williamson, to affirm the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision regarding the Open-Enrollment Amendment Request for LISA Academy. Ms. Saviers, Ms. Reith, and Dr. Barth voted no. The final vote was 5-3 with Chair Newton voting for the motion (a majority vote of the quorum). The motion carried.

Dr. Barth moved, seconded by Ms. Reith, to place an item on the April agenda regarding a partnership to develop a strategic plan for public education in Pulaski County. The motion carried unanimously.

A-3 Hearing on Open-Enrollment Amendment Request: eStem Public Charter School

Charter School Director Ms. Alexandra Boyd said that on February 19, 2016, representatives of eStem appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel requesting an amendment to their charter. She said by a 6-1 vote, the Panel approved the request. She said that on March 10, 2016, the State Board of Education voted to review the Charter Authorizing Panel's decision.

Staff Attorney Ms. Jennifer Davis reviewed the hearing procedures.

Ms. Saviers recused from this agenda item.

e-Stem Public Charter School Chief Executive Officer Mr. John Bacon said the charter started in July 2008 with Grades K-9. He said the current racial balance mirrors Little Rock. He said the school has worked hard to implement innovative approaches. He said the school is eager to work with other districts. He said the Noble Impact Program can become a national model. He said the school requested a capacity cap increase; to relocate the high school; to restructure the current elementary and middle school; and to open two new campuses.

Little Rock School District Superintendent Mr. Baker Kurrus said approval of the charter would permit 9300 plus seats. He said LRSD needs assistance with educating students

in poverty. He recommended the charter be relocated to serve students in southwest Little Rock.

Mr. Bacon said currently 55 percent of students live in Little Rock. He said the percentage has declined over time.

University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Provost Dr. Zulma Toro said the university has worked with the Little Rock School District for years. She said the university wants more. She said a national model is needed to succeed in the global economy.

Public Comment Student Mr. Roman Kressee said he likes the e-Stem school schedule. He said being downtown has connected him to opportunities in the city center. He said Noble Impact has been a great program. He said he worked on an anti-bullying program that helped to solve a problem in the school.

Public Comment Student Ms. Sydney Massey said she has grown academically since being at e-Stem. She said the extended day affords her the opportunity to learn more. She said the extended year helps students retain learning.

Public Comment Ms. Karen Hayes said she wants school choice for her children. She said her daughters have different needs but e-Stem provides a different approach that helps both students find success. She asked the Board to support the expansion.

Public Comment Captain Scott Pursley said he is a new teacher. He said teaching at e-Stem has been a great opportunity. He said parents and staff work as a team. He requested the Board approve the expansion.

Public Comment Mr. Jackson Fitzgibbon said he was a graduate of e-Stem. He said he had a difficult time in a Little Rock middle school.

Public Comment Senator Joyce Elliott said e-Stem's work is admirable. She said some neighborhoods are disenfranchised.

Public Comment Little Rock City Director Ms. Joan Adcock said new businesses and home owners make decisions based on the quality of the schools. She said Baseline Elementary is doing an amazing job. She said something should be done now. She requested the Board approve the expansion.

Public Comment Ms. Austin Bailey said education is the foundation of democracy. She said some parents are not represented.

Public Comment Teacher Ms. Amanda Heinbodell said the Little Rock School District and Little Rock needed a plan of action.

Public Comment Teacher Mr. James Szenher said the expansion would leave many students in failing schools. He advocated for a comprehensive plan for education in

Little Rock.

Mr. Bacon said e-Stem is committed to downtown Little Rock. He said the Shall Street location was considered because of the needs of families.

Mr. Williamson moved, seconded by Ms. Zook, to approve the Open-Enrollment Amendment Request for the eStem Public Charter School. Ms. Reith and Dr. Barth voted no. The final vote was 4-2. The motion carried.

The Board agreed to start the regularly-scheduled April 14, 2016, State Board meeting at 8:00 a.m. to allow more time to hear action items.

Adjournment

Dr. Barth moved, seconded by Ms. Dean, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:41 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Deborah Coffman.



Toyce Newton, Chair



Johnny Key, Commissioner of Education