ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MINUTES
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

April 16, 2026
Arkansas Department of Education
DESE Auditorium
4 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, AR 72201
9:00 a.m.

Call to Order

The April 16, 2026 Regular Meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) was called to order by Chair Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray at 9:21 a.m.

Present in person were:

- Chair Dr. Wright-McMurray,
- Dr. John Bacon,
- Ms. Edie Stewart, and
- Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan.

Absent were:

Ms. Toyce Newton
Dr. Tina Moore

Mr. Phillip Baldwin attended via Zoom.

Changes to Agenda

None

Action Agenda

Expedited Renewal of School Charter for Don Tyson School of Innovation expiring June 30, 2026

Assistant Commissioner Dr. Darrell Smith presented the panel with an accountability report for this school with its charter expiring on June 30, 2026. The Charter School Office recommended to the CAP that charter be renewed for 5 years.

After discussion and questions from the panel, it was moved by Dr. Beshears-Duncan to accept the recommendation of the Charter School Office and renew the charter for the Don Tyson School of Innovation for 5 years through June 30, 2031. The motion was seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. The motion passed unanimously.

District Conversion Charter Application--Searcy County School District:

Superintendent Valorie McCleary of the Searcy County School District, along with staff members, Ms. Heather Bohannon and Ms. Julie Rippy, appeared before the panel to present the district's application for the Searcy County Career and Technical Academy.

After discussion and questions from the panel, it was moved by Dr. John Bacon to accept the application. The motion was seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Minutes

It was moved by Dr. John Bacon to approve the minutes of the February 19th Charter Authorizing Panel Meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. The motion passed unanimously.

Reports

Mr. Freddie Scott reported to the Charter Authorizing Panel on the status of pre-opening activities and readiness for the following schools approved to open in the 2026-27 school year:

- Arkansas Executive Prep Academy
- Arkansas Outdoor Academy
- Iota Leadership Academy
- Pinecrest Academy—Roselawn

The Arkansas Outdoor Academy has elected to defer opening until the 2027-28 school year.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 am.

The next meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is scheduled for May 21, 2026.

Minutes Prepared By:

Ms. Regina Rihani
Charter School Office Staff
Arkansas Department of Education

Minutes Approved By:

Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair
Charter Authorizing Panel
Arkansas Department of Education