Minutes
Charter Authorizing Panel Meeting
April 25, 2023

I. Call to Order

The Charter Authorizing Panel met on April 25, 2023. Panel Chair Deborah Coffman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Present: Ms. Deborah Coffman, Ms. Karli Saracini, Mr. Phil Baldwin, Dr. Sonya Wright-McMurray, Toyce Newton(virtual)

The transcription of this meeting may be accessed on the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education website at the following:
https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/about/archived-minutesvideo

II. Consent Agenda

II.1. Minutes
Presenter: Dorie Summons, Director of Charter Schools

II.2. Arkansas Lighthouse Charter School Financial Documents
Presenter: Dorie Summons, Director of Charter Schools

II.3. Friendship Aspire Financial Documents
Presenter: Dorie Summons, Director of Charter Schools

Mr. Baldwin made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Ms. Saracini seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

III. Action Agenda

III.1. Waiver Clean Up

Presenter: Shastady Wagner
Description: This item is to correct an issue that was discovered where Exalt Academy of Southwest Little Rock, Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas, Premier High School of North Little Rock, and The Excel Center have the statute and accompanying rules, but lack the appropriate standard waiver. The clean-up is to correct this error.

Dr. Wright-McMurray made a motion to approve the waiver clean up as presented. Ms. Saracini seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

III.2 Consideration of Fort Smith Virtual Academy Request

Presenter: Thomas Coy

Description: Fort Smith Virtual Academy is requesting to change the grade levels served from K-8 to K-12. The enrollment cap is 500.

Dr. Samantha Hall from the Fort Smith Virtual Academy provided the rationale for increasing the number of grades served. She indicated that the intention was to create a seamless and consistent model for virtual learning.

The charter also requested a waiver of hands-on CPR training.

There were no legal concerns.

There were questions related to budget projections. Dr. Hall indicated that there would be a monetary savings surrounding curriculum costs by using Virtual Arkansas for some courses and using teachers from the district in social studies and mathematics.

Dr. Hall explained the teaching environment for teachers. She indicated that all virtual teachers are on-site in a district building.

Ms. Saracini made a motion to approve the amendment request for FSVA. The motion was seconded by Dr. Wright-McMurray. The motion carried unanimously.

III.3. Consideration of Mountainburg Middle School Brain Academy Amendment Request

Presenter: Shastady Wagner

Description: Mountainburg Middle School Brain Academy is requesting a change in grade levels served from Grades 5-8 to Grades 6-8. The enrollment cap would be 400.

Dr. Debbie Atwell presented on behalf of the Mountainburg School District. The amendment request is to move the students in fifth grade to the elementary school. This reconfiguration will allow the district to better meet the needs of the students in terms of intervention and support.

Dr. Wright-McMurray asked for further clarification of the rationale. Dr. Atwell indicated that the rationale also considered staffing needs, community/parental support, and financial concerns of the district.

Dr. Wright-McMurray made a motion to approve the amendment request. There was a second by Ms. Saracini. The motion carried unanimously.

III.4. Consideration of Arkansas Military First Responders Amendment Request

Presenter: Feather Linn

Description: Arkansas Military First Responders is requesting to transfer the charter from American Quality Schools (AQS sponsoring entity) to Arkansas Military and First Responders Academy (local 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization) and rescind its waiver of Ark. Code Ann.§6-17-2403.

Dr. Kevin Durand spoke on behalf of Arkansas Military First Responders. He updated the panel on construction and renovation of the school and that the school planned to open on August 16, 2023.

There were questions about the physical location of the school. There was a question about the leadership of the organization. Dr. Durand explained the composition of the board and advisors as well as the CEO. There was a question about the estimated enrollment and if there was sufficient staffing. There was a question about financing and if there was any decrease in the support from the original 501(c)(3). There is a CSP grant in place to support as well as support from the church where the school will be housed. The charter is being supported by APSRC in things related to finance.

Dr. Durand will be the direct contact for those at DESE needing to speak to the charter.

Dr. Wright-McMurray made a motion to approve the amendment request. There was a second by Mr. Baldwin. The motion carried unanimously.

III.5. Consideration of Responsive Education Solutions Amendment Request

Presenter: Dorie Summons

Description: Responsive Education Solutions is requesting to transfer the Arkansas charters schools granted to the Texas-based Responsive Education Solutions to Responsive Ed Arkansas.

The request would apply to the following charter schools:

- Founders Classical Academies of Arkansas
- Premier High Schools of Arkansas
- Premier High School Springdale
- Premier High School North Little Rock

Rescind its waiver of Ark. Code Ann. § 6-17-2403.
Mr. James Taylor presented on behalf of Responsive Ed. The purpose of the change is to establish Responsive Ed Arkansas as the primary organization responsible for the charter schools located in Arkansas. Responsive Ed Arkansas will employ the Superintendent and staff exclusive to the charter schools under the Responsive umbrella in Arkansas.

Questions were asked about next year's budget projection related to Blue Learning. Mr. Baldwin asked about the executive board. Mr. Taylor indicated that there would be onboarding of Arkansas participants to the executive board over the next two years.

Mr. Baldwin made a motion to approve the amendment request. There was a second my Ms. Saracini. The motion carried with Ms. Newton abstaining.

III.6. Consideration of Arkansas Lighthouse Charter School Amendment Request
Presenter: Dorie Summons
Description: Arkansas Lighthouse Charter School is requesting:

- District is requesting a name change to Arkansas Lighthouse Charter Schools, Inc. (6050700);
- Operate all of the Jacksonville Lighthouse Charter School campuses and request that the enrollment cap of 1,019 be incrementally met over the course of the next 5 years;
- Amend the traditional calendar of 178 instructional days to a twelve month/year-round calendar beginning in the school year 2023-2024.
- Rescind its waiver of Ark. Code Ann. § 6-17-2403.

LaShonda Noel presented on behalf of Lighthouse Charter Schools. The local board broke ties with the Charter Management Organization which necessitates the name change. Lighthouse is requesting an incremental enrollment cap increase. The local board recently approved a salary schedule that aligns with AR Learns which is the reason to rescind the waiver of teacher salary.

Mr. Baldwin had a question about the 12-month school schedule. Ms. Noel talked about summer slide that students experienced when not in school.

With input from parents and staff, the decision was made to move to a year-round schedule.

Dr. Wright-McMurray made a motion to approve the amendment request. There was a second by Ms. Saracini. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. **New Business**

There was a discussion about the need to reschedule the May meeting. It is scheduled for May 16, 2023. They are discussing moving the meeting to Friday May 19, 2023. The meeting will start at noon.

V. **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Saracini, and it was seconded by Mr. Baldwin. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:14 AM.

Minutes prepared by Thomas Coy

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Ms. Deborah Coffman, Charter Authorizing Panel Chair