

ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

JULY 14, 2022

10:00 a.m.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. OUIDA NEWTON, Chairman

DR. SARAH MOORE, Vice Chairman

DR. FITZGERALD HILL

MS. KATHY McFETRIDGE

MR. STEVE SUTTON

MR. RANDY HENDERSON

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

MR. JOHNNY KEY, Secretary of Education

MS. JESSICA SAUM, Arkansas Teacher of the Year

DESE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. LORI FRENO, General Counsel

MS. SHASTADY WAGNER, 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

2. HARMONY GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Exhibit One (1)

Letter in Opposition by State Representative Richard
Womack

Exhibit Two (2)

Letter in Opposition by State Representative DeAnn Vaught

5. HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT - STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION WAIVER

Exhibit One (1)

Hope School District Star Academy Project Proposal

P R O C E E D I N G S

CHANGES TO AGENDA

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We do have some changes to the agenda.

Item 1, the Colburn Clark licensure action hearing, that one has been pulled off; so that -- we no longer have that one.

And then Item 6(h), the Rauls case under School Choice appeals, that one has been resolved; so pull that one off also.

Okay. We would like to add one additional 1240 waiver. That's the -- for Camden-Fairview. If the Board would agree to that, we would put it after the other 1240 which is Item 4(a). We would put it there, if that's agreeable to the Board. If so, I need a motion for that. It's the Camden-Fairview 1240 request.

DR. MOORE: I'll make a motion to add that to our agenda.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Have a motion by Dr. Moore.

MR. HENDERSON: Second.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson. All in favor?

(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

2 Okay. We'll add it and it would become Item

3 4(a)(2), I guess.

4 (OFF THE RECORD FOR CONSENT AGENDA)

5 (BACK ON THE RECORD)

6 1) PULLED FROM AGENDA

7 2) PETITION OF HARMONY GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO CLOSE GRADES

8 7-12 AT ITS SPARKMAN CAMPUS

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We are ready to move to our --
10 which is Item Number 2, but it's our first item on
11 the Action Agenda that we'll see this morning. It's
12 Petition of Harmony Grove School District to Close
13 Grades 7 through 12 at its Sparkman Campus.

14 Ms. Freno.

15 MS. FRENO: Thank you, Ms. Newton.

16 Can you hear me? Is this on?

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It doesn't seem like it's on.

18 MS. FRENO: Is it on?

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think we're going to need
20 new batteries this morning.

21 While we're waiting on that, we want to take a
22 second and recognize Senator Beckham.

23 There you are. Welcome, we're glad that you're
24 here with us today.

25 MS. FRENO: Ms. Newton -- okay, that one works.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: There we go. We're good.

2 MS. FRENO: Thank you, Dan.

3 We're here today on the petition of the Harmony
4 Grove School District to move its grades 7 through 12
5 at its Sparkman campus, which is considered under the
6 law an isolated school, and to transfer those
7 students who are in grades 7 through 12 to the
8 Harmony Grove High School.

9 The law affords two different ways in which an
10 isolated school or a part thereof -- which is what
11 we're dealing with here, a part of the school -- can
12 be closed. First, the local board of directors may
13 unanimously decide on its own to close it and -- or
14 to move these grades, which it did not do. Second,
15 if there's a majority vote, which there was, of the
16 local board of directors -- it was 5-to-2 -- then the
17 State Board can -- may -- they may allow the closure
18 if it determines that the closure would be in the
19 best interest of the students in the school district
20 as a whole.

21 If there are no questions at this point, I would
22 ask if I may read the hearing procedures.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, please.

24 MS. FRENO: Okay. All persons wishing to
25 testify before the Board shall first be placed under

1 oath by the chairperson of the State Board. That
2 does not include lawyers.

3 CHAIRPERSON NEWTON: Okay.

4 MS. FRENO: Second, the spokesperson for the
5 petitioning school district, which is Harmony Grove,
6 shall have a total of 15 minutes to present the
7 school district's remarks. The State Board may allow
8 more time at its discretion, if needed.

9 The spokesperson for any individual group of
10 citizens that opposes the petition shall have a total
11 of 15 minutes to present the remarks of the
12 individual or group of citizens. The State Board may
13 allow 15 -- more than 15 minutes, if need be, at its
14 discretion.

15 The spokespersons for the petitioning school
16 district, Harmony Grove, shall have a total of 5
17 minutes to present closing remarks to the Board. The
18 State Board may allow more than 5 minutes, if needed.

19 The State Board shall then discuss, deliberate,
20 and vote upon the matter, approving or denying the
21 school district's petition. If it deems necessary,
22 it may take the matter under advisement -- but, of
23 course, deliberations and votes would always have to
24 be in an open public hearing.

25 And if there are no questions, I will turn the

1 floor over to the petitioner.

2 Yes, Secretary Key.

3 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Freno, just to clarify -- so
4 the closing, there's only one group that closes and
5 that's the petitioning district. Is that accurate?

6 MS. FRENO: I'm sorry; would you repeat that? I
7 just didn't hear.

8 SECRETARY KEY: The closing -- or the 5-minute
9 closing is only by the district --

10 MS. FRENO: Yes.

11 SECRETARY KEY: -- the petitioning --

12 MS. FRENO: Yes, that is what is provided in our
13 rules, only the petitioner.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Would
15 anyone that is planning on testifying today before
16 this Board, would you stand and raise your right hand
17 please? Do you swear or affirm that the testimony
18 you're about to give shall be the truth, the whole
19 truth and nothing but the truth?

20 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

22 All right. The District is first and --

23 Have you got a timer for me?

24 SECRETARY KEY: Yes.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay, 15 minutes.

1 Good morning.

2 MR. BEQUETTE: Good morning, Secretary Key, Ms.
3 Newton, Members of the Board. My name is Jay
4 Bequette; I'm an attorney in Little Rock and I
5 represent the Harmony Grove School District in its
6 petition to close the 7th through 12th grade -- 7th
7 through 12th grades at the Sparkman campus.

8 In the interest of time, I'm going to limit my
9 remarks just to a legal issue that opposing counsel,
10 Mr. Askew, has raised on behalf of the Sparkman
11 community. And then I'll introduce, first, Dr.
12 Albert Snow, the district superintendent, and then
13 also Jeff Mock, the high school principal down at the
14 Camden-Harmony Grove campus to make brief remarks to
15 the Board.

16 The legal issue I want to address is an issue
17 that was raised by Mr. Askew, the opposition's
18 counsel, first, and initially, in a court proceeding
19 that was filed in early June in Ouachita County
20 Circuit Court, that he supplemented in -- later in
21 June with the filing that Mr. Askew has provided to
22 this board to consider as part of the district's
23 petition to close the 7th through 12th grades in
24 Sparkman. And that legal issue involves whether or
25 not a board meeting the district had, on June 9,

2022, was a legal meeting. And it's the district's strong position that the June 9 meeting was a legal meeting. What happened was is that this district's board meets on the second Thursday of every month of every year, and it has for many, many years to our knowledge. Unfortunately, the June 9 meeting -- there was a typo on the district's website and it had it for a date later in June, the 16th or something. But the second Thursday of June was June the 9th and the district held a meeting. At that meeting one of the actions taken by the board was to authorize the superintendent to file a petition with the State Board requesting the closure of grades 7 through 12 at the Sparkman campus.

Now, interestingly, the board, on April 26, 2022, at a meeting -- at a called meeting, had already voted to authorize the superintendent to close grades 7 through 12 at the Sparkman campus, but the board voted again on June the 9th. The bottom line is from a legal standpoint there was no harm because the meeting on June 9th was on the second Thursday of the month of June 2022. It was a very heavily attended meeting. Everyone that always attends the board meetings, and others, were there. There was no harm, no foul. And so it is our

1 position that it was a legal meeting, notwithstanding
2 the typographical mistake on the district's website
3 where the meeting was mistakenly listed for June 16th
4 instead of June 9th. No harm; everybody showed up.

5 And then, in addition to that, the board had
6 already voted on April 22nd -- or 26th, 2022, to vote
7 -- to authorize the superintendent to take whatever
8 actions were necessary to close grades 7 through 12.

9 So that's the legal issue. I just don't think
10 it's of any consequence to the Board's decision, but
11 I anticipate that Mr. Askew may bring it up and may
12 make arguments with that.

13 At this point now I'm going to introduce Dr.
14 Snow who will speak to the district's petition.

15 Dr. Snow.

16 SUPT. SNOW: Good morning, everyone.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good morning.

18 SUPT. SNOW: I'm going to be very quick and I'm
19 going to read some of this in the interest of time.
20 I want to make these points before I turn it over to
21 Mr. Mock, the Harmony Grove high school principal, to
22 discuss bus routes.

23 Why are we here today? Okay. Two years ago,
24 Harmony Grove School District petitioned to close the
25 entire Sparkman campus, and there was an event that

1 led to that. Okay. They lost 24 students in one
2 year. They went from 142 students to 118. Okay.

3 There's been another event that brings this on
4 today. In April, the principal at the Sparkman
5 campus contacted me and said -- at that time there
6 was one kindergartener, but that kindergartener soon
7 withdrew -- there are zero kindergarten students
8 coming into the Sparkman campus. Okay. I can't
9 stress enough how important that is. Okay. That's
10 not a one-year problem. Okay. That's a 13-year
11 problem if you have no students in a grade. And then
12 if you -- even if you do get some in -- say they get
13 two students next year in 1st grade, that's an issue.
14 Okay. And it will be an issue from now -- or for
15 many years to come. Declining enrollment has been a
16 problem at -- in Sparkman for many years. In the
17 last four years, Sparkman campus has lost 45
18 students. At the end of the year they had 97
19 students on roll and that was before any school
20 choice occurred and before any students transferred
21 down to Harmony Grove on their own. There have been
22 some that have done that this week; I've talked to
23 several parents this week.

24 But it's not just the school that's lost
25 students. The northern two board member zones in the

1 county, which were traditionally thought of as the
2 Sparkman districts -- according to the 2020 census,
3 they have lost the most percentage-wise population of
4 any of the zones in the Harmony Grove School
5 District. We had to move those district's boundaries
6 down to get them to substantially equal with everyone
7 else. And because of that, we will have an election
8 in November for all the board members; all the board
9 members have to run because of this.

10 All right. It was the consensus of the
11 administrators at Harmony Grove that something needed
12 to be done to address this. All right. And I've
13 been asked, you know, why the high school instead of
14 the elementary; that was where the problem was.
15 Well, there are 40 students at the high school,
16 again, before anyone transferred to Harmony Grove on
17 their own or anyone went to home-school or anyone
18 school-choiced out -- and many of them did. And I
19 will say this: the reason I had a meeting on April
20 26th was to meet a deadline. If anyone wanted to
21 transfer out, they had to do so -- school choice by
22 May 1st. Okay. That's the reason we did that. So
23 I've been contacted -- so that's another event, okay,
24 no kindergarteners, 40 high school students. And of
25 those 40 high school students 10 to 15 of them always

1 come to the Harmony Grove campus every day. They
2 ride a bus down at noon, at lunchtime, and go to vo-
3 tech or take concurrent credit classes. So we
4 already have established bus routes to Harmony Grove
5 school. Now, as it stands, those students that
6 remain at the high school are on Virtual Arkansas.
7 Any of you that have children, grandchildren that
8 struggled with digital learning during the pandemic
9 will probably have to agree with me that that is not
10 the optimal way to provide education to those
11 students. Now, sure, there's some kids that do fine.
12 Okay. Harmony Grove school board had to pass a
13 policy during the pandemic that anyone that wasn't
14 making a C or above had to come back to face-to-face
15 classes, because we had so many students that weren't
16 doing their work and were failing.

17 All right. Closing the high school allows me to
18 move staff from there to Harmony Grove -- and might
19 hear I forced everyone to come to Harmony Grove, the
20 employees; I did not. Three teachers requested to
21 move to Harmony Grove -- two elementary teachers and
22 a middle school teacher; they requested to come. I
23 decided not to replace one position. And two
24 employees were asked to transfer, one a certified
25 teacher and one a classified person.

1 I want to stress this as well: the first time I
2 came here, two years ago, I was looking at a major
3 RIF that would've involved people on both campuses.
4 Not during this time. No one will lose a job because
5 of what we're doing here today.

6 All right. One of the major concerns with this
7 closure is the length of bus routes, and it's part of
8 their petition to -- or response to our petition this
9 time, talking about kids being on the bus two hours
10 in the morning and two hours in the evening. We have
11 been working on bus routes for two years and we've
12 got them all plotted out. Mr. Mock is going to show
13 those to you in just a minute. And we are not going
14 to pick anybody up before 6:30, and deliver them at
15 the school by 7:30, anywhere in the district. Okay.
16 So that's -- we have fixed that problem. And
17 somebody said, "Well, what if somebody moves in
18 further out?" We'll add a bus if we have to. Okay.
19 We will figure it out, like we always do. Okay.

20 All right. I've rushed through this, but I did
21 want Mr. Mock to have time to show you the bus
22 routes.

23 And let me say this, I'm a 40-something year
24 educator, 30 years in administration. I would not be
25 doing this if it wasn't -- I didn't think it was for

1 the best interest of the kids at Sparkman and at
2 Harmony Grove. I have to -- I have to take the whole
3 district into account. I need to keep the whole
4 district financially sound and this will help in
5 doing that. Okay. Inflation and all the financial
6 problems I talked about two years ago, they're still
7 here and they're coming to fruition -- the higher
8 teacher salaries, higher wage for classified people,
9 and wage -- goods and services, there's supply chain
10 problems, and everything has gone up. When you go to
11 the grocery store you can see that for yourself. I
12 think they say 9% inflation, but it's -- it looks
13 like a lot of it has doubled to me.

14 All right. I'd like to introduce Mr. Jeff Mock,
15 the high school principal at Harmony Grove.

16 MR. MOCK: Good morning.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Morning.

18 MR. MOCK: And I want to stress that bus routes
19 are extremely fluid type situation and we can get
20 down in the weeds with this pretty quickly. I do
21 have a map illustration, if the Board would like to
22 refer to that at some point in time.

23 And if Dan would like to, he can pull that up.

24 What I do every-so-often is I go through and map
25 out all the residences within our school district

1 just so that I can keep up with basically where
2 everyone is at, to make sure we're providing the
3 routes where they need to be. Just as soon as we
4 went to this process, I immediately went back and
5 updated that. So based upon the students that we
6 had, with the information I had at the time with the
7 number of students that had requested school choice
8 out of the Sparkman area, the students who had made
9 home-school requests, and a couple of nonresident
10 students that I was able -- that I identified in the
11 process, I was able to look at the routes as a whole.
12 Harmony Grove District operates 13 routes at this
13 time. Three of those routes service the Sparkman
14 campus; two of those three routes actually connect
15 with a Harmony Grove-bound route every day, morning
16 and afternoon, with students who live in the northern
17 part of the Harmony Grove School District. Those
18 students right now are on the bus in excess of an
19 hour, in some cases, to come to Harmony Grove School
20 District.

21 When this issue arose, my goal was to make sure
22 that we did not have a student on a bus more than an
23 hour. And so when I went through, trying to look at
24 this, we went and we drove the longest route to see,
25 to make sure that we were within that, because

1 there's not an issue with actually adding another
2 route if we have to. If students move in or there
3 are some change in residency, for example, in an area
4 and it causes us to exceed that amount, there's not
5 an issue with adding a shorter route to fix that,
6 with the one exception of finding a driver, which
7 every district in the state will say that's an issue.
8 But having an actual route is not an issue to make
9 that happen.

10 So what I did, if you want to refer to it --

11 Dan, if you would, just open Sparkman 1 -- I
12 just named the routes -- and if you can enlarge that
13 for me.

14 I did try to draw a basic boundary of the
15 northern half of the district. The south lateral
16 line is actually the Dallas County line, between
17 Dallas County and Ouachita County, just to give you a
18 reference. And, of course, the blue line, the
19 squiggly line is the Ouachita River. The farthest
20 stop out that I plotted with the students, the
21 resident students that we have is about 35 miles out.
22 That stop would actually be picked up at about 6:30.
23 That route driver would come down into Sparkman, pick
24 up some students on the western side of Sparkman, go
25 by the Sparkman High School, and actually come down

1 what is Highway 7 to a little community of Ouachita,
2 and at that point they would be southbound to Harmony
3 Grove nonstop. The other route --

4 And you can open that one, Dan -- is Harmony
5 Grove -- I mean Sparkman 2. Well, he got 3.

6 Three is actually the downtown one, or inside.
7 But Sparkman 2 is the one that comes directly to
8 Harmony Grove. That comes down what is to Highway 9
9 at Holly Springs. Once again, same process, it picks
10 up high school students southbound out of the east
11 side of Sparkman, down to a community of Pine Grove
12 and to Holly Springs, and then it would be southbound
13 nonstop to Harmony Grove. There could be some tweaks
14 to that one because we have a Harmony Grove route
15 that's right there in the same area. If time is a
16 problem, I've already worked out some solutions to
17 address that issue on that side of the route.

18 The fourth route that is there, that is a new
19 one. The Sparkman 4 route is a route that I had to
20 create --

21 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

22 MR. MOCK: -- to gather elementary students that
23 are going to Sparkman, northbound. Because there are
24 some elementary students south of Sparkman that would
25 need to get to the Sparkman campus. So we'll have a

shorter route that will actually go north and pick them up and have them at school within the normal time.

[TIMER BELL RINGS]

MR. MOCK: I don't think those are necessarily early starts.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

MR. MOCK: But I can take any questions concerning those routes.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I think --

MR. MOCK: Was that my 15-minute warning?

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That's -- that's the 15 --

MR. MOCK: Okay.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- minutes. And I think we'll hold questions kind of till the end.

MR. MOCK: Okay.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So we may come back to this --

MR. MOCK: Okay.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- bus -- this -- I can't even talk -- bus issue in a little bit.

MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

All right. Who is --

Okay. Good morning.

MS. PAGE: Good morning. My name is Jennifer

1 Page and I am the school counselor, along with 2nd
2 grade teacher, at Sparkman K-12 school. This past
3 year was my first year there in Sparkman. I hold
4 about 14-1/2 years of experience in education.

5 I walked into Sparkman School not knowing a
6 soul, but as a school counselor whatever kids are in
7 front of me is who I'm going to advocate for.

8 So as a professional coming in from the outside
9 and maintaining a professional mindset, you could see
10 that the environment there is safe and conducive to
11 learning. You've got passionate professionals who
12 love kids. With that being said, in this school you
13 do have all the pieces. You have teachers who take
14 care of the kids; no matter what storms blow in the
15 admin world, they don't quit. They love and they
16 teach, which encompasses a student's academic success
17 and wellbeing, nurturing the whole child which means
18 that teachers, school leaders, and parents focus on
19 the child's whole self, you know, including their
20 social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive
21 capacities. However, there's no involvement of all
22 stakeholders in anything that takes place in Sparkman
23 K-12. Time and effort hasn't been spent at Sparkman
24 to look for ways to improve anything, just simply to
25 take things away. As you take things away numbers do

1 decline, but they don't have to. Coming in from the
2 outside, what I see is we're kind of giving them the
3 bare minimum, when we don't have to. We have the
4 means to give them our best, and it just doesn't seem
5 to be happening. They're kids, and they're kids at
6 the mercy of adults.

7 I'm sure you're familiar with the professional
8 standards of educational leaders and standards to
9 speak to ethics and professional norms. And part of
10 this is placing children at the center of education
11 and accepting responsibility for each student's
12 success and their wellbeing. The wellbeing of
13 Sparkman kids does not seem to be a consideration,
14 what impact is this having on them. You know, are we
15 putting an effort into orientation, school tours?
16 You know, these kids are expected to show up at
17 Harmony Grove on August 15th. You know, is there a
18 comfortable transition for these students. There
19 doesn't seem to be any support in meshing of the two
20 schools, no comfortable transition activities, no
21 efforts to make these students feel comfortable.
22 They are simply being thrown into it because they
23 don't have a choice.

24 The lack of support for the kids is almost
25 unbearable. So many things have been stripped away

1 from Sparkman kids. There doesn't seem to be a
2 presence of support. It's almost like there's a
3 stigma attached to Sparkman and this stigma is felt
4 by the kids. And there's no procedure that I'm aware
5 of to close the high school, it just seems to be
6 based on numbers. There's no concern about the
7 impact on what it will have to the students. So if
8 this decision is made to close part of Sparkman, or
9 Sparkman, it kind of can't be undone.

10 And, of course, Standard 10 speaks to
11 educational leaders acting as agents of continuous
12 improvement to promote each student's academic
13 success and wellbeing, once again. And I have seen
14 what support and leadership can do within a school; I
15 have experienced that -- I've experienced it, I've
16 lived it. In Sparkman, we have combined classrooms.
17 So where I come from, if that was something that was
18 going on with that -- in our campus, then that would
19 be something on the front-end that they would load us
20 with training, do observations, admin would provide
21 feedback on what we're doing in the classroom, and it
22 would, you know, give us room for instructional
23 improvement. And, of course, all of this can be seen
24 in the kids; you know, the impact is seen in the
25 kids. And, of course, sometimes as adults we're on

1 the other side of things and we don't consider what
2 these kids are actually going through. Anxiety,
3 depression is common among our youth. It is
4 something that -- I had a student this year who
5 experienced it and he -- the fear of the unknown, and
6 it's heartbreaking; he did not handle change well.
7 And this is something that I have not heard anybody
8 talk about -- you know, how are we going to address
9 these things, what are we going to do in regards to
10 taking care of the whole child. Although their
11 school does offer more activities, it does not
12 guarantee that the students will be involved.

13 When only bottom lines, numbers, or metrics are
14 the only measure of value, small schools can be
15 dismissed as unnecessary. And, of course, it
16 eliminates jobs for members of the community and
17 research on school closure does show substantial
18 impact on the community. This community includes our
19 kids. You know, the school is somewhat of a
20 community hub.

21 And, you know, in regards to the bus route, of
22 course we do have concerns with the length, the time
23 that the students will be spending on the bus. But
24 also when those days come, as we experienced some
25 last year in Sparkman, when you are short bus

1 drivers, then you're having to combine these routes
2 -- and it happened on more than one occasion -- and
3 so it extends the bus route even longer. Thank you.

4 MR. ASKEW: Senator Beckham.

5 SENATOR BECKHAM: Good morning.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Morning.

7 SENATOR BECKHAM: I'm State Senator Charles
8 Beckham. I serve District 12, which includes this
9 area that we're talking about.

10 One of the biggest issues I see in rural
11 Arkansas is the closure of small schools. We have
12 Waldo, we have -- you know, we have Stephens right
13 there in the general area where I live. I live just
14 north of McNeil, between McNeil and Stephens. And
15 when you see these schools close you start seeing
16 businesses close, you start seeing parents and
17 families moving closer to campuses. We may be able
18 to say that we can keep everybody within one hour on
19 a bus ride, but I've been in logistics my entire
20 career and things happen, buses breakdown, activities
21 toward -- field trips take buses, take bus drivers
22 out of the equation. Things happen; these bus routes
23 get extended.

24 The number of students that are going from the
25 Sparkman area to Harmony Grove will decrease over --

1 year over year over year if we close these campuses.
2 As those numbers decline, they will consolidate bus
3 routes and we will most likely see where students are
4 on the buses extended periods of time. That's just
5 something we've seen across the state, something
6 we've seen in all these small areas, small towns.

7 There are three sawmills in Sparkman currently.
8 Very few small towns survive without schools, without
9 campuses. This is the start of closing down Sparkman
10 -- all Sparkman campuses. That's not a secret, but
11 something that was tried -- they tried that -- tried
12 to happen two years ago, when my predecessor came up
13 here and spoke against closure of the campuses and
14 stopped the closure of the campuses. We're back here
15 two years later. The difference is is we have Act
16 662 that I helped pass, with Representative Womack
17 and Representative Vaught. That Act allows Sparkman
18 to actively seek to join another school district, but
19 the campuses have to be completely closed in order to
20 do that -- or the intent to close those campuses.

21 I ask you to keep the campuses open so that they
22 can look to another school district to join with or
23 we can start looking at de-consolidation. That's
24 something that's been very prevalent in a lot of
25 legislation when we look at -- from the Act's

1 standpoint. We did the new inspection programs to
2 try to break up the large factories, the large meat
3 processing plants. We're trying to get back to more
4 of a locally controlled, locally sourced area; same
5 thing with schools. I think the more community --
6 you can look here in the audience; you have Harmony
7 Grove Hornets, you have Sparkman Raiders. Community
8 identity is huge. It's huge for everyone. It's huge
9 for the students; it's huge for the parents. And we
10 ask that you keep this -- the campuses open so they
11 can keep that identity.

12 Going back to the enrollment numbers, Secretary
13 Key, you were in -- we were on the Education -- I'm
14 on the Education Committee. We've been asked not to
15 consider the enrollment numbers for funding because
16 of the pandemic. But we're considering the
17 enrollment numbers when we're going to close down the
18 campus. So --

19 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: An audience member's
20 cell phone goes off.)

21 REPRESENTATIVE BECKHAM: Is that my timer?

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: No.

23 REPRESENTATIVE BECKHAM: Okay. I'd ask you to
24 give us the same grace that we've given the school
25 districts and we've -- you've given, the Department,

1 and not consider the enrollment -- the declining
2 enrollment numbers for one or two years, especially
3 when Sparkman has continuously been under threat of
4 having campuses closed.

5 In closing, when we started this meeting, Ms.
6 Newton, you said that this is about the students, we
7 need to do what's best for the students. I cannot
8 see closing a campus, putting kids on a bus -- and
9 one thing I've always -- always get from sheriffs is
10 they hate bussing prisoners; they hate bussing
11 prisoners from Columbia County to Lafayette County,
12 from Pulaski County down to Columbia County for
13 hearings. But we're wanting to bus our students;
14 we're wanting to treat our students worse than we
15 treat the prisoners. It's not out of convenience,
16 it's not out of -- to better education; it's out of
17 the bottom line on we can spend more money on one
18 campus versus providing the best education for the
19 kids.

20 So, in closing, I would ask you to keep the
21 Sparkman campuses open. And if you have any
22 questions, I'll be here.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

24 REPRESENTATIVE BECKHAM: Thank you.

25 MR. ASKEW: I'm Jess Askew. I spoke a couple of

1 years ago. I represent the Sparkman community. I'm
2 a lawyer.

3 We heard no financial information on the impact
4 of closing grades 7 through 12 at Sparkman, hasn't
5 been presented to you. And we know from two years
6 ago, from Dr. Snow's sworn testimony to you then, the
7 problem with just closing the high school -- I'm
8 quoting his record, his testimony -- "Just closing
9 the high school, then your economy of scale is even
10 worse. Okay. Then you're keeping a school open for
11 56 kids. Okay. And you still have to have at least
12 a part-time librarian, a counselor, an administrator,
13 and it just puts the financial end even more out of
14 whack." And that was when they wanted to shut down
15 the entire campus for financial reasons. They don't
16 touch that today.

17 The financial analysis in the petition is in
18 paragraph six. It goes to the Sparkman campus, not
19 Sparkman 7th through 12th grades. No separate
20 analysis.

21 You all asked Ms. Smith two years ago what the
22 cost of educating the different children was, and she
23 told you, on page 62, line 4 of last time's
24 transcript, Harmony Grove spent \$9,773 per student at
25 the high school; Sparkman had \$9,911 per student at

1 the high school. That difference was \$138 two years
2 ago. You haven't heard anything different. And
3 guess what, the isolated funding per capita for
4 Sparkman students is \$487, according to the statute
5 -- more than three times the difference. So this
6 makes no financial sense.

7 The transportation plan you've heard, we know
8 that the furthest point where children live, in
9 Dallas and Clark County, to Harmony Grove is 47
10 miles. And we presented that last time -- for the
11 94-mile roundtrip how would the district possibly
12 deal with that. What you heard today was a little
13 bit of a interesting proposition where the total
14 longest bus route would be 35 miles. And what I
15 heard Mr. Mock say was, "Well, we took out children
16 who have school-choiced to other districts and we
17 took out children who have home-schooled." And so,
18 they're not even going to pretend to try to serve
19 those children who are part of this school district
20 and supported by the tax dollars from Dallas County
21 and Clark County that go to Harmony Grove. No
22 pretending to do that. So they don't have a
23 realistic bussing plan. Even if you accept that they
24 -- you know, if you accept what they want to do, they
25 don't even intend to go the extra 12 miles twice a

1 day to get these other children.

2 Now the petition speaks mostly about the
3 Sparkman campus, not grades 7 to 12. And there's a
4 reason for that, and that's because the plan that
5 Harmony Grove has is to shut down the Sparkman campus
6 as a whole. And as you just heard, Act 662 prevents
7 that without a one-year notice to other school
8 districts, and that notice is to allow the other
9 school districts to say, "Hey, we might be interested
10 in bringing in Sparkman; we might want to come to
11 you, State Board, and de-annex Sparkman from Harmony
12 Grove and take it in ourselves in its whole, in its
13 entirety." And guess what, Harmony Grove has already
14 put that plan into operation; they just didn't tell
15 you that. What they want you to do is authorize
16 closing of grades 7 to 12, even at the same time as
17 they're telling neighboring school districts, under
18 Act 662, "Hey, come look at this district. Do you
19 want it? Well, half of it is already gone." So
20 that's what's going on here. This is not closing 7
21 to 12; this is closing a campus.

22 Now I want to talk about the legal violations.

23 We had sworn testimony from Dr. Snow on June 8th
24 in court where he said that he did not tell the board
25 -- he told the board, "We're not coming back." He

1 told his school board, "We're not coming back to the
2 State Board of Education this time. We're not coming
3 back to the State Board of Education to ask for
4 permission to close down grades 7 to 12." My
5 question, "You decided to close grades 7 to 12 on
6 April 26th, didn't you, at Harmony Grove?" "Yes,
7 sir." "At that time you told the board that you
8 weren't going back to the State Board, didn't you?"
9 "Yes, sir."

10 So they actually shut down grades 7 through 12
11 at that time, transferred all the students who taught
12 -- I mean the teachers who taught grades 7 through 12
13 to Harmony Grove. I asked, "Who's going to teach at
14 Sparkman in grades 7 to 12 next year?" This was on
15 June 8. And he said, "Nobody." And I said, "Well,
16 but at the same time you're saying that I'm prepared
17 to open school --

18 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

19 MR. ASKEW: Just a couple more points, if I may.
20 So, yeah, you can --

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Is it okay with the Board if
22 he finishes?

23 MR. ASKEW: May I have a couple more minutes?

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Is it okay with the Board?
25 Okay.

1 MR. ASKEW: I apologize. I get a little wound-
2 up.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I understand.

4 MR. ASKEW: The point is, you can't have a
5 school without teachers. And Dr. Snow and Harmony
6 Grove say that if you deny their petition, well,
7 they'll just throw all these kids into virtual
8 education, but there aren't any teachers to catch
9 them.

10 You heard about the June 9th hearing -- or board
11 meeting, where Mr. Bequette says, "Well, that was
12 just a typo." He's admitting the law was violated.
13 So that's legal violation number two.

14 The first violation was they closed down grades
15 7 to 12 without even asking you. We had to file
16 suit. That's the only reason they're here today.

17 The second violation was they had a meeting on
18 June 9, when their calendar that's required by law
19 said June 16. And they did that to meet the 30-day
20 deadline to get to you, because the Judge was going
21 to shut down their effort without that.

22 The third violation was Act 662. They cannot
23 shut down -- piecemeal Sparkman, and therefore make
24 it impossible or at least undesirable for other
25 school districts to look at Sparkman and decide "we

1 want those children, we want those tax revenues, we
2 want those families, we want those businesses, we
3 want that community." But they're asking you to do
4 that. They're asking you to be complicit -- asking
5 you to be complicit in three violations of the law
6 that they have committed, which I find shocking. And
7 that is without respect to how they're treating each
8 other.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

10 MR. ASKEW: Thank you for your indulgence.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: The district gets 5 minutes
12 now.

13 MR. ASKEW: There are also people signed up for
14 public comment.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Well, yes.

16 MR. ASKEW: Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, sir. Thank you.

18 SUPT. SNOW: I realize that this is a very
19 emotional issue. Okay. And he keeps talking about
20 Act 662. Okay. That was -- that was run through the
21 legislature just for the Sparkman people, and it says
22 that you must notify contiguous districts to -- that
23 you're going to close the school. All right. Now
24 they're mad at me for following that and sending
25 those letters out. But I can tell you right now, at

1 the most that is a pipe dream. Okay. They don't
2 have anything to offer another district. Okay.
3 Steadily declining enrollment. Okay. There would be
4 no funds going to them from there, and it's --
5 they've been talking about that for two years. I've
6 actually talked to superintendents -- not all of
7 them; I have talked to four out of the seven, okay,
8 and they expressed no interest in trying to do
9 anything with Sparkman. Okay.

10 Sparkman got that law passed. I've complied
11 with it. It also says that you can close -- it talks
12 about closing the whole campus, and that's why I went
13 ahead and did that, because we weren't closing the
14 whole campus. Okay. But they took us to court and
15 Judge says the proper place for that is the State
16 Board, so here we are. Okay.

17 Now he's going to argue that again in front --
18 in county court on the 20th, okay, actually trying to
19 subvert the will of the State Board, in my opinion.
20 But he talks about -- he talks about we have no plan.
21 Yes, the 7-12 school, if it stays open, will be
22 totally virtual. Okay. And I have made my feelings
23 known on numerous occasions that that is not in the
24 best interest of the district and not in the best
25 interest of the students at Sparkman.

1 He talks about there's no plan for getting those
2 kids into Harmony Grove. There are over 50 students
3 from Sparkman that are already there. They will have
4 friends and siblings that are already at our campus.
5 And, yes, we will make sure that they have a smooth
6 transition.

7 Financials, they say we don't talk about that.
8 Okay. I spoke at length about it the last time we
9 were here. Okay. He says that, you know, the --
10 that I said the economies-of-scale will be back -- or
11 will be out of whack. Okay. There's a lot that has
12 changed since then. Okay. We reduced staff at the
13 Sparkman campus, okay, not through reduction-in-force
14 but simply by attrition; so there's not as much staff
15 up there. Okay. What I'm cutting out is the staff
16 that will -- would only serve high school students.
17 I did -- I allowed some classes to be taught. This
18 came about long before I was superintendent. Okay.
19 They put all the students on virtual long before I
20 became superintendent, and what we'll be doing is
21 going back to that if you deny this petition today.

22 There's also a lot of stuff in there -- I could
23 not answer all the questions in that 180 pages that
24 they turned in in response to this petition. But the
25 thing about sports and taking away agri and sports,

1 there weren't enough students. Okay. They had
2 basketball teams with five kids. That's a nightmare
3 for a coach to try to do. You can't really coach
4 kids who say, "I don't have to go to practice. I get
5 to play anyway." And then if you foul out in a
6 basketball game, then you're playing with four or
7 three students. That's a nightmare for kids. They
8 get beat almost every time, parents are upset, and
9 so-on. So we didn't -- those were taken way before I
10 got there, and really the lack of numbers did this.
11 Okay.

12 And they talk about that we're taking their tax
13 money. There is no Sparkman tax money; it's Harmony
14 Grove as a whole tax money. And we're not enriching
15 ourselves. We're a district that has to receive
16 support from the state; we're not a district that
17 pays all the foundation money ourselves. So I don't
18 know how we're enriching ourselves from Sparkman
19 students.

20 The numbers are not getting better. All this
21 other is distraction --

22 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

23 SUPT. SNOW: -- getting away from the numbers
24 that are not getting better; they're continually
25 going down.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

2 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

3 MR. MOCK: May I have an additional 30 seconds?

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

5 MR. MOCK: I stood here just a little while ago
6 and held my hand up and swore an oath. When I was 18
7 years old I swore an oath to protect and defend the
8 Constitution. I served in the military for 25 years,
9 deployed three times. I will not have my name
10 impugned as if I stood up here and told this board a
11 lie about bus routes. I did not do that, and I will
12 not have my name impugned in such a manner as if I
13 did.

14 SUPT. SNOW: That's right.

15 MR. MOCK: I will answer the questions this
16 board has to ask me about those bus routes, and I
17 will clarify anything that needs to be clarified.
18 But I am a citizen of this state and I will not be
19 impugned in this body --

20 [TIMER BELL RINGS]

21 MR. MOCK: -- by that man. Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

23 All right. At this point I want to see what the
24 pleasure of the Board is. Would you like to ask
25 questions now? We do have public comments and we'll

1 have to have a motion to accept public comments. But
2 would you rather have -- do public comments and then
3 ask questions, or do questions and then do public
4 comment? How would you rather do that?

5 MR. HENDERSON: We can do it either way.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Public comment first then?

7 MS. McFETRIDGE: I vote public comment.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So we do
9 need a motion for public comment.

10 MS. McFETRIDGE: I make the motion we hear
11 public comments at this time.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion from
13 Ms. McFetridge.

14 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

16 All in favor?

17 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

19 All right.

20 (OFF THE RECORD FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS)

21 (BACK ON THE RECORD)

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So let's move into the Board
23 letting you ask some questions of the parties, as you
24 need.

25 Ms. McFetridge, do you have questions?

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Not quite yet.
 2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Not quite yet. Okay.
 3 Dr. Moore?
 4 DR. MOORE: Yes, I do. How do we want to do it?
 5 Do we want to --
 6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It's your pleasure.
 7 DR. MOORE: Okay. I'll start with the district
 8 first --
 9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.
 10 DR. MOORE: -- and then --
 11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We have questions
 12 of the district -- Dr. Snow or Mr. Mock or Mr.
 13 Bequette.
 14 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.
 15 DR. MOORE: Hi. Thank y'all for being here
 16 today. I know that we went over some of this at our
 17 hearing two years ago, but I would like --
 18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We can't -- you're going to
 19 have to get real close.
 20 DR. MOORE: Hello, can you --
 21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.
 22 DR. MOORE: Okay. I know we went over some of
 23 this at our hearing two years ago, but I would like a
 24 little bit more discussion here today, speaking to
 25 the history of the district. What -- when was

1 Harmony Grove consolidated with Sparkman?

2 SUPT. SNOW: Best I can find from going back
3 over the minutes is it was the 2003-04 school year.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. And that was because of Lake
5 View, I'm assuming --

6 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

7 DR. MOORE: -- with Sparkman under 350 --

8 SUPT. SNOW: Act 350.

9 DR. MOORE: Okay -- at that point in time. And
10 was it a forced consolidation by the district?

11 SUPT. SNOW: To my knowledge, because I haven't
12 found anywhere in the minutes where Sparkman --
13 excuse me -- Harmony Grove actually voted for it.

14 DR. MOORE: Okay. Because as I understand it,
15 with the neighboring districts that -- it seems as if
16 many of the neighboring districts could have picked
17 up the district at that point in time. And I want to
18 know if there's any back-story as to why Harmony
19 Grove picked up the district versus Arkadelphia or
20 any of the others?

21 SUPT. SNOW: Now you're talking when I was not
22 there.

23 DR. MOORE: Okay.

24 SUPT. SNOW: All I know is what I've seen in the
25 minutes. But no one else wanted them, is all I've

1 ever been told by the people that were there at the
2 time.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. And so since that point in
4 time the district has run an elementary school and a
5 7-12 high school. That's correct?

6 SUPT. SNOW: Do what, now?

7 DR. MOORE: Since 2005, Sparkman has had the K-
8 12 campus, but at one point --

9 SUPT. SNOW: No.

10 DR. MOORE: -- it was two separate schools?

11 SUPT. SNOW: It was two separate schools --

12 DR. MOORE: Okay.

13 SUPT. SNOW: -- until two years ago, we went to
14 a K-12 school.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay. What prompted the K-12, the
16 move to K-12?

17 SUPT. SNOW: Just the lack of enrollment and
18 financial. There is no way we can get enough -- we
19 can hire enough teachers to get 38 credits for the
20 high school. We can't do that. And the enrollment
21 has steadily been dropping. And that one building
22 that we have, they're housed in, is by no means full.

23 DR. MOORE: How old is that building?

24 SUPT. SNOW: I don't know the age of that
25 building. I think it was built in the 60s. I've got

1 buildings on the Harmony Grove campus that were built
2 50 years ago and 70 years ago.

3 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

4 SUPT. SNOW: So, you know --

5 DR. MOORE: How many campuses are in Harmony
6 Grove?

7 SUPT. SNOW: Just one. The state would tell you
8 an elementary and a high school --

9 DR. MOORE: Okay.

10 SUPT. SNOW: -- but it's all on the same campus.

11 DR. MOORE: But it's also a 7-12 high school --

12 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

13 DR. MOORE: -- in that sense? Okay. Can you
14 speak to me to the teaching staff currently at
15 Sparkman, at both the elementary and the high school?

16 SUPT. SNOW: We've got -- with the transfer of
17 teachers and the teachers that voluntarily went, I
18 think we're going to have about 13 staff members --

19 DR. MOORE: Okay.

20 SUPT. SNOW: -- and five-and-a-half teacher
21 units. And then there will be half for six grades,
22 and there will be halftime librarian, halftime
23 counselor, halftime art. And most of those also
24 teach elementary classes.

25 DR. MOORE: Okay. So at the elementary level

1 you have grades -- classes combined?

2 SUPT. SNOW: It hasn't really been completely
3 combined.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay.

5 SUPT. SNOW: They did a departmentalization to
6 try to avoid putting classes -- you know, 3rd and 4th
7 -- together too much. They tried to just teach
8 people one class at a time.

9 DR. MOORE: Okay. And so this past year for the
10 7-12 how many teachers were there?

11 SUPT. SNOW: Ms. McCarroll, who has requested to
12 come to the Harmony Grove campus; Mr. Mock, the
13 principal, taught two classes; Ms. Robinson was
14 teaching some English classes; and there was some --
15 another teacher teaching middle school classes.

16 DR. MOORE: Okay. So to understand that better,
17 the rest of the courses students were doing
18 virtually?

19 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

20 DR. MOORE: All through Virtual Arkansas?

21 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

22 DR. MOORE: Okay. Do you --

23 MR. BEQUETTE: Or they went to Harmony Grove.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Or they went to the Harmony Grove
25 campus.

1 DR. MOORE: Okay. So some students could
2 transfer down?

3 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. How many in-person credits do
5 you offer at the Harmony Grove campus?

6 SUPT. SNOW: Mr. Mock?

7 MR. MOCK: With the exception of some upper
8 level onesie classes, like AP type classes, things
9 like that, everything is in-person.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay. And do you offer in-person AP
11 courses?

12 MR. MOCK: We do those on virtual. Most of our
13 students at -- on the Harmony Grove campus choose to
14 take concurrent credit at SAU Tech.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay.

16 MR. MOCK: And so it pretty much levelizes that
17 out. But they have the option of doing that through
18 Virtual Arkansas.

19 DR. MOORE: Do Sparkman students currently do
20 that, concurrent credit courses?

21 SUPT. SNOW: They have the opportunity to do so.

22 DR. MOORE: Okay. And do they have to drive
23 down or --

24 MR. MOCK: When I was explaining the bus routes
25 while ago, we have the ability to get them on campus

1 first thing in the morning, which is when those
2 classes occur. So, yes, they could actually ride
3 school transportation. Some of them, however, do use
4 their personal vehicles. Even some of the students
5 in the afternoon use their personal vehicles because
6 they work in the Camden area after school, so they
7 were already driving south anyway before they went to
8 vo-tech or participated in any other activity on our
9 campus.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay. Can you talk to me a little
11 bit about school choice in your area? How many
12 students transferred out of the Harmony Grove
13 district and how many transferred in? Do you know?

14 SUPT. SNOW: I believe we had 40 that signed up
15 for school choice and -- no, we got 40 in, and it was
16 28 that school-choiced out.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay. Do you ever allow board-to-
18 board transfers for students as well?

19 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

20 DR. MOORE: When you look at the map, obviously
21 I can see how some families might choose different
22 districts based upon where they've living.

23 SUPT. SNOW: In some of the very rural areas the
24 Arkadelphia bus comes by houses just like the Harmony
25 Grove bus does.

1 DR. MOORE: And do you all allow those -- I mean
2 you have allowed those board-to-board transfers when
3 families have asked in the past?

4 SUPT. SNOW: I can recall one or two to
5 Arkadelphia. But, yes, we do allow board-to-board
6 transfers.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay. Lastly, I wanted to ask
8 around -- and which I'll ask the other side too --
9 but on the Act 662, so that has -- that's required
10 you to notify the districts around you that that
11 campus might be closing?

12 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

13 DR. MOORE: And have you -- and you said you've
14 had conversations with those surrounding districts?

15 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

16 DR. MOORE: Have any expressed interest --

17 SUPT. SNOW: I notified all of them by Certified
18 Mail.

19 DR. MOORE: Okay.

20 SUPT. SNOW: I spoke in person to the Bearden
21 superintendent, and I think there's people from
22 Sparkman that have been reaching out to
23 superintendents as well. They said -- you know, I
24 told them it didn't make sense for me financially to
25 send a bus to Sparkman. You know, it's not that far

1 up Highway 9 to -- from Bearden. But to keep -- what
2 they want is to keep the school open and I don't know
3 that anybody wants to do that. I talked to Gurdon
4 and that superintendent, I think they -- they may
5 have even talked to the board over there. But the
6 superintendent was not -- her comment to me was "I
7 have my own issues to deal with in Gurdon." She is
8 now -- she is now the superintendent at Arkadelphia.
9 And so -- and that's three. Oh, and the
10 superintendent at Fordyce --

11 DR. MOORE: Okay.

12 SUPT. SNOW: -- and she has no desire to --

13 DR. MOORE: Okay. If this were -- if your plans
14 were to proceed with the closing of the school, what
15 sort of plans are provided to transition those
16 current students into the new school? Have y'all --

17 SUPT. SNOW: To transition the students?

18 DR. MOORE: Yes.

19 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. As --

20 DR. MOORE: You know, we've heard concerns about
21 that today.

22 SUPT. SNOW: As soon as you make the ruling
23 today, we will be putting them into the classes in
24 the master schedule. We've already got buses worked
25 out. And when we come in August, we will meet with

1 the students that are coming in and try to alleviate
2 their concerns. And at registration we will do the
3 same thing.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. Because I know --

5 SUPT. SNOW: But we have the classes. It's just
6 a matter of absorbing the students into the classes.
7 And that's one of the reasons we're just doing the
8 high school, because those 40 students will be
9 totally assimilated into the master schedule at
10 Harmony Grove High School.

11 MR. MOCK: We have -- my counselor and I have
12 already discussed some things. We do things early in
13 the year when we transition 7th graders into the
14 building also, but we have our open house
15 registration time where we address anything. We have
16 a lot of students that come to us that -- from just
17 about anywhere every year. They transition into the
18 building all the time. We do that all the time.
19 Many of these 40 students that we're talking about
20 have been on the Harmony Grove campus previously.
21 They're Harmony Grove students. And we're not
22 talking about students that are coming from some
23 other state that has never been in that area. As far
24 as I'm concerned -- and I've always treated them --
25 if they come to my campus, they're Harmony Grove

1 students. If they're on the Sparkman campus, they're
2 Harmony Grove students. So they'll come to the high
3 school campus and have that same respect and
4 treatment as any other student that comes on campus.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank y'all. I allow someone
6 else to ask questions. I won't take up all the time.
7 I appreciate y'all. Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Why don't we -- to keep y'all
9 from having to get up and down, let's do the whole --
10 all the district questions right now and then we'll
11 go to the Sparkman questions. Would that be okay?

12 All right. Dr. Hill, did you have any
13 questions?

14 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Hill had to get off to check
15 out of his hotel.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We'll come back to him
17 in a minute.

18 Ms. Saum, do you have questions?

19 MS. SAUM: Yes. If I could clarify real quickly
20 that all courses -- if the school is allowed to
21 remain open, all courses 7th through 12th grade will
22 go online? I know this previous year some were
23 taught by staff in the building. Are you saying that
24 there will be no options for in-person learning?

25 SUPT. SNOW: Correct. The -- I don't -- by

1 standards we don't have to have a fulltime
2 administrator on that campus because of numbers. He
3 -- the principal taught math classes last year and
4 the year before, and that could be a possibility.
5 But that would be it.

6 MS. SAUM: So will the principal be on campus
7 next year? That is an option if that principal will
8 be there?

9 SUPT. SNOW: He will be there the full day.

10 MS. SAUM: Okay. And my other question was that
11 at Harmony Grove are there any courses that are
12 required for students to take through Virtual
13 Arkansas, or are all courses available that are
14 required to be in-person -- or do they have to take
15 courses at all through Virtual Arkansas?

16 MR. MOCK: Are you talking about on the Harmony
17 Grove campus?

18 MS. SAUM: Yes, on the Harmony Grove campus.

19 MR. MOCK: The exception are some of those
20 elective courses that I mentioned that we don't have
21 faculty on campus for, like our -- the AP classes,
22 for example, those are -- but there's not a
23 requirement for those --

24 MS. SAUM: Right.

25 MR. MOCK: -- for any particular program we

1 have. There's generally an exception, an either/or,
2 in most of those cases that would allow that to
3 happen.

4 MS. SAUM: But there's none that are required?

5 MR. MOCK: No, ma'am. No, ma'am.

6 MS. SAUM: All right. That's all I needed.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Henderson?

9 MR. HENDERSON: Dr. Moore asked about two or
10 three of my questions, but I do -- there's been a lot
11 of discussion on I guess obviously the bus
12 transportation. I haven't heard yet what percentage
13 of that bus transportation will consist of students?

14 SUPT. SNOW: Students from Sparkman or --

15 MR. HENDERSON: Yes, absolutely.

16 SUPT. SNOW: What percentage?

17 MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

18 SUPT. SNOW: Okay. Well, I know that there's
19 only 25 students on the route north of --

20 MR. MOCK: We already had several students in
21 that area riding transportation to Harmony Grove.

22 SUPT. SNOW: Right.

23 MR. MOCK: So what's going to happen on those
24 two routes coming south, it's going to incorporate
25 the students that were already coming south; it's

1 also going to incorporate the new students from the
2 high school that's coming south. Overall, I don't
3 know the exact number that we're talking about. I do
4 not have completely full buses on either one of those
5 routes at this moment that I'm aware of. The ones
6 that may possibly do that, I can actually shift some
7 off on the Harmony Grove route just by changing a
8 couple of roads maybe. But those are two solidly --
9 mostly students from the Sparkman area.

10 MR. HENDERSON: Okay. Thank you.

11 My next question, we talk about sustainability.
12 Obviously, you know, good people work -- or people
13 want to work. What's your sustainable plan as far as
14 having bus drivers and stuff like that if we were to
15 go this route?

16 SUPT. SNOW: What we'd like to do is have our
17 employees drive -- you know, either teachers or
18 certified -- excuse me -- classified staff. And we
19 have -- how many of our employees getting their
20 license this summer?

21 MR. MOCK: There's at least two or three this
22 summer.

23 Both routes coming south out of Sparkman are
24 employees that will be working on the Harmony Grove
25 campus. That's how that -- that part is sustainable

1 in that sense. But we have, just like many people
2 have, difficulty with the drivers. That's a hard one
3 to crack overall. I'm driving a bus currently to
4 fill a route just due to the absence of bus drivers;
5 so it's -- that part is reaching a critical mass.
6 But the actual location probably doesn't matter a
7 whole lot, because it even occurs on the south side
8 or in our campus.

9 MR. HENDERSON: How many buses do you project to
10 actually manage this process?

11 MR. MOCK: We run 13 routes currently total.
12 I'm actually consolidating one route on the Harmony
13 Grove end. We're going to keep that number at 13.
14 If I have to add another route, then that's what we
15 will do in order to compensate some of the time, even
16 if that occurs north of Sparkman to make that happen.
17 As I mentioned before, the fluidity of that situation
18 -- because you always have the unforeseen -- the
19 students that may come out of home school, the
20 students that may not go school choice, the students
21 that may come out of the online virtual option -- I
22 will have to address that transportation when that
23 occurs. But we don't generally provide
24 transportation to home school students that aren't
25 going to school, so we don't have to address that on

1 the actual route part. So we will -- we'll -- like I
2 say, we'll address that as that happens. But we have
3 the physical ability to do it; we'll just have to
4 address it with the driver part.

5 SUPT. SNOW: I will -- I would like to address
6 the school choice, students at Sparkman who have
7 chosen to go somewhere else if the high school
8 closes. I've been in a consolidation before, and at
9 the beginning of it you always have an exodus. Okay.
10 But within two years most of them are back, okay,
11 because of the length of the trip somewhere else or
12 they miss their friends or whatever.

13 MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Sutton, do you have
15 questions of the district?

16 MR. SUTTON: Just -- so it's safe to say you're
17 not really going to save any money on your bussing
18 expense?

19 SUPT. SNOW: No, not really.

20 MR. SUTTON: Right.

21 SUPT. SNOW: Because we're still transporting
22 them, those students.

23 MR. SUTTON: Right. You still have to.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Yes.

25 MR. SUTTON: Okay. And --

1 SUPT. SNOW: Where we're going to save money is
2 from the salaries.

3 MR. SUTTON: Yes, right. I wasn't here, going
4 back during this consolidation, certainly two years
5 ago. But back during the -- when the annexation took
6 place, if that's what it was instead of a
7 consolidation, I guess, in that 2003-2004 school year
8 what was the ADM of Sparkman at that time?

9 SUPT. SNOW: I do not know, but it was under 350
10 because that's what --

11 MR. MOCK: That's what shifted --

12 SUPT. SNOW: -- pushed the consolidation.

13 MR. SUTTON: That's what --

14 MR. MOCK: Yes.

15 SUPT. SNOW: Yeah. And it's down to 297.

16 MR. SUTTON: Okay.

17 SUPT. SNOW: And --

18 MR. SUTTON: And again this is just sort of an
19 obvious comment. But if I read something, some of
20 these emails -- well, I've heard some of these
21 comments today about some of the Sparkman students
22 perhaps being behind or over grade --

23 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Mr. Dan Davis changes
24 out Mr. Sutton's microphone.)

25 MR. SUTTON: Is it working?

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It's the battery, another
2 battery issue.

3 MR. SUTTON: Okay. Some of the comments about
4 the Sparkman overall test scores, et cetera, well,
5 since 2003 and '04, whenever the annexation took
6 place, I mean Sparkman was -- you know, they may be
7 called Sparkman, but they're under Harmony Grove
8 administration?

9 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir.

10 MR. SUTTON: Now I don't know which side made
11 the comment, but if it was your -- if it was your
12 side making the comment I would be embarrassed by
13 that. That falls under your umbrella, "your" being
14 the Harmony Grove administration. Right?

15 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir.

16 MR. SUTTON: I just want to be clear on that. I
17 mean that's -- you're operating as one. You may be
18 separate --

19 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir.

20 MR. SUTTON: -- but you're operating as one.

21 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir. And I will say this,
22 okay, when you get to information from the State it
23 breaks it down by district and particular schools.
24 Okay. In the two years prior to my becoming the
25 superintendent here Harmony -- Sparkman Elementary

1 had an F. Okay. Sparkman High School had Ds for
2 those two years. We haven't -- we haven't -- and the
3 next year, the first year I was here the high school
4 had a D and the elementary did come up to a C, and we
5 haven't got letter grades since. Well, that's what
6 people should've been outraged about was an
7 elementary in the state having two Fs -- two years of
8 Fs in a row.

9 MR. SUTTON: I would totally agree with that.
10 Yes, sir.

11 MR. MOCK: I want to -- I want to sort of answer
12 some of I think what you're asking or what had been
13 asked. I was present when -- I was the high school
14 principal at Harmony Grove when the Sparkman High
15 School went virtual. I know there were a lot of
16 things said, and I sort of stayed in my lane then and
17 just observed because it wasn't actually part of my
18 -- what I would say my business at that time. But at
19 that time, considering the number of students that
20 was on the high school campus, you cannot viably put
21 teachers into those classrooms one on one. Given the
22 numbers, you can't offer 38 courses that way and
23 sustain that when you only -- when you have say 10 or
24 so kids per class, when you get to that point. I
25 know there were a lot of things said and it was

1 promoted, "Hey, this is the way to go," and those
2 kinds of things. But ultimately -- at that time,
3 when that happened that's when this discussion
4 should've been held. The discussion about the high
5 school should've been held when they went virtual
6 years ago. That should have been the administrative
7 decision, and the board, at that time, and they did
8 not have that discussion at that time. Because we
9 should've been there back in 2017-18, whichever year
10 we went that route.

11 MR. SUTTON: Right.

12 MR. MOCK: That's when that discussion should've
13 taken place, rather than now, because we've drug this
14 thing out with the Virtual Arkansas part. And I
15 would've told you then that I didn't think that that
16 was the best, most logical option; that they would've
17 been better off on my campus in front of a teacher.
18 And the result is over the last four years I've had
19 more and more students continue to come to the
20 Harmony Grove campus to receive an education --

21 MR. SUTTON: Right.

22 MR. MOCK: -- out of the high school. There's a
23 reason for that. But I'm just saying there was a
24 time in a previous administration and board that that
25 discussion should've been held instead of going the

1 other route, and here we are today.

2 MR. SUTTON: I would agree with that.

3 What is Harmony Grove's ADM?

4 SUPT. SNOW: Approximately 800.

5 MR. MOCK: Yeah, I have about 380 on the high
6 school campus.

7 SUPT. SNOW: And we've got over 400 on the
8 elementary campus.

9 I was going to say something but I lost it.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Secretary Key, do you have a
11 question or comment?

12 SECRETARY KEY: Just a question. Mr. Mock,
13 what's your -- we've heard concern voiced about class
14 size. What's your average class size at the high
15 school?

16 MR. MOCK: You know, it varies. Because, once
17 again, rural districts, you know, grade size varies.
18 You know, one year I could have 60 in the 7th grade,
19 the next year I could have 80. I actually have one
20 class -- one grade that's plus-80. So, you know, it
21 affects your class size across the board and, of
22 course, the scheduling. I don't know what the
23 average is right off the top of my head. But I try
24 not to -- because of our classroom size, some of the
25 older classrooms, I hardly ever put more than 25 kids

1 in a classroom ever, and very seldom do I ever have
2 that many.

3 Just turning to ask -- Ms. Wells, what's
4 probably your average class size?

5 MS. WELLS: Probably about 22.

6 MR. MOCK: Yeah. If it tops that, we'd be
7 lucky.

8 SUPT. SNOW: The average class size at the
9 Sparkman campus has been less than nine, and it will
10 go down this year because of the people that have
11 graduated and not having any kindergarteners.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. McFetridge?

13 MS. McFETRIDGE: This kind of goes along with
14 what Mr. Sutton has asked you. How many students
15 coming from Sparkman have the learning gap that both
16 of these teachers talked to us today about? And I
17 guess I'm surprised because Sparkman has such a low
18 class size. How can this be happening? And as
19 superintendent to Sparkman, how can we let this go
20 on?

21 SUPT. SNOW: All right. One of --

22 MS. McFETRIDGE: I mean maybe you can tell us
23 why this has happened?

24 SUPT. SNOW: Well, there's not been a lot of
25 teaching going on. Okay. And I -- in the first year

1 I was here I met quite often with the Harmony Grove
2 -- excuse me -- the Sparkman campus. And, you know,
3 they asked me, they said, "Well, you know, what's the
4 line that we cross if it gets closed down?" I said,
5 "You already passed it. Two Fs in a row at the
6 elementary school is cause for concern." And the
7 State Department of Education was down to see me that
8 very first year, what am I going to do up there. Now
9 I did send every specialist I could get -- okay, some
10 were paid for; we spent a good bit of money on
11 specialists, educational specialists to go up there
12 -- and sent every free specialist that I could come
13 across. Okay. So I did do that. And I did start
14 letting them teach some classes face-to-face as well.

15 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. How about the
16 Professional Learning Communities, have you started
17 that in your district?

18 SUPT. SNOW: We do that -- we're supposed to do
19 that on all the campuses; so the elementary and high
20 school should be.

21 MS. McFETRIDGE: So both campuses are doing
22 that?

23 SUPT. SNOW: They are equal opportunity to go to
24 all professional development on the Sparkman campus.
25 The Sparkman students -- well, I'm not going to say

1 that.

2 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. And also the bus ride,
3 it is quite lengthy. Have you ever thought about
4 putting monitors on the buses with the children if
5 they have to be on it that long?

6 MR. MOCK: For that long a period of time -- we
7 have -- I would characterize discipline on buses as
8 very -- as far as that aspect of it is not being a
9 huge issue. But we do have -- we have installed
10 cameras on all the buses this year, so we can monitor
11 all the buses as far as after the fact. Our whole
12 district is fairly rural. A lot of times it's missed
13 out on the fact that one of the -- the Harmony Grove
14 route that I'm driving right now in the absence of a
15 driver, I picked up my first student at 6:45 and that
16 student is 25 miles away from Harmony Grove, and
17 that's in the Harmony Grove School District. We have
18 distances that we're already traveling, just the
19 students that are already coming to the Harmony Grove
20 campus, that were already trying to overcome. The --
21 we have considered that on some of our routes and
22 have some younger students on it. I have been
23 working on that with some of our -- that have -- we
24 have some preschool students who ride some routes,
25 local. We've considered adding some monitors there

1 for them. But the longer routes, I haven't seen a
2 lot of issues arise just to -- I guess to actually
3 say that that's something that was needed at that
4 point in time. We are considering adding some WiFi
5 on some routes. We are investigating that --

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

7 MR. MOCK: -- particularly some of those longer
8 ones. But, once again, in the part of the world that
9 we live in, signal -- any type of signal in some
10 areas is almost non-existent.

11 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

14 Did Dr. Hill get back on?

15 SECRETARY KEY: No.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

17 SUPT. SNOW: I'd like to say one thing. Part of
18 -- in that response to our petition -- and there's
19 been a lot of talk for years now about "well, we need
20 to get this" -- and this comes from Sparkman
21 supporters, "We need to get the Sparkman kids back on
22 our campus." Okay. There's reasons they have chosen
23 to come to the Harmony Grove campus. Arkansas is
24 about school choice and I don't think our -- I don't
25 think our school board would vote -- you heard from a

1 parent who said she did not want her child going
2 there; she chose to bring them to Harmony Grove. So
3 I personally would not be a part of forcing people to
4 go to another campus.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any other questions for
6 the district?

7 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'm sorry; yes.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, go ahead.

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: How are you doing on finding
10 teachers? Are you seeing --

11 SUPT. SNOW: It's difficult.

12 MS. McFETRIDGE: -- the teacher shortage?

13 SUPT. SNOW: It's difficult.

14 MS. McFETRIDGE: How many licensed -- are all of
15 your teachers licensed teachers --

16 MR. MOCK: You know, I have everyone --

17 MS. McFETRIDGE: -- in Harmony Grove?

18 MR. MOCK: -- at the high school side is either
19 an MAT, APPLE. We've pursued several of the other
20 routes, even PPTL; I've had some of those. But right
21 now I have -- I do not have an English teacher
22 secondary, and will not have one. I just pretty much
23 just hung that up. Everyone in the South Central
24 Service Co-op is missing a secondary English teacher
25 right now.

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

2 MR. MOCK: And there aren't any -- there's not
3 any applicants or anything like that. I've already
4 had to make some considerations of how to adjust to
5 that on campus.

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: But you're making those
7 adjustments?

8 MR. MOCK: I'll have to make those adjustments
9 -- yes, ma'am -- because that just doesn't exist.

10 SUPT. SNOW: And I'm still trying to find an
11 elementary teacher at Sparkman. I am doing that.

12 I made a comment that I want to clarify, just a
13 minute ago --

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

15 SUPT. SNOW: -- when I said I wouldn't be part
16 of forcing people to go to a campus. I'm talking
17 about people that are already going to Harmony Grove;
18 I'm not going to force them to go back to a campus
19 that they chose to leave. Okay.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Sutton?

21 MR. SUTTON: Can I have one more question?

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

23 MR. SUTTON: And I'm not even sure this makes
24 any sense, but it does to me.

25 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

1 MR. SUTTON: If there was a -- if Sparkman
2 requested to de-annex --

3 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

4 MR. SUTTON: -- would you oppose it?

5 SUPT. SNOW: Well, and I've told Department
6 people from two years ago, tell the superintendent to
7 contact me and we would have to have meetings between
8 the board or both boards --

9 MR. SUTTON: Sure.

10 SUPT. SNOW: -- and so-on. And that's going to
11 be a lot more complicated than people think it would
12 be. We -- the finances have been intertwined for
13 over -- for 20 years. You don't just separate that
14 like that. Okay. And like I said, I haven't --
15 nobody has contacted me, okay, about that -- and I
16 will talk to them. Okay. But I don't see it
17 happening. I don't see a superintendent saying,
18 "Yeah, I'm going to take in 97 kids and keep the
19 campus open." Okay. That's the thing, keeping the
20 campus open. All superintendents will take the kids,
21 until they reach to a certain cap, and that happened
22 this year. Okay.

23 MR. SUTTON: Right. I fully understand that.
24 Right. And I think that's something that the
25 Sparkman people need to understand as well. You

1 know, I don't think it's going to be an easy sell,
2 you know, if you, you know, woke up tomorrow morning
3 and said, "Okay, here's the direction we're going to
4 go; let's break away and let's talk to so-and-so."
5 Keeping a campus with your numbers I think is going
6 to be really, really tough --

7 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir.

8 MR. SUTTON: -- unless they're just -- the
9 campus or the district that is willing to take you is
10 just busting at the seams with needing space.

11 SUPT. SNOW: In the response to the petition
12 they talk about Cossatot River and the isolated
13 school of Umpire. After they brought that out at a
14 school board meeting I contacted that superintendent,
15 and he is attempting to keep it open. Okay. And --
16 but the fact of the matter is -- this is the way he
17 left it, he said, "I've got people school-choicing
18 from that campus to Dierks." Okay.

19 MR. SUTTON: Oh, really?

20 SUPT. SNOW: He said, "If that continues, I'm
21 going to have to do something."

22 MR. SUTTON: Right.

23 SUPT. SNOW: So rural schools in districts,
24 that's what they're facing now.

25 MR. SUTTON: Yeah, I fully understand that.

1 MR. MOCK: Mr. Sutton, I might add, we had a
2 legislator speak up here a while ago, and I
3 understand where he's coming from. I don't have a
4 problem with them doing anything that they're wanting
5 to do. My question is -- this is the same
6 legislature that's currently telling our teachers
7 that they're not going to give them a pay raise, and
8 they've made comments in public about superintendents
9 not following the funding matrix. The schools are
10 limited based upon the funding that the State gives
11 us through the funding matrix. The FTE tells us how
12 many teachers we're supposed to have per grade. When
13 you're in a building that's got less than 100
14 students in it, and you've got 13 certified teachers
15 in it, I guarantee you you're not meeting the funding
16 matrix.

17 SUPT. SNOW: 13 staff.

18 MR. MOCK: Or 13 staff. You're not meeting it;
19 you're going above and beyond that. So, you know,
20 I'm all about the legislature saying what they might
21 want to do, but I do know what they're saying right
22 now.

23 SUPT. SNOW: And part of the discussion on
24 teacher pay raises, we met with the State Department
25 a couple of weeks ago and one of the things they said

1 was "you need to be careful about your fulltime --
2 FTEs, full-time employees." Part of the problem we
3 have getting classified employees is we're not paying
4 enough. Okay. But I can't -- it's hard to raise
5 salaries.

6 MR. SUTTON: I know.

7 SUPT. SNOW: And teachers' salaries, once it's
8 on the pay scale, it's forever. Okay. Our match to
9 insurance for teachers and employees, it's doubling
10 this year. Okay. There's a lot of expenses coming
11 down the pike, and I've been saying this for several
12 years now. It's not anything I have -- it's not like
13 it's a secret.

14 MR. SUTTON: Right. Well, you mentioned the age
15 of some of your buildings on your campus are 50- to
16 70-years old?

17 SUPT. SNOW: The main part of our campus is. We
18 have an arena with, what, four classrooms?

19 MR. MOCK: We have six. Six.

20 SUPT. SNOW: Six classrooms. But all the other
21 classrooms, the entire elementary school and almost
22 all of the high school are 50 and 70 years old.

23 MR. SUTTON: Have you thought about building new
24 facilities?

25 SUPT. SNOW: That would be great. Okay?

1 MR. SUTTON: I know. I know.
2 SUPT. SNOW: That would be great. It's very
3 hard to maintain old buildings.
4 MR. SUTTON: Yes, I know it.
5 SUPT. SNOW: It's just as expensive -- it's just
6 as --
7 MR. SUTTON: Have you --
8 SUPT. SNOW: -- expensive to do that.
9 MR. SUTTON: Oh, I know.
10 SUPT. SNOW: And the State doesn't want to give
11 us money to -- they don't want to give us money to
12 rehab --
13 MR. SUTTON: Right.
14 SUPT. SNOW: -- because they're building so many
15 new --
16 MR. SUTTON: Right.
17 SUPT. SNOW: -- schools in other parts of the
18 state.
19 MR. SUTTON: Right. When was the last time you
20 passed a millage?
21 SUPT. SNOW: I wasn't there.
22 MR. MOCK: That was the millage that was passed
23 just before they built the arena with the six
24 classrooms in it that -- if you heard the comment
25 about the millage rate being as high as what it is.

1 But when you go and look, our assessed value is
2 fairly low.

3 MR. SUTTON: That's why your millage has to be
4 --

5 MR. MOCK: That's right. The millage has to be
6 as high as --

7 MR. SUTTON: Right.

8 MR. MOCK: -- what it is.

9 MR. SUTTON: Right.

10 MR. MOCK: But I would seriously doubt that
11 another millage would pass for that, as high as it is
12 right now, just given -- you've got the community
13 right out here and they're the ones that would go and
14 vote on it. It would be tough. But, yes, the
15 buildings are an issue and they're an issue across --
16 you could ask that question of anyone in south
17 Arkansas just about, the condition and age of
18 buildings. But we're still going to have to have
19 school 20 and 30 years from now. And there's -- they
20 look great up in northwest Arkansas.

21 MR. SUTTON: Oh, I know. I know. And, of
22 course, you know, it's easy to say, but if you were
23 -- if you had the money to build a totally new
24 campus, the thing to do would be to build it between
25 Harmony Grove --

1 MR. MOCK: Yes, sir.

2 MR. SUTTON: -- and Sparkman.

3 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, sir. That would be the thing
4 to do. It would be great if we had the money to do
5 that. Okay. I'm getting towards the end of my
6 career; I don't think I'll ever see that. Okay.

7 MR. SUTTON: Okay.

8 SUPT. SNOW: Mr. Mock might, but, you know --

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dr. Moore, you had some
10 questions?

11 DR. MOORE: Yes, I do. I want to go back to
12 this. Does your district have an Act 1240 Digital
13 Learning waiver?

14 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am, we do.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay. How many students are --

16 MR. MOCK: When I asked for that, I asked for
17 25.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay.

19 MR. MOCK: And I had very -- I went ahead and
20 asked for that last year and got that, because I
21 didn't know the route that we were going to go. I
22 had just a few students in it. So I have 25 seats
23 open and most of those seats right now are being
24 chosen by students that have indicated that's the
25 route they wanted to go from Sparkman.

1 DR. MOORE: What program do you use for that?

2 MR. MOCK: We're going to use Virtual Arkansas,
3 because that's what we've been using. We will still
4 have a facilitator on the Sparkman campus that can
5 facilitate for them for any lockdown browser issues
6 that they might have.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay.

8 MR. MOCK: The way I wrote that for the waiver
9 is that that facilitator would also be in contact to
10 that individual at home and make sure that those
11 students were on track to stay within that. But
12 within that waiver I believe I included an exception
13 about maintaining a grade, that if they can't
14 maintain a passing grade that they would come back to
15 face-to-face at some point.

16 SUPT. SNOW: And that's -- we did that back
17 during the pandemic because of all the issues that we
18 were having.

19 DR. MOORE: Certainly --

20 SUPT. SNOW: Some students just thought it was a
21 holiday.

22 DR. MOORE: Well, and you'd alluded to the
23 difficulties with virtual learning. But I also
24 believe and research shows it does work for some
25 kids.

1 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

2 DR. MOORE: And we want that to be a strong
3 option for something --

4 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

5 MR. MOCK: And I will say this, Dr. Moore, I
6 wrote that waiver for Harmony Grove High School,
7 because that was in my purview. I didn't write it
8 for the district. So that waiver is within Harmony
9 Grove High School, is the way it was approved, I
10 believe.

11 SUPT. SNOW: But it applies to the district.

12 DR. MOORE: So if the Sparkman campus were to
13 close, would those students have the option --

14 MR. MOCK: They would have the option at that
15 time.

16 DR. MOORE: -- to do digital learning?

17 MR. MOCK: Yes.

18 DR. MOORE: Would they have to do that from home
19 or --

20 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am. They would --

21 DR. MOORE: -- is there a spot on location to do
22 that?

23 MR. MOCK: They can come onsite to see -- for
24 the facilitator or anything extra. They could
25 actually come to my site if they needed more -- I

1 believe I wrote in that plan having access to some
2 teachers to provide some tutoring and things like
3 that. But that would have to be at the Harmony Grove
4 campus.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay. I --

6 MR. MOCK: Those things I think I could work out
7 if it was a needed situation.

8 DR. MOORE: Yeah. I struggle with what -- our
9 state of virtual learning right now, to be honest.

10 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

11 DR. MOORE: And I want students to have strong
12 virtual learning options, and I know to do that you
13 have to have that district support.

14 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

15 DR. MOORE: At the same time, I want every
16 student to have access to in-person --

17 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

18 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

19 DR. MOORE: -- teaching. And it is our
20 responsibility that every student has 32 credits -- I
21 mean there's access to 32 credits. And I firmly
22 believe there should be in-person credits --

23 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

24 DR. MOORE: -- for those options. And so as we
25 look at this, I know we all know in this room it's

1 just so hard because we --

2 MR. MOCK: May I -- may I add to this? Because
3 there's been questions asked. I'm not going to
4 address whether or not I have a student that arrives
5 on my campus at the high school actually being
6 learning-behind. But, traditionally, when I receive
7 a 9th through 12th grade student on the Harmony Grove
8 campus they are behind on credits. And the reason
9 why they're behind on credits is because of the
10 shortfall within virtual learning -- because if they
11 fail a class, then they end up behind the credit.
12 So, in other words, I may not receive a 9th grader
13 coming into 10th grade with five-and-a-half credits;
14 they may only have four. So we're already behind the
15 eight-ball as far as trying to catch-up on credits as
16 we move forward.

17 DR. MOORE: Because they were doing virtual
18 learning --

19 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am. And we have to address
20 it, and we do address it and we're fairly successful
21 getting them caught-up and moving them on.

22 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: One question on virtual
24 learning. If this were to be voted and then you had
25 a student that wanted to continue doing virtual --

1 and you had even mentioned it a while ago -- in rural
2 Arkansas, there is not always cell service or
3 internet access in different places. Would it be
4 possible if a student did not have internet access at
5 home or even a remote possibility --

6 MR. MOCK: Yes, ma'am.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- could they come on the
8 Sparkman campus to access their virtual learning?

9 MR. MOCK: There is a possibility for that. I
10 haven't directly addressed that planning-wise with
11 the building principal there, but I think there's a
12 possibility there. Like I said, there is still a
13 facilitator on campus that that would be part of his
14 job to do that. We do have access still, once again,
15 through some of the hotspots. But I'll mention this
16 again, we're in that part of Arkansas --

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It doesn't always work.

18 MR. MOCK: -- where a cell signal is -- and
19 that's -- and that was -- when we discussed this and
20 students expressed interest in it -- even if they do
21 it on my campus, I have to emphasize the fact that
22 you have to have connectivity to make this work, that
23 the virtual learning does not work without
24 connectivity. And that means if you don't have a
25 cell signal that's not really a viable option in the

1 long-run.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So you're saying you would not
3 provide that --

4 MR. MOCK: No.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- option then?

6 MR. MOCK: No. I'm saying they can come on
7 campus. What I'm saying is that if I was a parent
8 considering that with my student, and I don't have
9 connectivity at my household, I would be setting
10 myself up for a lot of difficulty as far as
11 monitoring the virtual learning at home when you
12 don't have connectivity. To me --

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: But --

14 MR. MOCK: -- it just wouldn't be a viable
15 option.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: But --

17 MR. MOCK: But they can come to campus to see
18 that facilitator. Yes, ma'am.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: But you understand what I'm
20 saying -- in rural Arkansas, not everyone has
21 connectivity.

22 MR. MOCK: That's right.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And so by not allowing them to
24 come to campus, then they would not have that option,
25 I guess is what I'm trying to say.

1 MR. MOCK: As far as I'm concerned, they can
2 come to the campus. But now there's not a -- to see
3 that facilitator and do that work, I think that's the
4 way we had planned that. That's the way that we had
5 done that on our campus, that if they chose the
6 virtual option they can come in for assistance but it
7 wouldn't be a classroom environment for that. That's
8 what they have in place right now, is when they're
9 coming in and sitting in a lab all day.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I understand that.

11 MR. MOCK: Yeah, I would just --

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: But I just -- I'm just
13 concerned about, you know, there are a lot of parents
14 here that are saying, you know, "we want to stay in
15 the community." And if they did not have
16 connectivity, then --

17 MR. MOCK: It is an issue.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- then that's going to be an
19 issue, if you're not going to allow them to be on
20 campus.

21 MR. MOCK: I mean, but -- well, professionally,
22 I wouldn't advise a parent to choose --

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

24 MR. MOCK: -- the connectivity option if they
25 didn't have it. And I'd be well within my bounds to

1 say that's probably not a good idea educationally for
2 your child, is to choose a virtual option when you
3 can't connect to the internet. They can come to
4 Harmony Grove and sit in a lab, in a sense, if they
5 wanted to. I have a virtual lab there. I don't have
6 anybody there all day. Our kids take those classes
7 randomly through the day. But as I said, the
8 facilitator option is there to provide some
9 assistance for those students, if they choose that
10 option.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do you have a -- I know during
12 the pandemic a lot of schools provided areas of their
13 campus that had WiFi, you know, if anyone in the
14 community wanted to use it. Do you have something
15 like that at Sparkman?

16 MR. MOCK: I believe we still have that at
17 Sparkman, don't we?

18 SUPT. SNOW: I think so.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You do have that at Sparkman?

20 MR. MOCK: If not, we can turn it back on.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Are there
22 any other questions for the district?

23 And Dr. Hill is -- I don't think he's back on
24 yet.

25 Okay. Let's move on to questions maybe for the

1 Sparkman area. Ms. McFetridge, do you have questions
2 right now?

3 MS. McFETRIDGE: No.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dr. Moore?

5 DR. MOORE: Yes. If possible, yes.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

7 DR. MOORE: I would like to hear if y'all have
8 anymore information about the Act 662 and
9 conversations that y'all's group has had with other
10 surrounding districts, and anymore, you know,
11 information about the history of the past
12 consolidation of the district in Sparkman.

13 MR. ASKEW: I'll speak to what I know or
14 understand about the history of the consolidation.
15 And I will ask Brady Harmon to come up and speak
16 about the conversations.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay.

18 MR. ASKEW: The consolidation was a voluntary
19 annexation that was actually done in 2005.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay.

21 MR. ASKEW: And as I understand it, the
22 proposition to the Sparkman community was "here's
23 Harmony Grove; you need to join Harmony Grove." And
24 Harmony Grove said, "You're going to need to raise
25 your millage rate," and Sparkman did. Sparkman, you

1 know, tried to be a good new part of Harmony Grove
2 and I think it worked for awhile. I think I heard
3 that, in 2014, there were 165 students and 28
4 teachers at Sparkman, and then we heard in 2017
5 things changed in the high school. And we know that
6 there are 55 kids who have transferred completely
7 from Harmony Grove to Sparkman. So it does -- it's
8 not that big a stretch to build this back. And our
9 footnote seven in the opposition speaks to the ADM,
10 the actual third quarter ADM, which is what the
11 funding is, and that shows a much higher number than
12 the 97 that you keep hearing from Harmony Grove.
13 Footnote seven, straight from the ADM, the citation
14 is there. So that's that point.

15 Do you want to speak to this?

16 MS. HARMON: I might. Can you repeat the
17 question?

18 MR. ASKEW: This is conversations with people
19 about possible annexation.

20 MS. HARMON: Okay. Yeah. Previous to Act 66 --
21 or Act 662 we had some conversations with Gurdon
22 School District and we actually met with their board.
23 And I know that they had reached out to Secretary Key
24 a couple of times about possibilities. I know that
25 he had -- the then-superintendent had a conversation

1 with Dr. Snow and then the conversation kind of
2 stopped; so we're not sure exactly what happened with
3 that. But we have had conversations also with --
4 also, there wasn't a legal pathway either. And I
5 know last year when we fought for this, you know, it
6 was compared to an ugly divorce. Nobody -- nobody
7 wants to have to go through an ugly divorce, but,
8 unfortunately, sometimes it's necessary for the
9 benefit of kids, an ugly divorce. And so that's kind
10 of where we're at now.

11 And, you know, we did have conversations with
12 Bearden and they told us the exact same thing. You
13 know, they're really small as well and they expressed
14 concerns about possibly having to consolidate with
15 another district in the future themselves; so of
16 course they didn't want to take us on.

17 And then, recently we were sought out by someone
18 -- and I don't know how --

19 MR. ASKEW: I don't know what your -- what your
20 agreement is with that district.

21 MS. HARMON: Okay. Just to -- you know, and
22 it's still in the works right now, and, you know, we
23 just had an initial conversation yesterday morning.
24 And I will say, you know, once again that it felt
25 good to hear an administrator say, "Hey, you can do

1 this, and you could do this, and let me help you do
2 this." And it was like, wow, there's some support
3 and -- I'm sorry.

4 You know, you spoke about how the kids that are
5 going to Harmony Grove are lacking and they have a
6 gap, and I -- that hurts me. You know, those are my
7 kids and I work hard to try to make sure that
8 happens, and sometimes it just -- it just happens.
9 You know, I'm extremely hurt by the comment "they
10 just don't teach." And I'll say this, I told you
11 guys that I -- last year I taught 4th grade, just 4th
12 grade; the year before that it was 3rd and 4th grade
13 combined. And we do have several combined classes.
14 I taught 4th grade and I was the English Language
15 Arts -- I'm the English Language Arts 4th grade
16 teacher and I was the K-12 librarian. And this falls
17 on administration, and I hate to say this, but my
18 administrator did not come and observe me one time
19 last year. I could've been teaching those kids how
20 to crochet every day and he would not have known.
21 And I think that goes with every -- you know, every
22 class, and that's sad. And I will say that Mr. Mock
23 did come down a couple of times and he did -- and
24 he's not my administrator, but he did, you know, make
25 an effort to come into my classroom two or three

1 times last year, and I appreciate that. Dr. Snow has
2 never been in my classroom, and I've been here since
3 he's been here. And my administrator, you know,
4 didn't hold me accountable, or anyone else. And, you
5 know, without accountability, you know, what are we?
6 There's got to be accountability, you know. And if
7 we're honest, a teacher craves accountability, and
8 that's lacking. So to hear this specific district
9 superintendent, yesterday morning, say, you know, "We
10 can offer that for you and we can help you with that"
11 and they thought outside the box -- they actually
12 said they were going to throw away the box and look
13 at different ways to help our students and meet them
14 where they are, which is Sparkman.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

16 DR. MOORE: Thank you. Thank you for your work
17 and for --

18 MS. HARMON: Thank you.

19 DR. MOORE: -- sharing all of that. I
20 appreciate it.

21 MS. HARMON: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Sutton, questions?

23 MR. SUTTON: Yes, I did have a question or two.

24 Did you ever find an answer to the population
25 ADM going back four or five years? I'm trying to get

1 --

2 DR. MOORE: I pulled that up, I think. So, in
3 2004 and 2005, Sparkman High School had 106 students,
4 and K-6 had 134. So that was 2004-2005.

5 MR. SUTTON: It just -- okay. So it's 240; is
6 that what you're saying?

7 DR. MOORE: Yes. And then 2011 and '12, in
8 Sparkman K-6 I had 103 and Sparkman 7-12 had 101.
9 And that was for 2011 and '12, so that was 10 years
10 ago.

11 MR. SUTTON: Okay. Is it -- is it losing 20% a
12 year? Is that a fair statement?

13 DR. MOORE: I didn't pull up all the years; I
14 just pulled up those benchmark years.

15 MR. SUTTON: Oh.

16 DR. MOORE: So, sorry. I don't have that.

17 MR. SUTTON: Can anybody give me some --

18 MR. ASKEW: I tried to find data and I couldn't
19 find anything earlier than 2019. You all have better
20 access to data than I do as a member of the public, I
21 think. And what I saw is the third quarter ADM that
22 I reported in that footnote.

23 MR. SUTTON: Yeah. You know --

24 MR. HARMON: Are you asking if there's been a
25 steady decline over all of these years?

1 MR. SUTTON: Yes, sir.

2 MR. HARMON: There have been years where I --

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You'll -- excuse me; you'll
4 have to come to the microphone because we are live-
5 streaming and --

6 MR. ASKEW: And I'm sorry -- you know, one of
7 the problems this school has is the administrator is
8 over here, and we don't even have a building
9 administrator here employed by Harmony Grove to speak
10 for Sparkman.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Come up to the microphone
12 please.

13 MS. HARMON: I don't know specific numbers, but
14 I can say that after our meeting in 2020 we did
15 increase in enrollment by 20 -- by 13%. Now,
16 obviously, we have dropped back down due to these
17 closures. And we know by looking at our eSchool that
18 a lot of students have already been rolled over, and
19 so that's where we get the less than 100 students, I
20 believe. So -- and some of these are parents who
21 have went ahead and filled out school choice, not
22 knowing that they had a choice, but that you guys
23 were going to give them a choice. So, but in 2020,
24 March -- after March 13th, after your vote, our
25 increase -- our -- that next school year, even during

1 the pandemic we increased by 13%. But it is down
2 right now.

3 MR. SUTTON: Right. I just want to comment on
4 -- I'm all for small districts. If any of you read
5 my bio on my -- on the website, I mean, that's -- I
6 came from a small district, we've had to take over
7 some districts -- from the district that I served on
8 the board for 29 years. I fully, absolutely support
9 small districts in Arkansas. Now having said that --
10 and we don't like to mix dollars and students and et
11 cetera. You know, running schools is expensive --

12 MS. HARMON: Right.

13 MR. SUTTON: -- and it's difficult. And so what
14 is the number? I mean if your numbers today are 100,
15 let's say, and the numbers next year are 80, what's
16 the number? I mean, if there's 14 students left --

17 MS. HARMON: I know.

18 MR. SUTTON: -- those 14 parents fill up every
19 one of these seats and we'll hear the same story.

20 MS. HARMON: I would still be standing here
21 fighting for these students.

22 MR. SUTTON: You sure would. But that wouldn't
23 work.

24 MS. HARMON: Right, I understand.

25 MR. SUTTON: So I'm not trying to show my hand,

1 which way, you know, I'm personally thinking. But
2 the reality of it is at some point it isn't going to
3 work. And if you're -- I don't know if you're there
4 now or not.

5 I will say this, you know, I came from a
6 district -- we took over two districts because of
7 numbers. My district was about 3,000 students and we
8 took over two districts in northeast Arkansas. Both
9 had fell below the 350. I want to tell you a little
10 story about that too. I mean, my district was about
11 75% Caucasian, and the two districts we took over
12 were 100% black, and we made that work -- and it
13 works really, really well. Now we had to close the
14 -- we had to close -- we did leave them open for a
15 year, but we ultimately closed the campuses on those
16 other two districts. But we're still -- but we're
17 running buses and we're picking them up, of course.
18 But the campuses in those two districts, you know,
19 were not comparable to the facilities that we had at
20 the main school there in -- where I'm trying to not
21 say where it is.

22 So all of that is to say that, you know, it
23 doesn't fall on a deaf ear to me to hear about the
24 change, how it affects the community. I've seen it.
25 I had friends that were in those other communities.

1 It did improve, in some cases. Once the town found
2 out that they were in this other district, new houses
3 went up. Their population actually went up because
4 they were in this -- you know, this better school
5 district, because these two districts that we took
6 over had failing grades or poor school grades.

7 I feel the pain. I really do. And, you know,
8 hindsight is 20/20. If I were here 20 years ago and
9 the question came up about an annexation or
10 consolidation between Harmony Grove and Sparkman, I
11 would have said, "Yeah, if it works." But they don't
12 need to be called Harmony Grove and Sparkman; they
13 need to be called NuCo -- NuCo, so that there aren't
14 -- there is no them and us. And -- but that wasn't
15 done, and so we can't un-do that. But I think that's
16 been a big problem, it sounds like to me. But what
17 I'm telling you, if I were in your shoes, regardless
18 of which way it goes, you've got to get your
19 community -- I don't mean Mr. and Mrs. Doe that's
20 sitting out here; I'm talking about businesses,
21 commerce, industry. If we decide that it can
22 continue for a period of time, if that's what is
23 decided -- I don't know if it makes any sense just
24 right this second -- and if you guys don't get your
25 industry and commerce and businesses behind you and

1 start lifting things up so your population grows, it
2 isn't going to work. It won't work.

3 MS. HARMON: I agree with that.

4 MR. SUTTON: Anyway, that's my comment.

5 MR. ASKEW: Thank you, Mr. Sutton. And to your
6 point, last time we were here there were 108 students
7 at Sparkman, according to the ADM. And I told you
8 that the report from the State was that Sparkman
9 costs \$138 per student more in the high school to
10 educate, and that's offset by the \$487 per student in
11 isolated school funding that the Sparkman children
12 have. Those were the numbers then. This year, the
13 ADM is \$109. You haven't heard anything from Harmony
14 Grove about the cost of educating children in the
15 high school, not a word. And so you don't have a
16 basis, in my view, to make a decision to close 7th
17 through 12th grades at Harmony Grove -- I mean at
18 Sparkman on the basis of finances. The only evidence
19 before you is to the contrary; there's more than
20 enough isolated school funding, which is what this is
21 for, to offset the \$138 difference in cost. And
22 that's the number.

23 MR. SUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

24 MR. ASKEW: Thank you. And, look, you asked
25 about business. This is one of the mill owners from

1 Sparkman. And I will have -- I would like you to
2 know that the business community is consolidated and
3 coalesced and working real hard to try to make this
4 happen. And Act 662 provides for that path to let
5 this happen, which, you know, Harmony Grove is trying
6 to short-circuit.

7 MR. SUTTON: Yeah. Well, I didn't mean to imply
8 that it's -- nothing is going on. But I can tell you
9 it's coming -- it's coming --

10 MR. WHITE: Can I speak to you one time?

11 MR. SUTTON: Yeah.

12 MR. WHITE: One thing, sir?

13 MR. SUTTON: Sure.

14 MR. ASKEW: Tell us your name and who you are.

15 MR. WHITE: I'm Donnie White from Sparkman,
16 Arkansas. And we need another year. We've got -- we
17 really need y'all to help us for one more year.
18 Well, they've got a letter out and we have got an
19 unbelievable bulldog that's willing to take us and
20 help us solve a lot of these problems, I'm convinced
21 a hundred-percent. Just like when you hire a winning
22 basketball coach, your basketball coach -- your
23 basketball team is going to win. If y'all could give
24 us a year, we can get hooked up with a lady that will
25 help us win and we will improve. We'll be over 100.

1 We're going -- if we get a chance to have our high
2 school this coming up year, we'll be well over 100.
3 And I understand 14 isn't doable, but over 100 is.
4 And we need another year to give us the opportunity
5 to hook up. That's all I've got to say. I'm sorry;
6 I don't mean to --

7 MR. SUTTON: Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You're fine. Thank you.

9 Mr. Henderson?

10 MR. HENDERSON: Yeah, Mr. Sutton brought up a
11 really good point. With contingency, with the
12 business owners and sawmills, I'd be curious to know
13 how many graduates, you know, stay there and go to
14 work at these businesses?

15 MS. HARMON: It's a very large percent.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You'll have to come to the
17 microphone. I'm sorry.

18 MS. HARMON: It is a very large percent. And
19 that's both a good and a bad, I suppose you could
20 say. But we want to work on different ways to create
21 classes in our school to prepare students to go to
22 those places and so they're immediately able to build
23 our workforce. But not just on the lower level; on
24 the higher level. Because if they know how to not
25 only run these machines in the sawmills but also

1 possibly help create them -- and that's what we're
2 looking for as things that we can do to help. We're
3 also, you know, close to lots of other industries who
4 we could partner with, who could write these classes
5 for our high school students to show them, you know,
6 "as soon as you get out of school we've got a job for
7 you that you're going to be" -- you know, my son just
8 graduated and he has opportunity to go through
9 welding school, and I think that helped him so much.
10 And the day after he graduated he had a job making 15
11 hours [sic] a day. And I'm very proud for my 18-year
12 old son to be able to do that. And we want to
13 continue to be able to provide our students with that
14 so that when they do graduate -- right now, a lot of
15 them are just going into the lower level, you know,
16 grunt work type stuff. But we want to be able to
17 provide these businesses with something more valuable
18 and I feel like, you know, given the chance, we can
19 do that.

20 MR. ASKEW: And the district that they're
21 talking to has an incredibly high focus on career
22 technical training and education. That's a real
23 focus of what they're doing.

24 MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Ms. Saum, do you have

1 questions?

2 MS. SAUM: I do not have any additional
3 questions at this time.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Dr. Moore?

5 DR. MOORE: Not for them. I would like to ask
6 questions of the Department, if possible.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. McFetridge, did you
8 have any questions?

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: No additional. Nothing.

10 MR. ASKEW: Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

12 All right. We have some questions from -- for
13 the Department.

14 DR. MOORE: For Legal or whomever.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: For Ms. Freno.

16 MS. FRENO: Yes.

17 DR. MOORE: Thank you, Ms. Freno. Thank you for
18 sending us all the information we needed prior to
19 this.

20 I wanted to go -- I wanted to go a little bit
21 further into getting some more background information
22 about Act 662 and the process for a -- if a school
23 were to leave a district. If -- so, first, 662. So
24 they were required to notify surrounding districts
25 that they're closing this school. Correct?

1 MS. FRENO: That is correct. If it is a closure
2 of a total campus.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay.

4 MS. FRENO: Whereas, with -- just the difference
5 between isolated -- what you're seeing today in the
6 petition is even if they're closing a part thereof,
7 of a school --

8 DR. MOORE: Yes.

9 MS. FRENO: -- which is considered the 7 through
10 12, they have to bring that before you. But with Act
11 662 it has to be the entire campus that's closing
12 before notice has to be given, one year notice.

13 DR. MOORE: Oh, okay. So because it's not the
14 K-12 that's why that year is not in place; this is
15 just the 7-12 part of the school?

16 MS. FRENO: That is correct.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay.

18 MR. ASKEW: But the notice has gone out.

19 DR. MOORE: Okay.

20 MR. ASKEW: And it's in your package.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. So what is the process if a
22 school -- and I know this happened with Jacksonville;
23 so when Jacksonville split off, obviously they made
24 their own district. But have we had other instances
25 where a school has split off from a district to join

1 another district?

2 MS. FRENO: No. Jacksonville was the first.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. And that was different --

4 MS. FRENO: And that was --

5 DR. MOORE: -- because they created their own?

6 MS. FRENO: Yes, and that was under a
7 detachment, the detachment statutes. A detachment
8 statute is not available here because there has to be
9 a certain number of students --

10 DR. MOORE: Okay.

11 MS. FRENO: -- in the district. Yeah, and this
12 has never -- it's never been tested. I mean, it's
13 unsure exactly how this -- it was effective -- the
14 annexation was effective in 2004, so this has been
15 one school district since 2004, and it would be -- I
16 mean, we don't know how exactly it would play out as
17 far as separating out.

18 DR. MOORE: Right. So if the school were to
19 separate out into another district, would that
20 require approval by their local board to leave or
21 could --

22 MS. FRENO: If they were going to separate --
23 let's see --

24 DR. MOORE: I guess I'm getting to is it a
25 viable option to detach and join another district,

1 like they're talking about?

2 MS. FREN0: I don't -- the Secretary may --

3 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

4 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Moore, I think that's a
5 conclusion that the Department could not --

6 MS. FREN0: No.

7 SECRETARY KEY: -- we would not be able to --

8 DR. MOORE: Because legally it's never been
9 done?

10 SECRETARY KEY: Exactly.

11 DR. MOORE: Is there -- but there is some sort
12 of process involved that --

13 SECRETARY KEY: Well, part of the process also
14 is that this type of decision would not -- there has
15 to be an assertion or verification that such a move
16 would not create fiscal integrity issues for the
17 receiving district.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay.

19 SECRETARY KEY: Really, for both districts, I
20 believe, is how it's worded. But there's a lot that
21 would have to be done before this type of decision
22 could even be considered as --

23 DR. MOORE: Okay.

24 SECRETARY KEY: -- with the question you're
25 asking and the details.

1 DR. MOORE: So it would be not necessarily a
2 viable option in the next year -- I mean it would be
3 a very difficult legal process?

4 SECRETARY KEY: I would say within a year would
5 be very difficult.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. When we look at school size,
7 I know obviously the 350 was put into place almost
8 two decades ago. Is there any laws around school
9 size in how small a school can be in law?

10 MS. FREN0: I do not know of a law that requires
11 a certain size for a school.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay.

13 MS. FREN0: It would just -- it would be a
14 practical matter, I believe.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay. Right. I was looking and it
16 seems like if you just look at the high school it's
17 one of the smallest in the state and the others are
18 all with the Division of Youth Services or they have
19 unique circumstances.

20 MS. FREN0: Yes.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. That's helpful. I think
22 those are all the questions I have right now, but I
23 always have questions. Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions for the
25 Department?

1 Mr. Rogers, you thought you were going to get
2 away with this, didn't you? I have some questions on
3 isolated funding.

4 Could you speak a little bit about the isolated
5 funding that this district gets each year, how much
6 that is?

7 SECRETARY KEY: I don't know that he was sworn
8 in.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Oh.

10 SECRETARY KEY: Lori, do we need to swear Mr.
11 Rogers in?

12 MS. FRENO: Yes, I would swear Mr. Rogers in.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: He did that just for you,
14 didn't he?

15 MR. ROGERS: Yeah, he did.

16 SECRETARY KEY: We don't want to give Counsel
17 any reason to, you know, point fingers at or poke
18 holes in anything you say.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Rogers, do you
20 swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to
21 give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing
22 but the truth?

23 MR. ROGERS: Yes, ma'am.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

25 MR. ROGERS: Okay. So isolated funding --

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Uh-huh.

2 MR. ROGERS: What they actually receive, they
3 receive three different pots of isolated funding.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

5 MR. ROGERS: One is for transportation; one is
6 for mileage of the district, the density of the
7 district; and then another one is because it was --
8 they're on the list of isolated funding that goes
9 back to when -- in law there's just a list of school
10 districts that are listed as being considered
11 isolated funding and they receive them. So other
12 than that, of those three pots they get about
13 \$440,000 a year, and most -- the biggest part of it
14 being the part that is for transportation.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So, and does that
16 transportation pot have to be spent on
17 transportation?

18 MR. ROGERS: It can only be spent on
19 transportation. Yes, ma'am.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So how much is in the
21 other pots, I guess is what I'm asking then?

22 MR. ROGERS: I don't have that broken down.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

24 MR. ROGERS: Of the \$400,000 -- the \$440,000
25 they got, I'm going to say \$300,000 was the

1 transportation. So there would be another \$100,000
2 between the other two --

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

4 MR. ROGERS: -- that they can spend on whatever
5 the district needs it on.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So -- all
7 right. Okay. That takes care of my question. Thank
8 you.

9 All right. Any other questions for the
10 Department, district, or our Sparkman representatives
11 from anyone here or online?

12 Okay. So now, Board, this is your opportunity
13 to discuss kind of what you're thinking or motions or
14 what you would like to do at this point.

15 Mr. Henderson, Mr. Sutton, any thoughts you
16 would like to share? And I'm not making you; I'm
17 just asking. Okay.

18 MR. SUTTON: Well, yeah, I mean, I've got a
19 couple of comments.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

21 MR. SUTTON: It seems like to me that it -- I
22 don't have any facts on this, but it seems like to me
23 that there's been a perhaps lack of over-and-above
24 effort by Harmony Grove to pull and keep Sparkman up
25 with your standards. And that -- and, again, I mean

1 I'm in here three hours, so I don't like making that
2 judgment. But still, I mean even by your own
3 admission they're -- you know, they're behind. You
4 made the comment "they're not teaching." That's your
5 responsibility, I mean absolutely. You can't part-
6 and-parcel out your buildings or your schools; it's
7 all under one. I think if there's anything to be
8 learned here today is that, you know, hey, they are
9 you, you are they, and that's got to continue. I
10 mean if they decide to do what they're going to do
11 down the road, if they can -- but yesterday and today
12 they are your responsibility. And if it takes
13 sending 10 teachers from Harmony Grove to go down
14 there and get those kids up-to-speed or whatever they
15 need to do, that's what you've got to do.

16 Now, look, I know I'm not doing it. Okay. I'm
17 sitting up here and you're sitting out there. But
18 I'm just giving you the benefit of, you know, the
19 experience that I've got and what I'm hearing. And
20 I'm not -- I apologize, I'm not trying to preach to
21 you, but I'm just telling you what's coming to my
22 mind.

23 At the same time, Sparkman wants time. They had
24 time, you know, two years ago. I mean that's
25 obvious. What more -- what does another year do for

1 them? I just -- you know, I just don't know. I've
2 heard it said that de-annexing or seceding from the
3 current district has never been done before. Can it
4 be pulled off in a year? Who knows, I have no idea.
5 It sounds like it's a long-shot. Again, I feel for
6 the -- for your position. You should never, ever
7 have been -- you guys here and we're over here, it
8 should have never been that way.

9 I'm torn about what decision, you know, I need
10 to vote today, because I feel it on both sides. But
11 I just want to get those comments off my chest. I'm
12 done.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Comments or
14 questions over here -- or not questions, but
15 comments?

16 MS. MCFETRIDGE: I'm really torn as well. My
17 heart is really heavy right now for everyone in this
18 room, and I don't know how I'm going to vote yet
19 today. This is a very difficult decision.

20 The data is telling us that the enrollment is
21 declining. Our responsibility is to make sure that
22 we educate children adequately. Are we doing that?
23 I've not seen evidence at Sparkman, I'm not. There
24 could be a dozen different reasons why that's
25 happening. It's hard right now in this position to

1 see why that is. I know that our children will need
2 to be competing globally, more now than ever. I have
3 a sister that works virtually with her employees from
4 India. So we've got to be ready. We have to prepare
5 our children. That is what we're called and asked to
6 do. If I don't do my job, I'm failing you, I'm
7 failing both communities.

8 Like I said, my heart is very heavy right now.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dr. Moore, any comments?

11 DR. MOORE: I echo that, this being such a
12 difficult -- such a difficult situation. I pulled up
13 in front of me the constitution of our state that
14 says that we want to adopt all suitable means to
15 secure the people the advantages and opportunities of
16 education. And you can look at that both ways. You
17 know, part of me -- I mean, there's the part that we
18 have high expectations for our students and for our
19 schools and every student should have the ability to
20 have a teacher in front of them, getting those 35 and
21 beyond credits. But in today's constraints we don't
22 have that. And I think, you know, that they didn't
23 envision virtual education when they wrote the
24 constitution, and it has changed the land of our
25 state. But at the same time, I feel that we still

1 need to give students all opportunities in front of
2 us. And I know that's weighed heavy not just on us
3 today, but on other boards and the legislature over
4 the past 20 years here in our state and other states
5 as people have had to make difficult decisions about
6 school and what's best for schools. And,
7 unfortunately, sometimes when we're just -- we're
8 looking at schools that affects communities in
9 different ways. That's what I keep thinking through,
10 and want to hear more --

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

12 DR. MOORE: -- from other fellow board members.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: This is one of the -- I think
14 if we had to rank things that we had to do this would
15 be the most difficult day of any term that we've
16 served, deciding in a manner such as this.

17 And I want to go back to -- I think we three
18 were the ones that were here when this was before us
19 once before. And one of the things that we left you
20 with as a district, not a Harmony Grove and not a
21 Sparkman -- but one of the things that we left you
22 with as a district was to go back and think about
23 innovative ways to serve children and what could you
24 do to guarantee a good situation for students. And
25 then I realize that very day we were thrust into the

1 Covid pandemic but that can't be our excuse for not
2 doing what kids needs.

3 I've been a little bit disappointed this morning
4 when I heard some of the things that were said; you
5 know, it was "them" and "they" and "us" -- and, you
6 know, that can't be how a district is. It has to be
7 "we," it has to be "our kids," it has to be everyone.
8 No matter what campus the "they" are on, those kids
9 deserve a quality education and those teachers
10 deserve support. You know, one of the things you
11 said, "Well, if they had the opportunity to" -- us,
12 as administrators and people in charge, we have to
13 make sure that things are done that benefit every
14 child. And so, that was very concerning to me when I
15 heard that today. And so, you know, from this point
16 going forward, whether Sparkman is a K-12 or whether
17 Sparkman is a K-6, I hope -- and I think as a board
18 that we will be watching what happens closely from
19 here to make sure that it is not "them," that it is
20 "our kids." And they deserve the very best education
21 possible, the very best supervision possible, the
22 very best professional development; they deserve what
23 they need to educate those children. And so, I hope
24 that that will be done from this -- not hope, but I
25 -- let me change my words. I'm going to use some

1 teacher words now. I expect that that will be done
2 after this point, whether it's a K-6 or a K-12 -- and
3 I hope you understand how serious I am about that.
4 But we want what's best for these kids, all kids in
5 the district at this point and we do not take -- you
6 know, I come from a small district also, and we lived
7 through all of that. Mr. Sutton and I, we lived
8 through all of that and we realize how difficult it
9 is for the communities to go through something like
10 this; we realize that it's the heart and soul of a
11 community. But we also have to think about what is
12 best for kids and for all children.

13 You didn't read the whole thing, but if you
14 could pull that constitution up, it says we provide
15 all public school children with substantially equal
16 opportunity for an adequate education. And it says
17 substantially equal opportunity to achieve and
18 demonstrate academic readiness, individual academic
19 growth, and competencies through the application of
20 knowledge and skills in core subjects consistent with
21 state academic standards through student focused
22 learning systems. That's our responsibility as a
23 board and so that's where we are coming from this
24 morning, and it makes our decision very difficult.
25 And I'm not advocating for either one; that's for

1 this board as a group to decide. But that is our
2 responsibility as a board to make sure that that does
3 happen.

4 Any other comments, Mr. Henderson?

5 MR. HENDERSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. You
6 know, when I hear -- when I think about, you know,
7 the sawmills, the relationships that they have with
8 the district, you know, it's pretty mind-blowing to
9 me to not think about or realize the fact that
10 businesses and the district should have a sound
11 relationship. I think about the opportunities that,
12 you know, have been missed when I think about the
13 workforce shortage. Those are some things that is
14 necessary. The mayor spoke earlier, businesses and
15 districts should be in one accord. There's jobs that
16 we haven't even seen yet that's going to come into
17 Arkansas, and somewhere we've failed. So I just want
18 to make that comment.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

20 Ms. Saum, did you have any comments that you
21 would like to add?

22 MS. SAUM: I just wanted to echo what you and
23 others have said, that when we talk about the
24 students -- and you probably heard me say this a lot,
25 all means all. It doesn't mean all but these

1 students, all but this school, all but this class, or
2 all but the learners who are struggling; it means
3 all. And so, I agree, whatever the decision is today
4 I hope that mindset -- I expect that that mindset
5 shifts and that no child is forgotten, no child is
6 excluded, and that everyone -- every educator, every
7 family member, and every administrator in this room
8 and across the district -- commits to all students.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

10 Any other comments or questions?

11 Okay. We are ready at this point, I think, for
12 a motion.

13 DR. MOORE: I do actually have one more comment
14 --

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

16 DR. MOORE: -- just thinking through this. So
17 if -- no matter which way this vote goes today, this
18 -- Sparkman concerned citizens, or however you call
19 yourselves, can consider -- can continue to consider
20 a de-annexation or whatever that process may be?

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Ms. Freno, would the 7-12 --
22 not being a part at that particular site, would that
23 prevent them from being able to pursue that?

24 MS. FRENO: That is correct. The -- Sparkman
25 could still look into closing the entire campus, and

1 they've given notice already. But, you know, a
2 school district can then assume --

3 DR. MOORE: If they assumed it, they could then
4 pick up the K-12?

5 MS. FRENO: That's not really clear in the law
6 --

7 DR. MOORE: Right.

8 MS. FRENO: -- I mean, you know, whether they
9 pick up a territory, whether they pick up, you know,
10 an area, whether they pick -- you know, what they
11 pick up. But still, absolutely there is an
12 opportunity for another school district to assume the
13 Sparkman campus.

14 DR. MOORE: Right. We've also seen where
15 districts across -- where this has occurred in the
16 past and a local community started charter schools --

17 MS. FRENO: Uh-huh.

18 DR. MOORE: -- in that area. There's nothing
19 that prevents that from occurring, if --

20 MS. FRENO: No. I mean, it's -- they would have
21 to go through the charter process --

22 DR. MOORE: Right.

23 MS. FRENO: -- you know, certainly before the
24 Charter Authorizer. But, you know, there would be
25 nothing that would -- I mean, nothing that would

1 prevent that.

2 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. Thank you. I just
3 continue to think.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other comments or
5 questions?

6 I do have a question. I guess this would be for
7 the district maybe.

8 The May 1st deadline on school choice has ended,
9 so that would not be an option for parents that
10 didn't want to send their students to Harmony Grove.
11 Would you still be -- you'll have to come to the
12 microphone. Would you still -- I mean, you would
13 allow still at this point in the year a board-to-
14 board transfer if that was asked for?

15 SUPT. SNOW: All right. One of the reasons that
16 started this on April 26th was -- but, you know, I
17 realize it was a short amount of time. And the
18 problem with school choice is sometimes they'll cap
19 it, and Ouachita did. But, no, we -- yes, we will
20 entertain board-to-board transfers.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

22 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Thank you.

24 SUPT. SNOW: Yes, ma'am.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other comments?

1 You have a very difficult decision to make
2 today, and it's not easy.

3 And let me say this to the people in the room,
4 whether you're from Sparkman or Harmony Grove; it
5 doesn't matter. We have listened and we have heard
6 what you said. Okay? And we are trying to do our
7 very best to make a wise, thoughtful decision. No
8 matter which way it goes, we have heard you today.
9 Okay. And we are trying to do our very best to do
10 what's right for your kids.

11 MR. SUTTON: So are you ready for a motion?

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I'm ready for a motion, Mr.
13 Sutton. Are you going to make a motion today?

14 MR. SUTTON: I'm going to make a motion.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

16 MR. SUTTON: I make a motion that we postpone
17 the closing of any buildings, grades at Sparkman for
18 another two years, provided that -- I mean, there has
19 to be significant improvement when and if we --
20 that's the way we end up here, and when we look at it
21 two years from now we know the excuses that -- if the
22 numbers are not the numbers. But I feel like a lot
23 has been learned today; perhaps some things have been
24 said that maybe needed to be said. These two
25 districts, you know, need to, as you've said, get

1 along and act as one.

2 So that's my motion, a two-year extension on the
3 non-closure.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. Freno.

5 MS. FRENO: So just to be clear, that would be a
6 motion to deny Harmony Grove's petition --

7 MR. SUTTON: That's correct.

8 MS. FRENO: -- with those other criteria
9 attached?

10 MR. SUTTON: Yes.

11 MS. FRENO: Okay.

12 MR. SUTTON: That would --

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion to
14 deny the petition and to have the parameters of it
15 will be denied for two years.

16 Do we have a second?

17 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

18 MR. HENDERSON: I'll make a second.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a second from
20 Mr. Henderson.

21 So I think you probably need to do a roll-call.

22 SECRETARY KEY: All right. On the motion to
23 deny the petition, postpone closure of any grades at
24 Sparkman for two years --

25 Mr. Sutton.

1 MR. SUTTON: Yes.
2 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. McFetridge.
3 MS. McFETRIDGE: No.
4 I will ask if Dr. Hill has re-joined us?
5 (MOMENT OF SILENCE)
6 SECRETARY KEY: Okay, he has not.
7 Mr. Henderson.
8 MR. HENDERSON: Yes.
9 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Moore.
10 DR. MOORE: No.
11 SECRETARY KEY: The vote is two-to-two.
12 Ms. Newton.
13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Oh. You know what I pray for?
14 It would be a tie. Y'all don't know how hard this
15 is.
16 SECRETARY KEY: To clarify, Ms. Freno, board --
17 the board's policy allows the Chair to vote in case
18 of a tie, but it's not forcing her. Is that correct?
19 MS. FRENO: That is correct.
20 SECRETARY KEY: Thank you.
21 MS. FRENO: The Chair can vote to break a tie or
22 any time.
23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Can I ask for some discussion
24 right now? Would that work? Or do we have to do --
25 SECRETARY KEY: Well, I think if it stays as a

1 tie vote, then the motion dies.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Right.

3 SECRETARY KEY: You would then return to board
4 discussion.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Let's do that and I
6 want to have some discussion on the two years. How
7 about that? Would that work?

8 SECRETARY KEY: Yes. So --

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

10 SECRETARY KEY: So then it was a two-two and the
11 motion fails.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So let's -- can we have
13 some discussion on the two-year issue, and then we
14 come back and vote again? Would that work, Mr.
15 Sutton?

16 MR. SUTTON: Sure, we can do that.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So tell me some --

18 MR. SUTTON: Well, I understand. I know where
19 you're going with your question.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

21 MR. SUTTON: The reason I said two years is
22 because it sounds like -- I'm pulling off potential
23 seceding from the district couldn't be done in one
24 year.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Right.

1 MR. SUTTON: And so that's really my primary --

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure. Okay.

3 MR. SUTTON: Otherwise, the one year is a wasted
4 period of time probably.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah. Okay. All right.

6 Any other discussion?

7 DR. MOORE: I guess they're thinking about -- so
8 if there was not a time period, their local board
9 could vote annually whether or not to keep -- I mean,
10 any board can vote annually whether or not to keep a
11 school open. Correct?

12 SECRETARY KEY: Yes.

13 DR. MOORE: And that is always up to a school
14 purview. It only comes to us because this is an
15 isolated school that was previously annexed?

16 SECRETARY KEY: And was not a unanimous vote by
17 the local board.

18 DR. MOORE: Right. So had it been unanimous by
19 the local board to close, then we wouldn't be
20 involved?

21 SECRETARY KEY: That's correct.

22 DR. MOORE: If it was not -- if it failed at the
23 local board, then we would not see it either. This
24 is just because it was a majority vote at the local
25 board?

1 SECRETARY KEY: That's correct.

2 DR. MOORE: Okay. And so, if we did the two
3 years that local board couldn't vote for two more
4 years, either way? Or I guess they could, but we
5 wouldn't act on it. I don't know.

6 SECRETARY KEY: I don't know if that would
7 preclude the Board from --

8 DR. MOORE: Right.

9 SECRETARY KEY: -- voting on it again.

10 So, Lori, help us out.

11 But I think it kind of establishes what this
12 board expects to happen.

13 DR. MOORE: Right.

14 MS. FRENO: That -- exactly. The two years
15 would be what this board expects. But as the
16 composition of this board changes, the decision can
17 change as well. I mean, the Board's decision can
18 change, you know, in a couple of months. I mean,
19 there's -- but that -- what Mr. Sutton is pointing
20 out is what he is expecting. He has made a motion to
21 deny the petition and this is what he would expect is
22 that it stays open for two more years. But there is
23 no way to absolutely enforce that, if that's the
24 question.

25 DR. MOORE: Right. Okay.

1 MS. FRENO: Yes.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So the board -- their board
3 can vote to do K-12 or 7-12, and if it was unanimous
4 we would never even hear it?

5 MS. FRENO: That is correct. If their board
6 would have voted unanimously -- that's because it's
7 an isolated school and there has to be a unanimous
8 decision by the board to close a part of the school
9 or the whole school. It was a five-two vote; that's
10 why it came to the Board.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

12 MS. FRENO: This board.

13 MR. SUTTON: So what -- excuse me -- so if the
14 board elects -- if the local board, or the board,
15 elects to vote again in 90 days, and votes
16 unanimously, where does that put them?

17 MS. FRENO: Votes unanimously to close the
18 school?

19 MR. SUTTON: Yeah.

20 MS. FRENO: Then the school could be closed.

21 MR. SUTTON: Okay. So, really, this decision
22 here isn't paramount to what can ultimately happen?

23 DR. MOORE: Right.

24 MS. FRENO: Well, the -- I mean, their board has
25 already voted --

1 MR. SUTTON: Right.

2 MS. FREN0: -- at this point.

3 MR. SUTTON: But they can -- but somebody could
4 bring it up again, I guess is what I'm saying.

5 MS. FREN0: Someone could bring it up again;
6 they could bring it up again.

7 MR. SUTTON: Yeah. And regardless of what we
8 decided here or stipulated could be -- would be over-
9 ridden by a new vote. Is that --

10 MS. FREN0: Possible. But if I'm correct, the
11 vote last time was five-two as well --

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

13 MS. FREN0: -- in 2000.

14 MR. SUTTON: Okay. Well, let me say this: if my
15 two-year trailer that I'm putting on my motion is
16 confusing, then, you know, I'll just make my motion
17 to --

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: No, it -- that wasn't it.
19 It's just that --

20 MR. SUTTON: Okay.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- you know, the -- it's a
22 difficult decision.

23 MR. SUTTON: Yeah, sure.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And so I just needed a moment,
25 I think. All right.

1 DR. MOORE: And I think it -- it's just -- it's
2 so hard, and I know everyone in this room knows that.
3 But it's setting up such a hard position. And we
4 want that school -- those students to do well
5 wherever they are and we want the district to work
6 with those students.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

8 DR. MOORE: And I know they will.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think that's --

10 DR. MOORE: That's what I want.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That's my problem, I think, is
12 we had expectations when they left that the district
13 would work with Sparkman to provide what they needed,
14 and I'm not sure that that happened. And so I think
15 that was -- that's where my disappointment has come
16 from.

17 SUPT. SNOW: Ms. Newton, what didn't we provide?

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You're going to have to come
19 to the microphone. I'm sorry. We --

20 SUPT. SNOW: What didn't we provide? We -- they
21 had the same opportunities as people at Harmony
22 Grove. Okay. There was talk about doing something
23 different. Okay. We did not pursue some of those
24 things, four-day week or something like that, because
25 of the difficulty of doing it with two campuses. So

1 I'm -- when you say we didn't provide an education up
2 there, we did. And if you -- I can't send 10
3 students up there -- I mean 10 teachers up there.
4 Okay.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

6 MR. SUTTON: Yeah, I understand that. Let me
7 say this: you took that district in -- not you --
8 Harmony Grove took that district in 10 years ago or
9 eight years ago. Okay.

10 SUPT. SNOW: Eighteen.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Eighteen.

12 MR. SUTTON: Eighteen years ago. And you just
13 said "they" didn't do --

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

15 SUPT. SNOW: That's not what I said.

16 MR. SUTTON: You didn't say it?

17 SUPT. SNOW: When did I say --

18 MR. SUTTON: I mean, that's like something --

19 SUPT. SNOW: When did I say "they?"

20 MR. SUTTON: That's like talking about -- they
21 shouldn't be any different than a geography class
22 down the hall.

23 SUPT. SNOW: When did I say "they?"

24 MR. SUTTON: Just a minute ago.

25 SUPT. SNOW: I said we provided --

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

2 SUPT. SNOW: -- the Sparkman campus with the
3 same opportunities as you have on the other campuses.

4 MR. SUTTON: It still appears to me to be a
5 separation on intent, and I just don't understand it.
6 I may be wrong.

7 SUPT. SNOW: Okay.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Thank you. Thank you,
9 Dr. Snow. Thank you. And I think that if I gave a
10 wrong impression, I'm sorry.

11 But the task before our board today is to decide
12 whether or not to close the 7-12 campus. And we --
13 the de-annexation or separation is not before our
14 board. I think that I have -- may have pulled you
15 off topic, and if I did, I'm sorry. But our task
16 today is we're going to either accept the motion to
17 close the 7-12 campus or we're going to deny the
18 motion to close the 7-12 campus. And so that -- you
19 know, if we want to put a time period on that, we can
20 do that, you know, with the understanding that their
21 board could not have to abide by that.

22 So that's the motion and if it comes down to a
23 tie, I will do my best to do a better job this time
24 as Chair and help us through this.

25 Okay. Do we have a motion?

1 MR. SUTTON: I'll make the motion that we deny
2 the petition to close the 7 through 12 building in
3 Sparkman.

4 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion to
6 deny the petition to close the 7-12 campus at
7 Sparkman and -- we have a motion by Mr. Sutton and a
8 second by Mr. Henderson.

9 And now we will do another roll-call.

10 SECRETARY KEY: I'll ask again if Dr. Hill has
11 re-joined us?

12 (MOMENT OF SILENCE)

13 SECRETARY KEY: Okay. I'm trying, Ms. Newton.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you. I was praying. I
15 was praying, but it didn't work though. That's okay.

16 SECRETARY KEY: All right. Mr. Sutton.

17 MR. SUTTON: Yes.

18 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. McFetridge.

19 MS. McFETRIDGE: No.

20 SECRETARY KEY: Mr. Henderson.

21 MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

22 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Moore.

23 DR. MOORE: No.

24 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Newton.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: No.

1 SECRETARY KEY: Motion falls, three votes to
2 two.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do we have another motion?

4 DR. MOORE: The alternative motion --

5 SECRETARY KEY: Yeah, the alternative motion
6 would then be to grant the petition. Because I think
7 -- and please clarify, Ms. Freno -- just by denying
8 is not an automatic granting.

9 MS. FRENO: That is correct. There would have
10 to be a majority vote to grant the petition, of
11 members present.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay. So, and that's granting the
13 petition of the local board?

14 MS. FRENO: Grant the petition of the Harmony
15 Grove School District to move grades 7 through 12 to
16 the Harmony Grove campus from Sparkman.

17 MR. ASKEW: Well, I have to point out it's not
18 move, it's close.

19 MS. FRENO: Well, close. They're moving it,
20 they're -- it's -- yes, close.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. So I guess with a heavy heart
22 I will make the motion to uphold the decision of the
23 local board as it stands.

24 MS. FRENO: And so, that would be a motion to
25 approve the petition --

1 DR. MOORE: Yes.

2 MS. FRENO: -- of Harmony Grove School District.

3 DR. MOORE: Yes.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do we have a -- we have a
5 motion by Dr. Moore to approve the petition by the
6 Harmony Grove campus -- Harmony Grove district to
7 close the 7-12 campus at Sparkman. Do we have a
8 second?

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Have a second by Ms.
11 McFetridge.

12 We'll do another roll-call.

13 SECRETARY KEY: Mr. Sutton.

14 MR. SUTTON: No.

15 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. McFetridge.

16 MS. McFETRIDGE: Yes.

17 SECRETARY KEY: Mr. Henderson.

18 MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

19 SECRETARY KEY: Dr. Moore.

20 DR. MOORE: Yes.

21 SECRETARY KEY: It's three-to-one.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So the motion did pass.

23 And please know, parents and community members,
24 that this was not an easy decision and we want the
25 best for your children, and any way this board can

1 help --

2 I think we will -- since it's 1:30, we're going
3 to break for lunch now. And we'll come back at --
4 how about 2:45. Does that work?

5 Okay. What did I say?

6 SECRETARY KEY: You said 2:45.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: This is difficult.

8 SECRETARY KEY: 2:15.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: 2:15. We'll be back at 2:15.
10 We'll be back at 2:15.

11 (LUNCH BREAK: 1:27 P.M. - 2:15 P.M.)

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Parents, I want to
13 apologize to you for keeping you so long. We had an
14 agenda item this morning that took awhile, but I
15 appreciate your patience with us and waiting on us to
16 have a little bit of a break before we came back.

17 And we are going to do something a little
18 different. I know our agenda item has several items
19 before our school choice appeals, but we're going to
20 skip down to Item 6 on our agenda and we're going to
21 hear those school choice appeals now so we won't make
22 you wait any longer. So we're going to move around
23 and -- monitor and adjust, as we used to say.

24 6) SCHOOL CHOICE APPEALS UNDER THE SCHOOL CHOICE ACT OF 2015

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So, Ms. Freno -- no, you're

1 not; it's not Ms. Freno. It's Ms. Wagner. Ms.
2 Wagner is going to help us through the appeals.

3 MS. WAGNER: Good afternoon, everybody.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good afternoon.

5 MR. SUTTON: Good afternoon.

6 MS. WAGNER: Okay. So before we get started
7 into the appeals, I want to go over the hearing
8 procedures for everybody.

9 All right. So we start off with all persons
10 that are wanting to testify before this board are --
11 have to first be sworn in and placed under oath by
12 the Chairperson. Each party that wishes to
13 participate may take 20 minutes to present its case,
14 with the nonresident district going first, followed
15 by the resident district, and then the parents
16 rounding out the parties. The Chairperson of the
17 State Board may for good cause shown, upon request of
18 the party, allow any additional time that you wish.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

20 MS. WAGNER: Okay. The State Board of Education
21 at its discretion shall have the authority to require
22 any person associated with the application to appear
23 in person before this board. But we do have many of
24 them appearing on Zoom, just for ease today.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

1 MS. WAGNER: The State Board of Education may
2 also accept testimony by affidavit, declaration, or
3 deposition. I don't have any of those. So everybody
4 who is testifying is here in person or, like I said,
5 on Zoom.

6 The State Board of Education will grant or deny
7 an appeal based on the totality of the evidence
8 presented to you -- and that was provided to you in
9 those appeals -- which those packets have been
10 provided to everybody and that you can access from
11 the agenda.

12 Okay. You can announce your decision
13 immediately preceding the hearings or you can take
14 the matter under advisement. All decisions shall be
15 -- take place in this open meeting. The State Board
16 shall provide a written decision to the Division,
17 which I will take care of and I will send it out to
18 the appealing parties -- the nonresident district,
19 the resident district, and the parent within 14 days.

20 Are there any questions about our hearing
21 procedures?

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: No.

23 a) BUIE

24 MS. WAGNER: All right. So we open this up with
25 the first family is the Buie family.

1 The family appeals the rejection of their
2 child's school choice application. The resident
3 district is Malvern, the nonresident district is Glen
4 Rose, and the transfer was denied based on the 3%
5 cap. Mr. Holicer is on for Glen Rose, and Ms. Harper
6 is on for Malvern.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 MS. WAGNER: And the parents are present.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. All right. Thank
10 you.

11 So nonresident would be Glen Rose. Mr. Holicer.
12 I -- we can't hear you quite yet.

13 SUPT. HOLICER: Okay.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: There we go.

15 SUPT. HOLICER: Yes, ma'am.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Go ahead, Mr. Holicer, when
17 you get ready.

18 SUPT. HOLICER: Okay. I am aware of the Buie
19 family. There is no reason --

20 MS. WAGNER: Before you get started, we need to
21 swear everybody in.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You told me that and I forgot.
23 I'm sorry.

24 MS. WAGNER: That's okay.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah. So anyone that's

1 going to testify in any of these school choice
2 appeals, would you stand and raise your right hand?

3 All right. Do you -- and if you're online, do
4 the same. You don't have to stand, but raise your
5 hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony
6 you're about to give shall be the truth, the whole
7 truth, and nothing but the truth?

8 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Thank you. Sorry
10 about that. She told me and I forgot anyway.

11 SUPT. HOLICER: Okay. I'm aware of the Buie
12 family. There is no reason why they should not be
13 allowed to attend Glen Rose.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. The
15 resident district is Malvern. And I believe you said
16 Ms. Harper?

17 MS. WAGNER: Yes, ma'am.

18 MS. HARPER: Yes, ma'am, I'm here.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do you have anything you want
20 to share?

21 MS. HARPER: No. I just received this
22 information. And our issue is that we have hit our
23 3% cap, and so that's my reason for denying their
24 request.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Is there

1 someone from the Buie family here?

2 MS. BUIE: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

4 MS. BUIE: I'm trying to get my daughter out of
5 Malvern due to multiple issues with teachers. She's
6 been cursed at; she has been in summer-school --
7 cursed at in summer school; they never know where my
8 child is at when I pick her up for orthodontist
9 appointments. I am a single parent; I'm also a nurse
10 and I work at night three days a week. During those
11 three days a week she is with my sister who is in the
12 Glen Rose district; so three out of the five school
13 days she is going to be in the Glen Rose district,
14 not even two miles from the school. And so that is
15 also a reason I'm wanting her to go to Glen Rose. I
16 get off anywhere between 6:30 to 7:00 in the morning,
17 so trying to get there to get her -- to get her back
18 to Malvern has even made her tardy in the mornings,
19 and then she gets D-hall for that. So that's also
20 another reason I'm trying to get her to where she can
21 get to school on time and it not be such a rush for
22 her every morning. So -- and we had everything in in
23 time. And if Malvern has met their cap on getting
24 students out -- I believe they can release 50
25 students -- doesn't that tell you something about

1 their district if that many kids are trying to get
2 out? So that's the reason.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Anything else? Okay.
4 All right.

5 MS. BUIE: Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions from
7 board members?

8 Mr. Sutton.

9 MR. SUTTON: What is Malvern's ADM --

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Can you pull your microphone
11 over a little closer?

12 MR. SUTTON: Do we know what Malvern's ADM is?

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We might can look it up.

14 Ms. Freno, can you look that up?

15 She's looking it up right now.

16 MR. SUTTON: I would like to know about those
17 districts that are on the bubble, you know.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Oh, they're not --

19 MR. SUTTON: They're not, okay.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- as far as -- they're not
21 close to 350. No.

22 MR. SUTTON: Okay. I had no idea.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions from the
24 Board?

25 MS. McFETRIDGE: I guess I don't want to assume,

1 but I am, that Glen Rose has space for this child?

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Holicer said that they
3 would take the child.

4 Mr. Holicer, do you have anything you want to
5 add?

6 SUPT. HOLICER: Nothing to add. There is no
7 reason why these children could not come to Glen Rose
8 at all.

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

11 MS. WAGNER: Malvern's ADM is 1857.

12 MS. BRYANT: If I may say, many times when
13 parents have issues within the building they will
14 come talk to me. And this parent I don't recall has
15 ever come to speak to me about any issues.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

17 MS. BUIE: I've never been directed to.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Any other
19 discussion from the Board?

20 Okay. Are we ready for a motion?

21 Do we have --

22 Ms. Saum, I forgot; do you have a question or a
23 comment?

24 MS. SAUM: No, ma'am. Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Are there any other

1 board members online? I know Ms. Woods said she
2 might join this afternoon. I didn't know if she was
3 back.

4 Okay. All right. Do we -- are we ready for a
5 motion then?

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'd like to make the motion
7 that we accept this transfer of the Buie child going
8 into the Glen Rose district.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So Ms.
10 McFetridge has made a motion to accept the appeal of
11 the parent for the child to go into the Glen Rose
12 district.

13 Do we have a second?

14 MR. SUTTON: I'll second.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

16 All in favor?

17 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

19 Okay. Congratulations.

20 b) PERRY

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. The next one is
22 the Perry family.

23 MS. WAGNER: The Perry family, it is the same.
24 Their nonresident district is Glen Rose, resident
25 district is Malvern, and they were rejected based on

1 that 3% cap.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Holicer, do you
3 have anything you want to add?

4 SUPT. HOLICER: I am less familiar with this
5 family and the child. But, once again, there's no
6 reason why they cannot attend --

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 SUPT. HOLICER: -- Glen Rose.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I think this is a
10 kindergarten child, if I remember right.

11 SUPT. HOLICER: Yes, ma'am.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Anything
13 from you, Ms. Harper, you want to add?

14 MS. HARPER: No, ma'am.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Perry family, is there
16 someone here?

17 Good afternoon.

18 MS. PERRY: Good afternoon. I am Aiden's
19 mother. He's going into kindergarten. I grew up in
20 Glen Rose, I taught at Malvern, so I'm familiar with
21 those -- both of the districts. We just feel as his
22 parents that the smaller class setting is going to be
23 better for him starting off in school. So like Glen
24 Rose's kindergarten is by itself, it's in pre-K, its
25 own campus, it's isolated. He did pre-K from home,

1 so he hasn't been in that school setting. So we just
2 feel that we'd be setting him up for more success if
3 he was in that smaller classroom setting where he's
4 going to get that one-on-one attention. We're
5 actually -- where we live is the dividing road for
6 the two districts, and we're actually closer to Glen
7 Rose School District than we are Malvern. We're on
8 the outskirts of Malvern. So transportation-wise,
9 we're going to be providing that for our child,
10 regardless. And so for us it would be more
11 convenient to take him to Glen Rose than it would be
12 to take him to Malvern.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Anything else you want
14 to add?

15 MS. PERRY: I believe that was it.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We'll see if we have
17 any questions.

18 Any questions over here to ask?

19 Any over here?

20 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

21 MR. SUTTON: I'll make the motion to approve.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Mr.
23 Sutton to approve the appeal for this child to go to
24 Glen Rose from Malvern.

25 Is there a second?

1 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

3 All in favor?

4 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

6 Okay. Congratulations.

7 c) HOBBS

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

9 MS. WAGNER: The next one up is the Hobbs
10 family. And it's the same; the resident district is
11 Malvern, nonresident district is Glen Rose, and the
12 denial was based on the 3% cap, and this is also a
13 kindergartener.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Mr. Holicer?

15 SUPT. HOLICER: Yes, ma'am, Ms. Newton. I am
16 again aware of this particular family. And, again,
17 there's no reason why they cannot attend Glen Rose
18 from our perspective.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

20 Ms. Harper?

21 MS. HARPER: I'm just curious as to what Glen
22 Rose's kindergarten class size is, if that's the
23 issue, if they're looking for smaller class sizes.
24 Because when we look at that, our class sizes are
25 around 22 with a teacher and an aid.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Holicer, could you address
2 kindergarten class size?

3 SUPT. HOLICER: Well, I mean, what she's
4 repeating is what state law is. We won't know
5 exactly the ratio, the true ratio, you know, until we
6 actually get the kids, you know, in there. We have
7 -- we currently have four kindergarten teachers --
8 four classrooms with teachers.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

10 SUPT. HOLICER: So what she's saying is true. I
11 mean, it's -- that's the state law. But I don't --
12 we won't know exactly what we have yet.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

14 Any -- let's see. I haven't had the Hobbs
15 family up yet, have I?

16 Okay. So we're ready for the Hobbs family.
17 Sorry.

18 MR. HOBBS: My name is Rusty Hobbs. I'm here
19 today on behalf of my daughter, Stella. She's five.
20 I'm a single father. I have full custody of Stella.
21 We're in the process of buying land right behind the
22 Glen Rose school as we speak. I'm definitely
23 interested in supporting the district as much as
24 possible. I submitted her paperwork back in
25 February, never thinking there would be any issue

1 with school choice. My grandmother, she taught at
2 Glen Rose in the 40s and the 50s, and my mother, she
3 graduated from Glen Rose as well. I've heard Glen
4 Rose values my whole life, and we have many friends
5 and family in the district. And I'm begging you to
6 please allow Stella to attend the Glen Rose school.
7 I know a smaller district is best for Stella. And
8 thank y'all for y'all's time.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Thank you,
10 Mr. Hobbs.

11 Any questions from the Board?

12 Okay. We're ready for motion.

13 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make a motion that we
14 accept the transfer of the Hobbs child into the Glen
15 Rose School District.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.
17 McFetridge to accept the appeal.

18 MR. SUTTON: Second.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

20 All in favor?

21 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

23 Congratulations, Mr. Hobbs.

24 d) HUGHES

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Hughes family.

1 MS. WAGNER: The Hughes family, the resident
2 district is Malvern, the Glen Rose is the nonresident
3 district, and they were denied based on the 3% cap.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

5 SUPT. HOLICER: Ms. Newton?

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, Mr. Holicer.

7 SUPT. HOLICER: I am not as familiar with this
8 particular student. But, once again, there is no
9 reason why Glen Rose would not accept the [audio
10 distortion] student.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I believe this child is
12 a senior, if I'm not mistaken.

13 SUPT. HOLICER: Right. Yes, ma'am.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

15 SUPT. HOLICER: Yes, ma'am.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Ms. Harper,
17 anything?

18 MS. HARPER: No, ma'am.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Is someone
20 from the Hughes family here?

21 MRS. HUGHES: Yes, ma'am. My daughter has had
22 some issues over the years with staff and people at
23 the school. My oldest daughter graduated from
24 Malvern this last year and she also had some issues
25 with Malvern. She -- my youngest daughter is the one

1 that's trying to transfer, obviously. She has had
2 enough issues that she switched to their online
3 program in order to try to encompass that. She found
4 that her education was lacking with the online
5 program and wants to go back into an in-classroom,
6 but just -- like she had a kid look at her and was
7 like, "Oh, I thought you died." You know, and it's
8 just stuff like that. She was like, "No." You know,
9 I don't -- so we are 10 minutes from Glen Rose. We
10 live close to Perla, so we're 10 minutes from
11 Malvern, 10 minutes from Glen Rose. She has a car,
12 she has a driver's license, so she can get herself to
13 school every day. There's not any issues with that.
14 And she's just not comfortable in Malvern and feel
15 safe at that school district. So --

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions?

17 Do we have a motion?

18 MR. SUTTON: So moved.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Which is?

20 MR. SUTTON: I'm sorry. My motion is to grant
21 the appeal.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So the motion is to
23 grant the appeal, by Mr. Sutton.

24 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

1 All in favor?

2 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

4 All right. Congratulations.

5 e) GOYNE

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Goyne family.

7 MS. WAGNER: Yes. The Goyne family, there are
8 three children in this family. The resident district
9 is Malvern, the nonresident is Glen Rose, and the
10 denial was based on a 3% cap. Mr. Goyne, for his
11 child Timothy, has actually provided a letter for the
12 Board to see.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

14 (WHEREUPON, Goyne Exhibit One (1) was marked for
15 identification and entered into evidence.)

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any questions or -- is there
17 someone from the family here or online?

18 Yes, okay. Would you like to come forward?
19 Yes. Good afternoon.

20 MR. GOYNE: Afternoon, Ma'am.

21 I've spent some time in the military. I
22 graduated from Glen Rose, so did my wife. I lived
23 there in that district most of my life. My son, I
24 just got custody of him -- I guess it was probably
25 about four or five years ago. But finished up his

1 year in Glen Rose when his mom died and I moved him
2 to Malvern, like the right thing to do. Well, in 6th
3 grade he was bullied to no extent, and in the 7th
4 grade he was bullied, and even had a teacher
5 discipline him -- gave him a failing grade because he
6 said, "Yes, ma'am." In my military term, it's always
7 yes ma'am and no ma'am. And we moved in with my mom
8 at her house to get him -- get all my kids back in
9 Glen Rose last year. So they spent all year last
10 year in Glen Rose. Well, she sold the house and they
11 moved to Tennessee. So, I moved back to my land in
12 Malvern, but I want to keep my kids in Glen Rose. I
13 mean --

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So they were in Glen Rose last
15 year?

16 MR. GOYNE: Yes, ma'am.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Anything
18 else you want to add?

19 MR. GOYNE: No, ma'am.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. So are we ready
21 for a motion?

22 Oh, first of all, do you have any questions?
23 I'm rushing y'all, aren't I? Any questions?

24 All right. Now, we're ready for a motion.

25 MR. HENDERSON: I'd like to make a motion to

1 grant the appeal.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. A motion by Mr.
3 Henderson to grant the appeal.

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McPetridge.
6 All in favor?

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
9 All right.

10 f) TULLOS

11 MS. WAGNER: Next up on the agenda is the Tullos
12 family, which the resident district is still Malvern,
13 but the nonresident is Poyen this time; so Mr.
14 Kissire should be on Zoom.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Mr. Kissire, are
16 you on?

17 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes, ma'am.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Do you have
19 anything that you'd like to say?

20 SUPT. KISSIRE: No. We don't have any issues
21 with the students coming to Poyen.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So you would be able to
23 take them if they were granted? All right.

24 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes, ma'am.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. And the nonresident is

1 Malvern. Ms. Harper?

2 MS. HARPER: No, ma'am.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. And the family is the
4 Tullos family. Okay.

5 MS. TULLOS: Hi. Largely, our choice to go to
6 Poyen is simply the fact that their grandmother works
7 at the school. She's a teacher at Poyen, has been
8 for many years. And it would be very convenient for
9 us with transportation and whatnot. I have two
10 children; neither can drive. I'd prefer to keep them
11 off the bus, if possible, and she can help us with
12 that.

13 And, secondly, their dad works in Sheridan.
14 It's closer to Poyen than Malvern, and it would be
15 easier should they need a parent at the school for
16 anything. Where we live, we're equally -- we're not
17 any further from Poyen than Malvern.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Any
19 questions from the Board?

20 MS. McFETRIDGE: Did we hear from Poyen? I'm
21 sorry.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes. Mr. Kissire.

23 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. Okay.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Am I going too -- I need to
25 slow down a little bit.

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Oh, my goodness. Okay.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah. Yes. He said -- they
3 said that they could --

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: You're accepting them.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: They are accepting, yes.

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Any questions from
8 the Board?

9 All right. Do we have a motion?

10 MR. SUTTON: I'll make the motion to approve the
11 appeal.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Mr.
13 Sutton to grant the appeal.

14 Do we have a second?

15 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McFetridge.
17 All in favor?

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

20 Okay. Congratulations.

21 g) HILLMAN

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Hillman family.

23 MS. WAGNER: The Hillman family, this is one
24 child. The resident district is Malvern, the
25 nonresident district is Poyen, and the denial was

1 based on that 3% cap.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Kissire? This is a
3 kindergartner, I believe.

4 SUPT. KISSIRE: Yes, ma'am. We will accept the
5 child.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Okay. Ms. Harper?

7 MS. HARPER: No, ma'am.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Is someone here
9 from the Hillman family?

10 MS. HILLMAN: Good afternoon.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Hi.

12 MS. HILLMAN: I have a -- I have two children,
13 actually, and my daughter is currently in preschool
14 at Poyen as well. And I have Nathan Hillman, and
15 he's going to be in kindergarten and I'd like for him
16 to go to Poyen, not because it's closer but because
17 we already have relatives and family members around
18 the area, and so they also live closer to -- and I
19 graduated from there, as well, so it's sentimental.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Any
21 questions?

22 Okay. Do we have a motion?

23 MR. HENDERSON: I make a motion to grant the
24 appeal.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We have a motion

1 by Mr. Henderson.

2 Do we have a second?

3 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McFetridge.
5 All in favor?

6 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

8 Okay.

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: Now I do have a question on
10 this. If -- because she's got a daughter in pre-K,
11 will that pre-K child be accepted or will she --

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think they're giving
13 preference for that. I think they have to --

14 MS. HILLMAN: There is a program in Arkadelphia,
15 and already got accepted. But I might be here next
16 year for my daughter to go to Poyen kindergarten.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

18 MS. McFETRIDGE: I just wanted to make sure --

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

20 MS. McFETRIDGE: -- I understood and that you
21 understood you might have to come back --

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

23 MS. HILLMAN: Right.

24 MS. McFETRIDGE: -- possibly.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

2 MS. HILLMAN: Maybe next year I'll have to do
3 the same thing.

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: Great.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes. Okay.

8 MS. McFETRIDGE: Thank you.

9 h) PULLED FROM AGENDA

10 i) EALY

11 MS. WAGNER: Next up, we have the Ealy family.
12 The Ealy family -- the resident district is Guy
13 Perkins; Dr. Fisher is on Zoom. The nonresident
14 district is Quitman. And the denial was based on a
15 3% cap. But as I understand what Dr. Fisher has
16 presented is that there was an address issue that he
17 would like to clear up on the record. And then,
18 after that I believe he is in favor of the transfer.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So, okay. All right. So the
20 -- we need to go with the nonresident district first,
21 right, which is Quitman?

22 MS. WAGNER: Yes, ma'am.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. There we go.

24 SUPT. TRUXLER: Yes, ma'am.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You're the first one that's

1 here.

2 SUPT. TRUXLER: Yes, ma'am.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

4 SUPT. TRUXLER: Dennis Truxler, superintendent
5 at Quitman.

6 Our board approved Grayson and Weston Ealy,
7 along with others, at the April board meeting. And I
8 received a letter from Mr. Fisher, June 7th, stating
9 that seven students were denied due to the 3% cap.
10 On July 1, I received an email from Mr. Fisher
11 informing me that the board had agreed to release
12 five of the seven students and not release Grayson
13 and Weston. And my first thought was, what do they
14 got -- what have they got against this family,
15 because there was an issue with this family last
16 year. Grayson came to us last year as a sophomore.
17 Grayson had been home-schooled since early
18 elementary. He came in and finished the year; broke
19 his foot, still only missed one day; ended the
20 sophomore year with a 4.0 GPA, zero discipline
21 referrals. In my 33 years of education, one of the
22 finest young men I've ever met. Everything is yes or
23 no, sir. He is very respected. The administration,
24 teachers, and his peers love him. And we would love
25 to have Grayson and Weston remain at Quitman as part

1 of the Bulldog family.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So both of those young
3 men were --

4 SUPT. TRUXLER: No, ma'am. Just Grayson.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Just Grayson.

6 SUPT. TRUXLER: Weston has been home-schooled.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 SUPT. TRUXLER: And as far as I remember, he's
9 never been in public school. But since Grayson loved
10 Quitman so much, he wanted to go to Quitman.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Okay.

12 Let's see. Guy-Perkins -- who is on? Dr.
13 Fisher?

14 SUPT. FISHER: Yes. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

16 SUPT. FISHER: And I agree with Mr. Truxler, a
17 fine family, fine student. We've enjoyed having
18 Grayson. Our only issue is last year we received an
19 inquiry from Mr. Ealy about, you know, what it would
20 take to school-choice, and it was in the summer, so
21 we were passed the May 1 deadline. We noticed in
22 August he enrolled -- and he had played sports with
23 us one period, enrolled one period. He was home-
24 schooled but had played baseball with us. But, in
25 August, he had enrolled. We inquired from the

1 counselor and from Mr. Truxler a bonafide address; we
2 did get a response sort of questioning why we were
3 doing that. But we knew that sports would be
4 involved, so we were trying to figure out if we
5 needed to do a C-SAP [ps] form or what we needed to
6 do at that point.

7 We had let that issue go. The only issue that
8 came back up that made us question is on their form
9 they submitted was an address that comes -- returns
10 back to the Big Red in Quitman. We just tried to
11 figure out what address they're using, because the
12 one that was submitted on the form returns to the Big
13 Red.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

15 SUPT. FISHER: We are prepared to, once we clear
16 this up, to go ahead and for the district to release.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Anybody?

18 SUPT. TRUXLER: I'm not sure about the address
19 he's referring to. I know that Grayson did excel in
20 sports. He played football -- first year he's ever
21 played football and was an All Conference athlete;
22 broke his foot in basketball, was an All State track
23 member; played baseball. We were turned in to the
24 Arkansas Athletic Association for a bonafide rule
25 move and Mr. Stacks, our -- he wears many hats, one

1 is the athletic director. He submitted all the
2 paperwork that we had to the Triple-A and they did
3 declare Grayson in our district, bonafide move
4 eligible.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

6 The family, yes.

7 SUPT. FISHER: And I apologize, Ms. Newton. We
8 were not contacted with any of that information from
9 the school, nor when I was visiting with Lance about
10 that at Triple-A. So we're unaware of that. Again,
11 we're just trying to figure out -- hopefully they
12 haven't had to live at Big Red for the last [Zoom
13 sound cuts out].

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

15 Okay. We'll hear from the family.

16 MS. EALY: And I wrote mine down.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

18 MS. EALY: Okay. Here's some history that will
19 clear that up. Grayson home-schooled in the Guy
20 district. He has not attended Guy school since the
21 4th grade. Weston has never attended Guy school; he
22 has been home-schooled only. We want him to attend
23 Quitman school in the upcoming school year. Quitman
24 and Guy had to agree that Grayson could home-school
25 in the Quitman district last year to begin taking

1 more rigorous classes; Guy refused. We missed the
2 school choice deadline last year -- sorry -- because
3 my father was in the hospital for nine months from
4 complications from Covid. He then passed away in our
5 home, so we moved. We then moved to Quitman. Sorry.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It's okay. Just take your
7 time.

8 MS. EALY: We enrolled Grayson in four periods a
9 day, and put the home in the Guy district up for
10 sale. Weston home-schooled and took three courses at
11 Quitman that would prepare him to take AP and
12 concurrent courses in the future. The family home in
13 the Guy district didn't sell, so we did decide to
14 live in it now and school choice to Quitman. Now Guy
15 has denied that too.

16 And let me add that our two boys are the only
17 two children of color that were denied.

18 Grayson wants to stay at Quitman because of the
19 more challenging courses to prepare him for college
20 and he wants to take AP and concurrent courses
21 through teachers on campus, not virtually like Guy
22 has. Quitman has teachers on campus who offer
23 concurrent algebra, college English, college
24 psychology, history, and education classes. He can
25 get over 21 hours of college credit from Quitman

1 teachers; they only offer those virtually at Guy. We
2 also don't want Grayson uprooted by not seeing the
3 friends that he's made and the teachers that he has,
4 and this is forcing him away from these things.

5 We want both boys at Quitman because of the
6 safety measures that are in place at Quitman. My
7 husband Bill is a retired State Police officer and
8 safety was a winning factor for him. Quitman has a
9 fulltime Resource Officer on duty all day, every day.
10 There are safe shelters in place in every single
11 classroom that protects from tornados and shooters.
12 Guy has a safe shelter in their hallway only.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

14 MS. EALY: That is what I have. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Thank you.

16 Do we have any questions from the Board?

17 Okay. Are we ready for a motion?

18 MR. SUTTON: Motion to approve the appeal.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Mr.
20 Sutton to approve the appeal.

21 Do we have a second?

22 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

24 All in favor?

25 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
2 Congratulations.

3 j) SWINSON

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Swinson family.

5 MS. WAGNER: The Swinson family, there are four
6 children in this family. Ms. Swinson is on via Zoom,
7 as is Dr. Martin of Greenland, which is the resident
8 district. And then West Fork is the nonresident
9 district, which is Mr. Karnes. They're all on via
10 Zoom. They were denied based on the 3% cap, and I
11 will let all of them discuss that with you.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. We'll begin
13 with the West Fork.

14 SUPT. KARNES: Yes, ma'am.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Karnes?

16 SUPT. KARNES: Yes, ma'am.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Go ahead. Do you have
18 anything that you'd like to say?

19 SUPT. KARNES: No. If -- you know, if the Board
20 chooses to accept the appeal, West Fork will accept
21 the kids into our district.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Greenland?

23 SUPT. MARTIN: Yes, good afternoon, Madam Chair
24 and Board. Thank you. This denial happened based
25 off of the 3% cap. I reached out when I received the

1 appeal to Ms. Swinson about the information in there.
2 I know that you saw that in the packet. I did offer
3 her a board-to-board transfer based off of the
4 information shared. I was concerned about what she
5 wrote in the appeal because, from our perspective, I
6 was not aware of those issues. But she felt like the
7 district had not done anything wrong, they were just
8 looking for a fresh start; so I offered her that
9 transfer based off of that information. She was
10 concerned about that transfer because of athletic
11 reasons and I never heard back from her. I did
12 forward that information to the Department, which is
13 also in your packet, I believe. And so at this point
14 we have offered the board-to-board transfer and we're
15 also looking at those choice offerings that are not
16 taken advantage of and reconsidering those that were
17 denied. So at this point they would be moving up. I
18 shared that with Ms. Swinson earlier in the summer.
19 But after July 1 we were able to provide more details
20 about possible choice approvals, which we're
21 currently working through. So at this point, you
22 know, that's -- that is all we have. So, thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Swinson family, is
24 there someone here from -- are they online?

25 Okay. We're not hearing you.

1 No, cannot hear you.

2 No, not hearing you at all.

3 Why don't you try hanging up and reconnecting
4 and we'll come back to you in just a few minutes.

5 Okay. So let's -- do I need to table this or
6 can we come back? What do we need to do? Give her a
7 second?

8 SECRETARY KEY: Give her a second.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. We'll give
10 you a second.

11 All right. Are you back?

12 No, we're not hearing anything.

13 Our tech guy says you need to re- -- disconnect
14 and re-join.

15 Board, why don't you take a second, while you're
16 waiting on her, and pull up the board packet on the
17 Swinson family and look at that and see if you have
18 any questions for her. And we might could take care
19 of that in a chat, if we needed to. Just take a
20 second and pull that up, because I think the
21 information is in the packet, while she's trying to
22 reconnect.

23 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Were you able to read and get
25 a picture? You don't have any questions? Anyone

1 have any questions? Mr. Henderson, Mr. Sutton, y'all
2 don't have any questions for her?

3 Okay. All right. Then do we have a motion?

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: I make the motion that we
5 accept the transfer of the Swinson family into the
6 West Fork district.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion to
8 accept the appeal.

9 Do we have a second?

10 MR. SUTTON: I will second.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

12 All in favor?

13 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

15 Okay. All right. Golden --

16 Ms. Swinson, were you able to understand what
17 happened? Give me a thumbs-up if you did.

18 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Ms. Swinson gave a
19 thumbs-up signal.)

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Good.

21 k) GOLDEN

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Golden family.

23 MS. WAGNER: So the Golden family, we have one
24 child at issue here. Arkadelphia is their resident
25 school district. Ms. Judy Talley is supposed to be

1 on for Arkadelphia. She is their special ed.
2 director. Their superintendent couldn't be here.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. And the nonresident?

4 MS. WAGNER: The nonresident district is
5 Ouachita and Mr. Newsom is on from Ouachita. The
6 denial was actually from the nonresident district and
7 they denied based on capacity.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: The capacity issue was that
9 they would have to add a staff member. Is that
10 correct?

11 MS. WAGNER: Yes, it is that they would have to
12 add a staff member.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Newsom.

14 SUPT. NEWSOM: Yes. Can you hear me?

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

16 SUPT. NEWSOM: Yes. We denied the application
17 based on the fact that we would have to add
18 additional staff. Of course, according to the
19 policy, if we have to add a staff member we're under
20 the impression that we wouldn't have to accept the
21 application. So that's kind of where we are.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. Talley.

23 Is there someone from Arkadelphia on?

24 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We'll move on to the

1 family. Is there someone here from the Golden
2 family?

3 MS. GOLDEN: Hello. I'm Janice Golden, Jace's
4 mother. I'm here today to present the fact that my
5 five-year old disabled child was rejected from the
6 school district his older brother will be starting
7 his fifth year at and whose twin sister was accepted
8 the same day he was rejected. I believe that this
9 comes down to which carries more weight, the law
10 protecting the disabled from discrimination or a rule
11 that says a school district is not obligated to take
12 on a child who will require a new-hire. Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So, Ms. Golden, could
14 you come back for just a second and let's make sure
15 that the Board understands. Your child has a
16 disability, and because of that disability the
17 nonresident district is saying they would have to
18 hire someone to help with that disability, and that's
19 the reason they rejected your appeal?

20 MS. GOLDEN: Yes. He has total assisted care,
21 and so he would need an aid with him --

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

23 MS. GOLDEN: -- throughout the whole day.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

25 MS. WAGNER: I got in contact with Arkadelphia,

1 and their position is that they -- if they granted
2 the --

3 MS. TALLEY: Judy Talley.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: There you are.

5 MS. WAGNER: There we go.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Ms. Talley --

7 MS. TALLEY: Can y'all hear me?

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. TALLEY: Okay. Yes, ma'am. We did Jace's,
10 Ms. Golden's son's evaluation, and we have already
11 gotten a current IEP in place. And so, I mean, we
12 have nothing to say other than we stand willing,
13 ready, and able to provide all services for him.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Thank you.
15 Questions from the Board?

16 DR. MOORE: May I ask Ms. Wagner a question?

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Y'all just get close and that
18 way you won't have to go far.

19 MS. GOLDEN: Thank you.

20 MS. WAGNER: Yes, ma'am.

21 DR. MOORE: Can you speak to me about families?
22 It was my understanding that if siblings get -- they
23 all get approved. How does that work?

24 MS. WAGNER: So what the law says is that if you
25 have a sibling that is already choiced into the

1 district, and then you apply for school choice for
2 your -- say you have a 5th grader -- as in this
3 instance, kindergarteners who apply -- unless the
4 school district does not have capacity, they are
5 supposed to accept the children.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. So that's the only --

7 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

8 DR. MOORE: And in this case, how do they know
9 -- you know, I mean, is there a provision that you
10 disclosed for special education and needs?

11 MS. WAGNER: So provided in your packet, Mr.
12 Newsom provided a policy that they have, that it is
13 -- their school board has, that if they have to add
14 staff then they reject school choice applications.
15 So that is their policy.

16 DR. MOORE: And that's a legal policy that they
17 can have? What does the state statute say?

18 MS. WAGNER: So the state statute -- our law
19 says that you cannot discriminate on the basis of
20 disability. And under the IDEA a one-to-one aid is
21 considered a related service. So, therefore, you
22 cannot discriminate on that basis.

23 DR. MOORE: Okay.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And these are twins that are
25 both going into kindergarten, one got accepted and

1 one got denied because that child needed an aid?

2 MS. WAGNER: Yes, ma'am.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions from the
4 Board?

5 All right.

6 SUPT. NEWSOM: Of course, I'd like to say here
7 too that we don't -- it's not our practice to deny
8 any school choice applications, so I don't want you
9 to think that. The problem we have is under ASBA
10 policy, which is what our school district follows, in
11 the last bullet there, if you see the policy, the
12 capacity resolution, it says the district reserves to
13 itself the ability to decline -- to accept under
14 school choice any student whose acceptance would
15 require the district to add additional staff for any
16 reason. That's under ASBA policy 4.5. That's, of
17 course, a signed resolution by our school board.

18 The problem we have with accepting students who
19 will require us to add additional staff -- of course,
20 being a small district it puts burden, a definite
21 burden on us, because we've had to deny other
22 students in the past based on this same circumstance.
23 And, of course, I'm afraid once the door is open then
24 we begin to have -- you know, where does it stop, and
25 we would have to have additional staff to come in and

1 serve these students.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I probably just need to be
3 quiet, don't I?

4 Okay. Is there a motion from the Board?

5 MR. SUTTON: I make a motion to approve the
6 appeal.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I have a motion to approve by
8 Mr. Sutton.

9 MS. McFETRIDGE: Second.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McFetridge.
11 All in favor?

12 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

14 All right. Congratulations.

15 All right. That was our last school choice
16 appeal. So from here, you want to go back to Helena-
17 West Helena and then we'll just see how we go after
18 that? Does that work for y'all?

19 Okay. All right. Let's just go back then. So
20 we --

21 Board, do you need a break or are you okay?
22 Because we're moving into Helena-West Helena. Any
23 reason not to go on then?

24 Okay. All right. So we're good. So let's --
25 we're going to go back to Item 3 on the Agenda.

3) CONSIDERATION OF CLASSIFYING THE HELENA-WEST HELENA SCHOOL
DISTRICT AS IN NEED OF LEVEL 5 - INTENSIVE SUPPORT

MS. SMITH: So, Stacy Smith, Deputy
Commissioner.

And I do believe we have Mr. Simpson on Zoom.
He's on the school board from -- there he is, right
there -- Helena-West Helena. So I just wanted to
make sure you were aware that he was on here.

Today, we are seeking to ask the Board to
approve classifying Helena-West Helena in Level 5
support. And I kind of want to give you some
background on this and why we're requesting that.

We've been working with the district now for
about a year-and-a-half. In December of 2020, the
then-superintendent had reached out for additional
assistance from the Office of Coordinated Support and
Service. And so at that time we started sending in
one of our Assistant State Superintendents to work
with the superintendent herself. That work continued
for that semester, into the summer. School started
then last -- this last school year and it became --
first week of school, we started getting calls here
at the Department that high school students did not
have schedules and were basically just sitting in
classes. So we got several calls about this. We

1 actually sent a team out then to see what was going
2 on, and that was absolutely the case that high school
3 schedules were not made; students were just basically
4 being held into classrooms and made some kind of
5 temporary schedules; the students did not have
6 assigned classes. We asked then for -- I sent in a
7 much larger team that included special education and
8 our standards team with Ms. Coffman to go out there.
9 So I sent, first, a few people from my team to go and
10 say yes, this is going on; then I turned around and
11 sent another team back, and they came back to say
12 yes, students did not have schedules, there were not
13 schedules made. We had folks from our special
14 education department walk through the school, visit
15 classrooms, and most of the special education
16 classrooms did not have any students assigned to
17 them, with the exception of a self-contained class.
18 You just saw -- it was the fourth day of school,
19 there was only four students, and the teacher didn't
20 even know the students' names. So there was just
21 some big concerns -- lack of access to equipment; had
22 a student who needed a wheelchair, that was just
23 laying on the floor that did not have a wheelchair.

24 So our team throughout the year has provided a
25 lot of direct hands-on support to correct some of the

1 things in special education and in just the academic
2 area.

3 On August 26th, I visited the school, so this
4 was -- I was the third visit -- to see if we'd gotten
5 the classes resolved. The day I was there, we still
6 did not have all of our kids in classes. In fact, I
7 was visiting classrooms and talking directly to
8 students, and I would ask, "Hey, are you supposed to
9 have Spanish? Is this" -- you know, "Is this what
10 you're supposed to have?" And they'd say, "No, I had
11 Spanish last year. I'm just in here because this is
12 the teacher they had assigned me to."

13 So it was well into the third week of school,
14 fourth week of school before we had students with
15 assigned appropriate classes and where they were
16 supposed to be. The Department sent a team there to
17 assist with that and have been helping throughout the
18 entire school year.

19 So that's kind of where Helena-West Helena first
20 really kind of got on our radar as far as services
21 and instruction for students.

22 MR. SUTTON: Well, and so what year was that?

23 MS. SMITH: This last school year.

24 MR. SUTTON: Last school year.

25 MS. SMITH: So at the beginning of the year.

1 So at that point, we did send them a letter
2 basically saying that there was evidence of several
3 violations. And they had until October -- I mean
4 August 31st to have evidence of a master schedule,
5 have kids assigned, and then we really laid out some
6 specific things that you had to do. There was
7 improvement made. Okay. Commissioner Key and I
8 actually visited in September and kids were in
9 classes, they were scheduled, they were going. But
10 at the same time, there was lots of things we were
11 discovering at the same time -- lack of attendance
12 being taken, they had put in a digital application
13 and digital classes were not going. And so within
14 that letter that we sent in September saying these
15 things had to be done and that we would continue to
16 come back doing site visits.

17 From there, we have continued to return and
18 provide direct support and do multiple site visits.
19 Special education team -- Ms. Green is actually in
20 the room; I think she's been there five or six times
21 this school year providing services and support. In
22 the month of March, they actually went in and did a
23 monitoring visit and found that the district was --
24 had several different compliance issues and gave the
25 district 90 days to correct those. They are coming

1 up on their 90 days, and the team was there just in
2 the last two weeks and the district has still not
3 completed all of those. So they are actually going
4 to get a compliance action plan for not correcting
5 some of the issues that they had identified 90 days
6 ago.

7 This morning, I visited with Ms. Green again and
8 she said there has been progress throughout the year,
9 but it is not -- it's not where it needs to be. And
10 the progress that has been made has been made because
11 of direct support.

12 Scheduling -- Dr. Sutherlin, who's in the room
13 somewhere over here -- there he is -- Dr. Sutherlin,
14 who's in the room, Andrea Fortner, who is our
15 counselor here at the Department of Education, Deb
16 Coffman, the APSCN folks from our division and
17 department, and the co-op have all worked with the
18 district closely this year on trying to get their
19 schedules set up so that we start school this year
20 with schedules first day of school. In checking
21 schedules a few weeks ago, they still had multiple
22 grade levels not scheduled yet. We did have another
23 update recently and we do have the majority of
24 schedules done, but we still had numerous students
25 that are not scheduled like they need to be. So

1 there's still a concern there. But again, that has
2 been with direct assistance from the Department
3 assisting them in getting their schedules done.
4 There's also -- was an attempt by the Department to
5 have monthly Zooms with their folks on scheduling
6 pieces. There's been a lack of follow-through on the
7 district's part on meeting with us consistently and
8 making sure those things are happening.

9 So that scheduling and special education were
10 two things early-on that we have tried to provide
11 support with throughout the school year.

12 Another thing that has kind of been an issue is
13 staffing. Now you've heard lots of staffing issues
14 from lots of districts around the state, and Helena-
15 West Helena has some of the same issues and problems
16 that the other districts around them face. Some of
17 our concerns though with Helena-West Helena have been
18 when they had opportunity to hire licensed staff
19 there was conflict between the board, there was
20 conflict between the district office, conflict
21 between board members, and licensed staff wouldn't be
22 put on the agenda, wouldn't get -- would be
23 recommended by the district office, not be -- and
24 then not be hired, and then we'd lose the potential
25 hiring those folks. That happened a couple of times.

1 We also recently RIF'd some folks in the district.
2 Two of those that were actually licensed, one was the
3 deputy superintendent and one was their literacy
4 specialist. The literacy specialist was probably the
5 one of most concern for me. That was the person that
6 we have worked with the entire year on supporting
7 their district literacy plan, paid -- a position paid
8 for with federal funds, not state; so it didn't
9 necessarily affect the state operating budget. This
10 person was also their dyslexia person. So when we
11 were going in for our plan, this person was who we
12 were investing our time with to build capacity in the
13 district to work with their staff -- and they let
14 that person go. That person has been hired by
15 another district now. So we're kind of starting all
16 over again with the literacy support that's happened
17 this last year.

18 In the spring, the district let-go their
19 superintendent, and that went back and forth. It was
20 a nonrenewal of their contract, to "no, we're going
21 to hire you back," to "no, we're not." It went back
22 and forth. They do have a named interim right now;
23 however, the board has met multiple times and they
24 still do not have a signed superintendent contract
25 with her. So she's still under her current -- her

1 previous contract as personnel in the district, but
2 not a superintendent. And so you do have a member
3 from the board on here that could probably answer
4 questions specifically to that.

5 MR. SUTTON: Can I ask a question?

6 MS. SMITH: Yes, you can.

7 MR. SUTTON: If we approve the Level 5
8 recommendation, would we not control who's running
9 the school, the district superintendent?

10 MS. SMITH: So, today, we're kind of approaching
11 this differently than maybe we have some of our Level
12 5's in the past. We want to work directly with the
13 board. Okay. We're not asking -- our recommendation
14 today was not to dissolve the board. Again, though,
15 that would be your decision as a board to decide
16 that. But what we would like to do is we would like
17 to have much more direct involvement with human
18 capital, even with those recommendations going to
19 Commissioner Key for those decisions within the
20 district, so that we can kind of get some of those
21 things hammered out and put back in place. But we
22 want to do it working with the board instead of
23 completely removing them. Now as we move forward, if
24 that becomes a hindrance or we're not working
25 together to accomplish things, then we might come

1 back.

2 SECRETARY KEY: I'll talk a little bit more
3 about that when Stacy is finished.

4 MR. SUTTON: All right.

5 MS. SMITH: Some other just general items to be
6 aware of, in the business office they had a turnover
7 of business office managers. There are some concerns
8 around the finances. We -- so, we feel like we need
9 to do a much bigger analysis of their current
10 financial situation, their coding. The new
11 superintendent has been working closely with Sheila
12 Whitlow, who is also here; she's a member of my team.
13 Sheila goes there once a week and works with that
14 superintendent, is available for calls. You know,
15 she's never been -- I think she's been a
16 superintendent as an interim once before, for like a
17 week. And so at this moment her deputy has been --
18 was RIF'd. At one point they had asked to rehire
19 that same person they RIF'd because she was the one
20 who was kind of helping with the retention and
21 recruitment plans of the district. The district has
22 several teachers from the Philippines; that's been a
23 good thing for them. But this was the person who was
24 kind of mentoring and organizing all that. They have
25 let that person go. So the current superintendent

1 was asking for that person to be -- there's just lots
2 of personnel stuff going back and forth that's been
3 kind of messy. And we're not directly involved in
4 that; we're coaching and supporting the
5 superintendent and the administration. And while
6 we're giving directions on what we think should
7 happen, some of those things are not being followed
8 through with or they're just completely -- where
9 we've invested our time, it's just gone now.

10 So I'll kind of stop there for a minute. Does
11 anybody have any questions? And, again, I want to
12 remind you that Mr. Simpson is on the Zoom.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any questions?

14 MR. SUTTON: Stacy, how big are they now, how
15 large?

16 MS. SMITH: What's the enrollment number for --

17 MS. WHITLOW: (inaudible)

18 MS. SMITH: You think it's what?

19 MS. WHITLOW: A little over 1,000 now.

20 MS. SMITH: A little over 1,000. She'll look
21 the number up exactly.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So they have a new bookkeeper,
23 or will have soon -- have a new bookkeeper. They're
24 going to have to have a new LEA supervisor. They're
25 going to have to have --

1 MS. SMITH: Yeah, they currently do not have an
2 LEA supervisor. The one they had has left.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And they're going to have to
4 have a new superintendent of some sort. And then
5 their RIF, was it necessary or just because they
6 wanted to? I mean, was there -- was there a need to
7 let people go and these are the ones they chose?

8 MS. SMITH: I'll probably let Mr. Simpson kind
9 of address that from a specific board -- from their
10 viewpoint, what they saw. From our viewpoint and
11 where we were at, we felt like the two positions they
12 did let-go were not -- didn't make sense. They did
13 do some restructuring within the district as well.
14 But, again, there was even -- there was conflict
15 around those RIFs from the previous superintendent
16 possibly disagreeing with it and then being removed,
17 then it was happening, and, you know, just the --
18 when do -- when are we approving our personnel, when
19 are we not. The reasons behind letting people go,
20 some things were just not clear.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions from the
22 Board?

23 DR. MOORE: Yes, and I hesitate to bring this
24 up. But from what I've seen -- the district was
25 taken over in 2005, and then again in 2010. When was

1 it released? When was it last -- was it --

2 MS. SMITH: When was it returned?

3 DR. MOORE: -- last returned?

4 MS. SMITH: Commissioner, I do not know that.
5 Do you know?

6 SECRETARY KEY: I believe it was 2016. I think
7 Lori is trying to ascertain that.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That sounds about right.

9 SECRETARY KEY: But I believe it was 2016, when
10 they had -- at that point had elected a board and
11 were released.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay. And so what's the
13 Department's relationship then with the district
14 since that point in time?

15 MS. SMITH: I'm sorry; say that again.

16 DR. MOORE: Since it was last returned, in 2016,
17 what's been y'all's relationship with them? What
18 level were they in when --

19 MS. SMITH: So -- so last year, they moved into
20 Level 4 due to their literacy scores and had a
21 literacy support plan while we were working with them
22 on literacy. Their then-superintendent,
23 Superintendent English, reached out specifically to
24 our team and said, "Can I receive some more help? I
25 need some assistance, we're struggling," which we

1 said, "Yeah, absolutely, we'll come in, we'll help
2 you." We started sending someone there monthly. And
3 even then, when we were going in monthly to support
4 we were seeing other things that we knew needed to be
5 addressed, but we felt like it was a great
6 opportunity that we were being asked for support, and
7 so we wanted to support; we wanted to go -- be able
8 to go in.

9 This last year -- I mean, in August, when we
10 went in because of complaints about students not
11 having schedules, there were lots and lots of issues.
12 They would have had standards for accreditation
13 violations this year without a standards waiver.
14 They would have had standards for accreditation
15 waivers without our direct support in helping clean
16 that up. I will say there still are issues that
17 we're aware of. For example, both the assistant
18 principal at the high school and the high school
19 principal, both, are listed as teaching classes, full
20 loads of classes, which we know that's not the case.
21 They're listed as teaching everything from math
22 classes to credit recovery, to Title 1 math classes,
23 a visual arts class -- and they're licensed, so it
24 doesn't flag in our system here at the Department.
25 But we recognized their names when we were looking at

1 schedules and have asked them to clean that up -- and
2 here we -- end of the school year and it still has
3 both of their administrators at the high school
4 listed as teaching courses.

5 So there are things like that that we know are
6 happening, that we want to get in there and get
7 elbow-to-elbow and really be able to clean that up in
8 a very direct way. But we -- again, we want to -- we
9 want to work with folks.

10 So when you asked what has our relationship
11 been, this last year we have -- we've been there
12 every week; we're visiting someone. We are trying to
13 establish some relationships. But there is a lack of
14 follow-through on some pieces. And there is a lack
15 of where we spend our time and effort, and then the
16 person is gone. And I think our frustration is the
17 person is gone not because they had to be gone.

18 MR. SUTTON: When you say "gone," you mean --

19 MS. SMITH: The person, they've been RIF'd.

20 MR. SUTTON: Oh, RIF'd.

21 MS. SMITH: They were reduced -- yeah, not
22 reduced; they were -- yeah, reduction-in-force. They
23 were reduced. That's terrible.

24 MS. McFETRIDGE: Some of the information that
25 we're -- we were given is the board at times has been

1 a hindrance to the progress of the district. Is that
2 --

3 MS. SMITH: Well, and again --

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: -- something you feel like you
5 can overcome?

6 MS. SMITH: Their -- they do have a board member
7 on here today, and it's very well documented -- and
8 I'm interested to hear from Mr. Simpson. But they
9 had very heated board meetings. They -- you know, if
10 you follow the newspaper, there's articles in the
11 newspaper; there's recordings out there of things
12 that have happened in board meetings where folks
13 don't agree and were not coming to an agreement. And
14 I think an example of that is their current
15 superintendent, who was named superintendent, and the
16 board has met two or three times trying to agree upon
17 what her contract should be. And last night, I think
18 they were supposed to have a board meeting and didn't
19 have a quorum, and so she still at this point doesn't
20 have a thing.

21 So, again, will they be a hindrance? I hope
22 not. I hope that this is an opportunity for us to
23 come in and say, "We want to work with you." You
24 know, a lot of folks out there were talking about the
25 State coming to take over. We don't want to take

1 over anybody. We don't want to dissolve anybody. We
2 really want districts to be -- stand up on their own
3 and we want the best for kids across this state. And
4 will the board willingly work with us? I would hope
5 so. If they choose not to, that's where we have the
6 State Board of Education.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think one of the big
8 concerns to me was when I read, and you stated, was
9 they had opportunities to hire certified teachers and
10 chose not to and then placed 1240 -- which was not
11 the intent of what we gave 1240 waivers for. And so
12 that's very, very concerning to us, I think.

13 MS. SMITH: And it's very -- and when I -- and
14 it's very messy. For example, we know licensed
15 teachers that were being recommended, but then we
16 were told, you know, one board member blocked it from
17 being on the agenda, and then it was brought up at
18 the board meeting anyway. And so it's just -- again,
19 it's not clean; it's very messy, especially around
20 human capital. And so this is the opportunity for us
21 to be able to work directly with them to try to
22 strengthen some of that -- but it's late in the year
23 and school is about to start.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

25 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Newton, the -- this board

1 took action, in March 2016, to return the district to
2 local control upon election of a local board. And I
3 believe it was election and training, if I remember
4 that motion -- yes -- and that occurred in the
5 November 2016 election. And then by -- after that,
6 and upon returning, then they assumed authority as a
7 local board.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So it seems like we're in a --
9 like a --

10 SECRETARY KEY: And Mr. Hoy was still the
11 superintendent --

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

13 SECRETARY KEY: -- at that time. So he had been
14 the superintendent under the state authority and then
15 continued that for some time. I don't remember how
16 long, but for quite a while after --

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

18 SECRETARY KEY: -- that he continued there till
19 he retired or resigned; I'm not sure which one.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It seems like we're in a five-
21 or six-year cycle, you know --

22 SECRETARY KEY: Well, it's --

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- which is not good. Yeah.

24 SECRETARY KEY: So, Mr. Sutton, you had asked --
25 and this is probably as good a time to mention this.

1 You know, y'all have dealt -- this board has dealt
2 with, twice, taking over districts, Dollarway being
3 one, Helena-West Helena being another. And I don't
4 know, Ms. Newton, if you remember -- or, Dr. Moore, I
5 think you might've been here; it may have been before
6 you were appointed. But in the meeting where we went
7 to Helena-West Helena and we talked about returning
8 to local control, and I reminded the community -- and
9 it was a pretty big community meeting, there was a
10 lot of excitement and energy about getting their
11 board back and getting control of their district
12 back. They've done some good things. They have --
13 they've had a building project since then, they built
14 a new high school.

15 MS. SMITH: A beautiful high school.

16 SECRETARY KEY: Yes.

17 MS. SMITH: Beautiful high school.

18 SECRETARY KEY: So I don't want to paint the
19 picture that everything going on there is bad,
20 because there have been some very positive steps for
21 that community. But I said then that -- and I gave
22 caution that if we had to come and do this a third
23 time it would look very different. Now the law has
24 changed. In 2017, we changed the statute and how we
25 approach -- you know, from the old No Child Left

1 Behind and consequences and those things to one of
2 support. We have poured more support into that
3 district -- you were talking about the relationship;
4 I think we have had more support going into that
5 district, especially in the last couple of years,
6 especially in the last year specifically, than what
7 under the old system we really -- the old school
8 improvement system that we had and that model.
9 Because we are looking at the entire -- the entirety
10 of a school district and the systems that are
11 necessary in those districts -- in those -- in
12 districts.

13 But it is -- it has to look different if we --
14 if it gets to the point where I have to come back to
15 you -- and I will not hesitate to come back to you
16 and say this isn't working and we need you to take
17 additional action. I will not hesitate because we've
18 got too many kids there that -- you know, when Stacy
19 and I visited last year --

20 MS. SMITH: September.

21 SECRETARY KEY: -- at the beginning of school,
22 in September, we saw students that were just like
23 every other student in the state. They want to be at
24 school and they want to learn and they want something
25 positive, because they understand that they're there

1 to learn. And what they are -- and we saw people
2 trying really hard, but we also saw evidence that
3 more could be done. And then last year, especially
4 probably the last six months or so, not everyone is
5 working together, and that's what we have to get back
6 to; so do I.

7 I hope I don't have to come back and ask you to
8 take additional action after today. But I'll say it
9 again, if it becomes necessary then I won't hesitate
10 to come back and say, "Look, we need you to do more."

11 MR. SUTTON: What's their fiscal status?

12 MS. SMITH: So they were identified in like
13 early intervention, but we have not analyzed that.
14 So that would be part of this classification of Level
15 5. And one of the directives for the Department
16 would be to go in and analyze all of their systems,
17 including their financials, their, you know,
18 facilities -- like all those different pieces.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions or
20 comments from the Board?

21 Okay.

22 MS. SMITH: I want to remind you that Mr.
23 Simpson is on.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Simpson, did you have
25 something you wanted to add?

1 We're not hearing you, Mr. Simpson.

2 Now you're muted, I think.

3 Now you're un-muted, but we're not hearing you.
4 Our tech guy, when this happened once before, said to
5 go out and come back in.

6 MS. SMITH: Matthew, will you tell him like he
7 needs to check his microphone?

8 DR. SUTHERLIN: Yeah. If you'll check your
9 microphone at the bottom, just make sure that it's
10 actually -- the right side, the one that's built into
11 your computer.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: He said check your microphone,
13 that it's at the bottom, to make sure it's the one
14 that's built into your computer.

15 Is there a way for -- he can phone-in maybe?

16 MS. SMITH: If he wants to call my cell phone, I
17 can put the speaker on.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Simpson, Ms. Smith
19 said if you would call her cell phone he would -- she
20 would put your audio on the microphone.

21 MS. SMITH: Mr. Simpson, if you'll check your
22 chat, they directly sent you my cell phone number.
23 And you can call my cell phone number and then we'll
24 play -- we'll do it that way.

25 Is that okay?

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

2 MS. SMITH: While he's trying to find my cell
3 phone number, do any of y'all have questions for me,
4 any more, or for any of my team?

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dr. Moore?

6 DR. MOORE: I know we're adding to a team for
7 you that's already very busy.

8 [MS. SMITH'S CELL PHONE RINGS]

9 MS. SMITH: Mr. Simpson?

10 MR. SIMPSON: Yes, ma'am.

11 MS. SMITH: All right. Let me put you on
12 speaker.

13 MR. SIMPSON: Okay.

14 MS. SMITH: Okay. Go ahead and talk.

15 MR. SIMPSON: Okay. There are a couple of
16 things. And the first one, let me just thank you,
17 the State Department, for coming in and assisting
18 with the problems that we've encountered these last
19 couple of years.

20 But there are some things that have been
21 mentioned here that was not accurate. One was that
22 we've been very supportive of the superintendent.
23 When we did not have a counselor for last year -- we
24 did not have a counselor last year because -- the
25 principal made a recommendation for our counselor on

1 a couple of occasions and the superintendent would
2 not give that to the board; because that counselor
3 had been with the district and moved to another
4 district and wanted to come back, and she would not
5 hire her. So we didn't have a counselor and that was
6 why the schedules weren't ready. We did not have a
7 counselor.

8 As far as the board not approving qualified
9 staff members, we've had -- the superintendent came
10 to us in the February board meeting and asked for the
11 attorney to RIF. And I told her that I had a problem
12 with that word attorney. I felt like if she's going
13 to RIF, the board should know who was going to RIF,
14 because there was a few top level positions that we
15 felt should be RIF'd. She chose not to bother with
16 either of those positions. And while she was
17 supposed to be RIFing, she brought I think six
18 persons up to be hired. She met with the board
19 president, and the board president told her that it
20 didn't look good to be hiring and RIFing at the same
21 time. So when she -- the board president told her to
22 take that off the agenda. Well, she asked to go in
23 executive session, and we went into executive
24 session, and she brought this person's name in for us
25 to hire. She did not -- she did not at the time tell

1 us that the board president, who had to leave town --
2 she was not there -- I'm the vice president and I'm
3 presiding. One of the board members asked the
4 question, "Who told you to take these off?" And she
5 told him, said, "Somebody." Said, "Was it the State
6 Department?" She said, "No, it wasn't the State
7 Department." "Was it a board member?" "Yes."
8 "Who?" And then I jumped in and told her that the
9 president felt that it didn't look good to be hiring
10 folks and RIFing at the same time. One of the things
11 that we wanted her to do was make the RIF, and then
12 once she -- because some of the people that she might
13 would RIF she could very possibly move into other
14 positions that we need. So she didn't -- she didn't
15 do that.

16 When our superintendent has made recommendations
17 for us to hire someone, we have done that, with the
18 exception of that one time. So when she didn't
19 recommend the counselor to us, she moved an
20 elementary counselor over to the high school. And
21 this elementary counselor had no experience at all in
22 scheduling high school classes. She was at the
23 elementary. So that was some of the reasons why the
24 schedules weren't done, because the counselor that
25 left wanted to come back and she would not put her on

1 the agenda to be hired back. We were supportive of
2 her and we told her to RIF -- one of the persons that
3 was to be RIF'd was the superintendent. We didn't
4 feel that -- not the superintendent -- deputy
5 superintendent -- we didn't feel that we needed a
6 deputy superintendent and a superintendent with the
7 number of students that we have. And our population
8 is declining and we didn't feel that we needed a
9 superintendent and a deputy superintendent at the
10 same time.

11 The other person -- the other person that we
12 suggested RIFing was the director of transportation
13 or busing. When this person was hired we had 33
14 buses running and he was the supervisor of those 33
15 buses. He does not have a CDL license. Okay? He --
16 we are now down to running two buses, and we felt
17 that we should not be paying a person a salary to be
18 managing two bus drivers all day. So that was one
19 that we felt could -- we could give that
20 responsibility to someone else and RIF this person.

21 The other one -- because our numbers at our high
22 school went down, we felt that we didn't need two
23 principals -- one principal, and we could reassign
24 the other principal. This principal I think was
25 certified in English.

1 So we have supported this superintendent and
2 have -- whenever she'd made recommendations we would
3 approve those recommendations. The one time that we
4 didn't was when we were in the process of RIFing and
5 she wanted to hire different people. So that was why
6 we didn't vote for that.

7 MS. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Simpson.

8 MR. SIMPSON: Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Mr. Simpson, for
10 joining us.

11 MR. SIMPSON: Okay.

12 MS. SMITH: So he mentioned a counselor; that
13 was prior to us coming in and working that August.
14 When we came in, in August, we had heard that there
15 had been conflict between which counselor should be
16 hired and who should be moved. And, you know, he
17 mentioned that the elementary counselor had been
18 moved up to the high school. Those -- he's accurate
19 there. Prior to us getting there, there had been
20 conflict though between the board and the
21 superintendent on who was supposed to be in that
22 position, and someone left. I mean, there was
23 conflict again about getting the right person in the
24 seat to make those things happen. And I understand
25 that the person who had previously been there that

1 had created those schedules was gone, but you have
2 school administrators who are responsible, you had a
3 district office who was responsible. But four weeks
4 into school we had kids just getting their schedules,
5 with seniors who didn't have correct classes
6 scheduled so that they could graduate. We had to go
7 in and make all those corrections. Matthew went
8 through every student at the high school and
9 identified courses and what they were lacking and
10 notified the school, "These are the courses these
11 kids need." If we wouldn't have gone in, we would've
12 had kids who wouldn't have had their courses to
13 graduate this year, and stayed on it. We looked at
14 them every month and semester. So he's accurate when
15 he says they were having counselor problems.

16 But, again, it goes back to conflict on people,
17 who's the right person for the job, and was the
18 superintendent making the recommendation, was the
19 board, was the school principal. There was conflict
20 among the adults and, therefore, because there was
21 conflict among the adults they didn't get someone
22 hired and we didn't get schedules done.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Any other
24 comments?

25 DR. MOORE: Well, I'm --

1 Do we have a motion?

2 DR. MOORE: I'm pulling up the data. Five
3 percent of 9th grade students are ready and achieving
4 in English Language Arts; 18% in 3rd grade. Do you
5 have the capacity -- do y'all -- can y'all -- can
6 y'all do this work? Is there more that we need to
7 do?

8 MS. SMITH: We are -- we don't have a magic
9 wand. Okay. And, Gina, I don't remember what -- how
10 many times -- yeah, it only bongs so many times,
11 whatever. We don't have a magic wand. And I don't
12 want anybody to think we're going to walk in there
13 and in two years and three years and four years it's
14 going to be perfect, because it's not. We've seen
15 that with every district that we've gone in to
16 support. There are only so many of us that are going
17 in. But what we try to do is we try to strengthen
18 the systems and we try to start building capacity
19 with the folks who are there. That's the same case
20 with every district we're in; we're trying to build
21 capacity. So do we have -- do we have the capacity?
22 I don't have capacity to send in and take over the
23 entire -- but we do have capacity to send people in
24 to support. And if we have to add people to our
25 team, we'll do what we need to do. We've got kids

1 who need courses and classes.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. I think we're
3 ready for a motion.

4 DR. MOORE: I have a motion whenever --

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Go ahead.

6 DR. MOORE: I move that the Helena-West Helena
7 District be classified in need of Level 5 - Intensive
8 Support; that the Commissioner of Education provide
9 support to the District to assist in improving its
10 educational systems, including the support in the
11 letter dated June 22, 2022. I move that the powers
12 and duties of the local board of directors to make
13 all personnel decisions be removed and that the
14 Commissioner of Education make personnel decisions in
15 lieu of the local board. And in doing so, I move
16 that the Commissioner conduct an analysis of the
17 school district systems and make recommendations for
18 any additional actions to us.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. I have a motion --
20 Is that --

21 DR. MOORE: That's it.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Dr.
23 Moore.

24 Do we have a second?

25 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll second that.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McFetridge.
2 All in favor?

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
5 Okay.

6 Ms. Sharon, would you like --

7 COURT REPORTER: Whatever is the pleasure of the
8 Board.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Yeah, pass that down to
10 Ms. Sharon; that way she can make sure she gets it in
11 the record.

12 All right. Do you need a little bit of a break
13 or are you zapping out? Are you -- is everybody
14 okay? You're okay? Guys, y'all need a break for
15 five minutes?

16 Five minutes, okay. Let's do a 5-minute break.
17 Let them get up and move around for a minute and then
18 we'll come back. We won't be long.

19 (BREAK: 3:39 P.M. - 3:46 P.M.)

20 4) CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS FOR ACT 1240 WAIVERS

21 a) HELENA-WEST HELENA SCHOOL DISTRICT

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Go ahead.

23 DR. PFEFFER: All right. Ivy Pfeffer, Deputy
24 Commissioner.

25 And this agenda item is also regarding Helena-

1 West Helena School District. And this is the --
2 about the district's request for an Act 1240 waiver
3 around Teacher Licensure. So this would be a
4 continuation of the waivers that they've had in place
5 for the last seven years -- several years.

6 And so we put -- we had put together a
7 presentation, and a lot of this conversation was
8 going on as we were learning more about all of the
9 issues that Ms. Smith talked to you about a little
10 bit earlier. And so based on the action that you've
11 just taken, I think that kind of helps the
12 conversation around this waiver request.

13 I'm going to go through the presentation though
14 because this is also part of what we've been working
15 on in updating our approach to Act 1240 waivers. So
16 a lot of what I'm going to share here also is going
17 to apply as we work with other districts, depending
18 on their level of need. So, you know, we really look
19 at this whole process as a way that we continue to
20 help support and serve our districts for a student-
21 focused education system. And like Ms. Smith said a
22 minute ago, the -- as we go in, one of the first
23 things we're going to be looking at are systems and
24 what are the processes that need to be put into place
25 to strengthen those systems or streamline those

1 systems so that we don't have those gaps in terms of
2 providing access to effective teachers; so that we
3 don't have large gaps in our fiscal operations
4 systems or in our academic system. And really
5 looking at what is the impact of the personnel and
6 the human capital system on academics and on some of
7 these other pieces of the whole operating process
8 within a school district.

9 So with the Act 1240 decision-making, I want to
10 just -- for you to see that we've really gotten very
11 tight and intentional as those applications come in.
12 We look to see, okay, do they meet the Act 1240
13 criteria, which is do they -- is the district asking
14 for waivers that will either enhance learning
15 opportunities, promote innovation, or increase access
16 to effective teachers; have they clearly communicated
17 the goals of the request and have they identified
18 appropriate waivers that are aligned to what they're
19 asking for. So we've got a team that's, you know,
20 really working on that. So you can see here what the
21 application looks like. And we -- a lot of times the
22 initial application that gets submitted looks very
23 different by the time that it comes to you all. And
24 the one you're going to hear in a few minutes is
25 actually going to, you know, show how just really

1 tightening up on this process and having clear
2 communication with the district I think is helping
3 us.

4 The critical questions that we've really refined
5 -- and I think these are probably the most important
6 pieces to share with you -- the very first thing we
7 want to look at is, is the waiver asking to do more
8 or to do less for kids. And I think you would agree,
9 especially those of you who have been on the Board
10 for a long time, over the years it seems that we've
11 almost drifted to, you know, we're asking for these
12 waivers because -- out of desperation, and we've
13 allowed districts to do less in some cases. And it
14 just -- we realize that. So we're really stepping
15 back to say are there other types of flexibility that
16 are more appropriate in the request. And because the
17 majority of the requests come in around waiver from
18 Teacher Licensure, you know, we really want to look
19 at do we have the right pathways that -- to provide
20 some flexibility to districts so that they can hire
21 people that are going to be the best fit for the kids
22 and do well with their school district and become
23 part of their community. We look at what's going to
24 be the result if we don't grant the waiver; is the
25 waiver going to mask a problem within the district

1 that's going to negatively impact students; is the
2 waiver request just an attempt to avoid a possible
3 standard for accreditation violation.

4 We've had some great conversations with some
5 districts that have submitted a request and they tell
6 us, "Well, it's just in case;" you know, "We think we
7 might have too many students and go over." And we
8 talk to them about, "Okay, there's a separate process
9 for that." And you'll hear a request in a few
10 minutes where a standards for accreditation waiver is
11 the more appropriate pathway to have the flexibility
12 needed.

13 And then, where we really are I think today with
14 this particular application is that we're really
15 starting to connect the levels of support to
16 approvals of waivers. And so if you remember,
17 several months ago, Dr. Hill asked, "Okay, so if we
18 say no, then what?" And I don't think at that moment
19 we were prepared with the best answer. And just over
20 the last few months, as we've really looked at our
21 process and started working on it, we thought --
22 we've realized we have the "then what." And the
23 "then what" comes back to those six systems and the
24 levels of support within our education and support --
25 AESAA -- and Ms. Freno will have to get me all the

1 words for that -- but our Education Support and
2 Accountability Act; so our state accountability
3 system.

4 So as we do this and we -- I remember it easier
5 as Act 930 of 2017, because that's when we went away
6 from ACTAAP to AESAA. So we built an accountability
7 system that really was more comprehensive and -- from
8 both the state and the federal side, including all of
9 the components that really are part of that student-
10 focused education system. And we've created five
11 levels of support for districts, and in this
12 presentation you have a description of what each of
13 those levels of support look like. And I think
14 probably over the next few months we're going to
15 spend more time going back to this and talking about
16 those levels of support and what -- how does that
17 look and how do we move to have that right
18 relationship with districts, because that's really
19 what it's all about.

20 That Level 1 - General Support, that's available
21 for everyone. And there are times when a district
22 may need more involvement from us or with us, and so
23 it doesn't mean that we don't provide the same
24 support that we did before. If we have the right
25 general supports, we really do -- but it's more about

1 the change in the relationship, maybe more
2 interaction, maybe whether some of it could be
3 virtual, some of it could be onsite, maybe there are
4 some specific criteria that we're going to go in,
5 maybe specific look-for's as we go along. And as we
6 get to the more directed and intensive support, then
7 obviously those relationships change to even the
8 point then maybe where we're in charge of some of the
9 decisions that have to be made.

10 So within that, and particularly around the
11 personnel or human capital system, we want to make
12 sure that we're very clear that public school
13 districts are responsible to recruit, hire, retain,
14 and develop effective teachers. And when we look at
15 what are those systems of support that we have within
16 the state, we have multiple pathways to teaching,
17 focused induction, and mentoring, meaningful support
18 and evaluation, and strong teacher leadership with
19 career advancement opportunities. It's -- we've laid
20 out what a lot of these general supports look like,
21 but when we get to the point where that support has
22 to be to that Level 5, that intense support, then
23 that relationship also becomes "yes, we're going to
24 make sure that you have access to all this, but there
25 are going to be things that we're going to have to

1 do, like maybe coming in and really auditing through
2 a comprehensive systems analysis for each of those
3 systems." And this just lays out what it would look
4 like for that human capital system, and so we know
5 that's really where we're going to get started as we
6 get to the district, and then we'll be looking at all
7 of those systems as you all have just asked us to do.

8 We have templates for each of the systems that
9 are part of our district systems analysis, and so we
10 will be coming back and sharing those templates that
11 have been developed. We actually created those a few
12 years ago, have been using those in the past, and
13 it's -- this is the time now where I think these
14 really come back into play. These help become the
15 roadmap as far as, you know what we're going to be
16 working with the district on. And they also help to
17 identify what's going to be part of the ADE support
18 plan and it's going to -- and may help us create a
19 kind of template for what the district plan of
20 support is going to look like.

21 So in the case with this Level 5, the district
22 will be working on a plan; we will have a support
23 plan that clearly identifies the expectations and
24 criteria for exiting. So just taking you through
25 that.

1 And going back to the waiver request, the
2 district had originally asked for just, you know, an
3 extension of blanket waivers. We don't feel that
4 that's what we want. But within this Level 5, the
5 very intense relationship with the personnel
6 decisions coming to Commissioner Key, we feel like
7 that we have to have the ability for some of that
8 flexibility that Act 1240 waivers from licensure are
9 going to provide. Because right now we have -- based
10 on the numbers they gave us -- and I think it's going
11 to be different because of what we know about
12 vacancies that were there that aren't included in
13 numbers that we had -- but we know at least 36% of
14 their teachers were hired under a waiver or employed
15 under a waiver last year. So to keep those people
16 employed we're going to have to have an extension of
17 Act -- of the Act 1240 waiver to fill the vacancies.
18 We're probably going to need some flexibility. We're
19 worried that in some of the grade levels within
20 elementary there are no certified teachers, so we may
21 need to be moving some teachers around to try to get,
22 you know, maybe, ideally, a couple of prepared
23 educators, you know, that have experience in each
24 grade level. And then we may be looking at, you
25 know, trying to recruit back some educators who maybe

1 have retired or recruit some teacher interns that
2 want to come to the district and work underneath some
3 of those qualified educators.

4 So that -- so we would be asking for the Act
5 1240 waiver to be extended for one year and that will
6 give us a good chance to really understand what that
7 human capital system looks like, and then coming back
8 to you all for later decisions as we really know.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do you know about how many
10 vacancies they currently have, or are you going to
11 have to wait till you get in there?

12 DR. PFEFFER: Do you -- I'm going to look back
13 here at the team to see if they remember how many.

14 MS. SARACINI: We can't remember right off the
15 top of our heads, but quite a few.

16 DR. PFEFFER: Yeah, there were a lot. And it
17 just -- a constant state of flux would be the --
18 probably the best way to describe it.

19 One of the actions also around this system has
20 to be going in and limiting who has access to the
21 eSchool scheduling. Because as Ms. Smith described,
22 when you have principals who are coded as teachers of
23 record, if you don't know to pay attention to those
24 names it's going to mask a problem. So we're going
25 to have to really get in there and take a close look.

1 And we may find that there are some people within the
2 district that can fill some of the vacancies, or
3 again maybe move some folks around.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

5 DR. MOORE: So even in the application that they
6 submitted there was -- it didn't line up. At one
7 point it said there was 19 waiver teachers and other
8 places it said 23. But in any case, there weren't
9 many that were on a pathway to licensure. Is there a
10 mechanism to require them to be on some sort of
11 pathway to licensure?

12 DR. PFEFFER: So that -- I mean that has been
13 the approach that many districts have taken, and I
14 think that would be part of our audit. When we did
15 the audit there are some who have completed their
16 program but they've just not passed the assessment.
17 And, you know, some of the MAT programs that are not
18 content -- MAT programs are not content-based;
19 they're pedagogy-based. So part of what we would do
20 is look at it and see how many of those folks there
21 are that need us to come in and provide some content,
22 either professional development or access to even
23 some courses that would provide them with that
24 content that they need. We could look at options as
25 far as, you know, are there people who do want to go

1 on through a pathway to actually become licensed and
2 stay in the district, and that would be ideal. This
3 will give us the opportunity to really make sure that
4 their Educators Rising students get the opportunity
5 for concurrent credit. I know all through the year
6 last year there was back-and-forth between the local
7 community college and the district about developing
8 an MOU for concurrent credit. I don't know that that
9 ever completely got finalized. So we will be in
10 there trying to take those steps to find folks that
11 can teach that for concurrent credit and actually
12 build that sustainability plan.

13 DR. MOORE: I think it should be that if you're
14 hired under the waiver you have some -- you are
15 started on the pathway in some fashion or form.
16 Because not only are you getting that license, but
17 you're getting that support from other programs --

18 DR. PFEFFER: Yes.

19 DR. MOORE: -- all along the way.

20 DR. PFEFFER: And I think that goes back to also
21 when we think about staffing -- you know, in the 20th
22 century model we looked at one teacher for every
23 classroom. Over this next year we want to look and
24 see, you know, where are those really strong teachers
25 that we have, how do we position them to help grow

1 those other professionals. We may have some staff
2 who come in just to support the teachers. And as we
3 really find out where all of the gaps are and we
4 bring people in -- I agree that if you bring in
5 people that have that desire to become a teacher,
6 getting them on the right pathway immediately is
7 going to be very important.

8 DR. MOORE: I remember it's maybe twice this
9 past year that they had an agenda item that was
10 pulled about a kindergarten teacher, maybe they
11 didn't have a licensed kindergarten teacher or they
12 were -- they had too many students?

13 DR. PFEFFER: I don't remember.

14 Do we have --

15 DR. SUTHERLIN: It was a standards waiver for
16 Class Size.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay. Was that resolved or --

18 DR. SUTHERLIN: Well, they were --

19 DR. MOORE: Sorry. Get your steps in.

20 DR. SUTHERLIN: So they received a standards
21 waiver which then cleared up that issue.

22 DR. MOORE: Okay. For too many students?

23 DR. SUTHERLIN: Yes.

24 DR. MOORE: Do we know what their staffing is
25 for kindergarten and elementary this coming year?

1 DR. SUTHERLIN: Not for this coming year.

2 DR. MOORE: But y'all are going to go in and
3 work on that and get --

4 DR. SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay.

6 DR. SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh. Yeah.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

8 DR. PFEFFER: There's just been too many moving
9 parts to -- for us to know with any certainty what's
10 going on.

11 DR. MOORE: But now, because of our action, you
12 all will be able to directly work with them to insure
13 that that does not happen again this next year?

14 DR. PFEFFER: Yes. We will have a much clearer
15 picture very, very soon.

16 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So I think we're ready for a
18 motion on Helena-West Helena 1240 waiver request for
19 one year.

20 DR. MOORE: I'll make a motion to approve --

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a --

22 DR. MOORE: -- the waiver request.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Dr.
24 Moore to approve the waiver request for Helena-West
25 Helena.

1 Do we have a second?

2 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

4 All in favor?

5 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

7 b) CAMDEN-FAIRVIEW

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: This is where the change in
9 our agenda came. We were going to add Camden-
10 Fairview. Ms. Pfeffer, are you going -- Dr. Pfeffer,
11 are you going to do this one also?

12 DR. PFEFFER: Yes, I have this one.

13 So this is an example of a waiver request that
14 looked much different today than it did when we first
15 received it. As we worked with the district, and
16 also with SAU, we became much more comfortable with
17 understanding what the district was seeking to do.
18 And so just, in essence, this district is asking for
19 the waivers for Class Size so that the district can
20 implement the residency model.

21 I do want to point out and brag on SAU because
22 they have created a rubric actually --

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I saw that, yeah.

24 DR. PFEFFER: -- to identify the criteria that
25 they're going to seek in their candidates in order to

1 recommend them to be placed as residents. The
2 district will have a mentor teacher assigned to the
3 resident. And so the actual class size -- the mentor
4 teacher and the class size of the resident will not
5 exceed the limit. But because that mentor teacher
6 will actually be the teacher of record, when you
7 combine those two together that's where the Class
8 Size waiver is needed -- but that teacher will
9 receive extra compensation.

10 So we feel very comfortable with this waiver and
11 we're excited about the partnership between the
12 district and SAU. So we would recommend the approval
13 of this.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Is there any discussion?

15 DR. MOORE: Yes. Is this the first time they're
16 doing this partnering?

17 DR. PFEFFER: This is the first time that
18 they're doing it in this way. SAU had worked with
19 the local districts in the past utilizing some of
20 their interns, but it wasn't -- they have really
21 taken the steps and the efforts to align it with our
22 residency model that we're launching. And so these
23 will be some of the very first ones that will kind of
24 jump off and start this. And then -- and we actually
25 hope -- I know the waiver request is for five years.

1 We actually hope that between now and the time they
2 would need to renew it we'll have had time to adjust
3 policies and where these kinds of waivers are not
4 needed --

5 DR. MOORE: Okay.

6 DR. PFEFFER: -- to constantly come before you.

7 DR. MOORE: Is it elementary or high school?

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It's K-12, I believe. Isn't
9 it?

10 DR. PFEFFER: The request is for K-12. I'm not
11 -- I think these two particular teachers might be
12 elementary.

13 MS. SARACINI: They're elementary.

14 DR. PFEFFER: Yeah, these two that will start
15 will be elementary. But then we'll be monitoring the
16 program over the next few years to see how often it's
17 being used in elementary versus secondary. And we're
18 going to know that as we update ALEs so that teacher
19 residents can be identified in ALEs.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay.

21 DR. PFEFFER: And it will be on a track where
22 they go from, even whether they start in high school
23 or whether it's, you know, while they're in the
24 workforce, but those who actually go into the
25 teaching profession. So in a few years we'll have

1 some -- I expect some awesome data.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah. Any other questions or
3 comments?

4 Okay. Do we have a motion on the 1240 waiver
5 for Camden-Fairview?

6 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make the motion to
7 approve.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.
9 McFetridge to approve.

10 Do we have a second?

11 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Second by Mr.
13 Henderson.

14 All in favor?

15 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

17 Okay.

18 5) CONSIDERATION OF A STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION WAIVER

19 a) HOPE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: The next thing is
21 Consideration of Standards for Accreditation Waiver
22 for Hope Public Schools. And this is Dr. Sutherlin.

23 DR. SUTHERLIN: So, Matthew Sutherlin,
24 Coordinator of Standards and Systems Support/Charter.
25 The Hope Public School District requests a one-

1 year waiver for standards for accreditation Standard
2 1-A.1(2)(7) for their middle school. The waiver is
3 requested in order to embed career development for
4 8th grade into the middle school's enrichment period.

5 And I believe Mr. Mike Radebaugh is here too,
6 actually, to explain what that's going to look like.

7 This is done to insure the 8th grade students
8 will receive instruction in career development. And
9 as they move -- basically, they're moving their
10 career development course to the 7th grade, to that
11 rotation. So they're trying to make sure they
12 provide it for all students.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

14 Come ahead. You've had a long day of sitting --

15 MR. RADEBAUGH: Ma'am --

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- and we appreciate your
17 patience.

18 MR. RADEBAUGH: Ma'am, I have watched y'all and
19 my day is nothing compared to what y'all have done
20 today. So, I salute you. I salute you.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do you have something you want
22 to share or --

23 MR. RADEBAUGH: I brought the contracts. May I
24 --

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

1 MR. RADEBAUGH: May I approach you?

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Sure.

3 MR. RADEBAUGH: What we're doing is we're
4 bringing the NOLA Star Academy here in the middle
5 school, which is career focused, in our core
6 classrooms.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 MR. RADEBAUGH: And so since we usually provide
9 the career development class to our 8th graders, we
10 don't have room to do that during this year and still
11 allow students to participate in things like
12 football, band, things like that; so I needed to
13 create more space for this program. So I'm moving
14 the career development course to the 7th grade; so
15 keyboarding is taught one semester, career
16 development is taught the second semester. Because
17 A-1.2.7 says that it must be taught to 7th and to 8th
18 graders in either the 7th or the 8th grade.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Right.

20 MR. RADEBAUGH: So, but if I do that this year
21 then my rising 8th graders will not --

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Gotcha.

23 MR. RADEBAUGH: -- have had career development
24 in this year; so we're going to embed that into the
25 STAR program.

1 And then we have the extra computer science
2 class that I wrote in my first letter and it made it
3 sound like that that's where we were providing that,
4 but that's just the enrichment course. Because if
5 someone chose to play football and be in band that
6 would not be possible for them.

7 So I'm asking for this waiver for one year,
8 moving the career development to 7th grade next year.
9 We will not have this issue anymore.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay, gotcha. Okay. That
11 makes sense.

12 All right. Questions from the Board?

13 All right.

14 MR. RADEBAUGH: Thank you so much.

15 SECRETARY KEY: Let me say something.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Go ahead.

17 SECRETARY KEY: Ms. Newton, let me just take the
18 opportunity to say that STAR Academy, that's --
19 Stacy, remind me -- that's what's having so much
20 success --

21 MS. SMITH: Yes.

22 SECRETARY KEY: -- in Pine Bluff, Dollarway,
23 with some of those students. And so it's exciting to
24 see this program spreading to other districts that
25 feel like that it's going to be good for their kids.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Good.

2 SECRETARY KEY: So, thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Great. All right.

4 So do we have a motion now?

5 MS. McFETRIDGE: I thought it was written up
6 very well and explained very nicely. So, yes, I'll
7 make the motion to approve.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion to
9 approve the waiver, from Ms. McFetridge.

10 DR. MOORE: Second.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Second by Dr. Moore.

12 All in favor?

13 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

15 Congratulations. Thank you for your work. And
16 thank you for staying with us.

17 MR. RADEBAUGH: You're welcome.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

19 7) EMBEDDED COURSE APPROVALS 2022-2023

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So we have done school choice,
21 and so our next thing would be Item 7, unless we need
22 to skip around and get someone that's here. Anyone
23 here that we're going to need to skip and get to?

24 No. Okay. So Item 7, Embedded Course
25 Approvals. Dr. Pride.

1 DR. PRIDE: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That's you. You waited all
3 day for your name to be called.

4 DR. PRIDE: Yes. Good afternoon.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good afternoon.

6 DR. PRIDE: Kiffany Pride, Assistant
7 Commissioner of Learning Services.

8 All right. So Act 421 of 2013 allows curriculum
9 frameworks from two separate courses to be taught in
10 a single course, known as a combined or embedded
11 course. Several school districts -- 15, in fact --
12 made application for approval of the combined or
13 embedded courses and assured, in writing, that the
14 curriculum frameworks for both courses will be fully
15 taught in the combined or embedded course.

16 So I stand before you today asking the State
17 Board to approve the embedded courses, as indicated
18 in the attachment, understanding that when the
19 curriculum frameworks for one of the courses are
20 revised a new course approval request must be
21 submitted to the State Board and approval must be
22 granted before a school is allowed to embed -- offer
23 the embedded courses.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions?

25 DR. MOORE.

1 DR. MOORE: I did have a question. What is the
2 time period for the approval, or is it continuous
3 until standard -- until --

4 DR. PRIDE: Yes, it is until -- it is until the
5 standards change --

6 DR. MOORE: Okay.

7 DR. PRIDE: -- or unless they make a change,
8 they can then --

9 DR. MOORE: So that's why we don't see as many
10 every year?

11 DR. PRIDE: Yes.

12 DR. MOORE: I mean, because the ones that we saw
13 last year --

14 DR. PRIDE: Each year.

15 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. That makes sense.

16 DR. PRIDE: Standard period of time, yes.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

18 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

19 DR. MOORE: I'll move to approve.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a motion by Dr. Moore
21 to approve.

22 Do we have a second?

23 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.

25 All in favor?

(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

DR. PRIDE: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Dr. Pride.

8) CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF NOMINATED MEMBERS
FOR THE PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE STANDARDS BOARD TO REPLACE
MEMBERS WHOSE TERMS ARE VACANT OR EXPIRING JUNE 30, 2022

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Consideration of
Request for Approval of Nominated Members for the
PLSB board. Ms. Saracini.

MS. FRENO: May I also point out that we do have
people here for the charter approvals.

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

MS. FRENO: Just so -- if -- because I had said
no, there was no one waiting. But --

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

MS. FRENO: -- four people for the charter --

CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I don't think these next two
will go very -- take very long, so I think we'll just
move right on. It'll take just a couple of minutes,
I think. These will go pretty quickly.

MS. SARACINI: Karli Saracini, Assistant
Commissioner, Educator Effectiveness and Licensure.

Last month, we brought some nominations to the
Board for the PLSB. We have two more positions to

1 replace. So the board nominations that I need you to
2 vote on today are: the Arkansas Association of
3 Colleges for Teacher Education voted to nominate --
4 reappoint Dr. Vicki Groves-Scott from UCA; and on
5 behalf of AEA, Carol Fleming nominates the
6 reappointment of Ms. Kathy Howell to represent the
7 classroom teachers.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions?

9 MS. SARACINI: These are three-years terms.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

11 MS. SARACINI: And so, these are both
12 reappointments.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

14 MS. SARACINI: That will be through '25.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Questions, anyone?

16 DR. MOORE: How many times can you be
17 reappointed?

18 MS. SARACINI: Currently, in law, there is no
19 limit.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Are we ready for a motion?

22 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll move to approve both
23 appointees.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.
25 McFetridge to approve both appointees.

1 MR. SUTTON: I'll second.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

3 All in favor?

4 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

6 Okay.

7 MS. SARACINI: Okay. Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Ms. Saracini.

9 9) NEW CUT SCORES FOR PRAXIS ASSESSMENTS

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: New Cut Scores for Praxis, is
11 that you again?

12 Mr. Rowland, all right. Welcome.

13 MR. ROWLAND: Mike Rowland, DESE. Good to see
14 you guys.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good to see you.

16 MR. ROWLAND: We're looking for you to adopt
17 five new Praxis tests.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

19 MR. ROWLAND: Okay. One of them is a new
20 Russian test -- Russian World Language is developed;
21 cut score is 9-point SEM.

22 The other three, we've been in communication
23 with ETS and they have recommended that we look at
24 the Social Studies (7-12). There's two versions of
25 that test: one that we currently use that has

1 constructive response, meaning it has to be scored by
2 individuals; the other is almost the shortest. So
3 they're recommending the same test, only one version
4 is all multiple choice -- it is \$26 cheaper and is
5 offered every -- continuously through Test at Home,
6 inter-rater reliability is 100%.

7 And so we got to looking at also the secondary
8 English -- same thing, same test only no constructive
9 response.

10 And then, finally, we looked at the Coaching
11 endorsement test and Special Education test. It has
12 constructive response; it has a content knowledge
13 test, as well.

14 So we're asking you to adopt those content
15 knowledge tests over the current ones that we have.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Cheaper sounds good to
17 all teachers.

18 MR. ROWLAND: Sure.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Any
20 discussion on the new cut scores and new assessments?

21 DR. MOORE: Yeah. Are there any -- with the new
22 assessment and the new cut score, are there any
23 changes? I mean, is it about the same --

24 MR. ROWLAND: Exactly the same competency, same
25 test; just one is all multiple choice and one is

1 multiple choice plus a couple of constructive
2 responses. So the constructive response questions
3 are now integrated in some multiple choice.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. And this will be effective --

5 MR. ROWLAND: September 1.

6 DR. MOORE: -- September 1. So anyone seeking
7 these licenses --

8 MR. ROWLAND: Sure.

9 DR. MOORE: -- may take these. Okay. Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

12 Secretary Key.

13 SECRETARY KEY: Do we know how many districts
14 offer Russian?

15 MR. ROWLAND: Well, I tell you, when I was
16 soliciting people to be on the standards setting
17 study there were no bites. But now in the
18 university, UA-Fayetteville did have a gentleman who
19 spoke Russian and he was invited to the standards
20 setting study. I talked to David Brocca [ps]; he
21 said we've never licensed a Russian teacher, so --

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: But there's always a first.

23 MR. ROWLAND: But it's on the books.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: There's always a first.

25 MR. ROWLAND: It's on the books. Right now,

1 they take a PLT --

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

3 MR. ROWLAND: -- to get Russian. And so now
4 they'll have it on a content test.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. I think
6 we're ready for a motion.

7 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make the motion.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Motion to approve
9 from Ms. McFetridge.

10 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.
12 All in favor?

13 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

15 Thank you. So, thank you.

16 10) REVIEW OF CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL DECISIONS

17 a) ARKANSAS MILITARY AND FIRST RESPONDERS ACADEMY
18 AMENDMENT REQUEST

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Now we're to the
20 Charter Authorizing decisions. And on these,
21 remember, these are review or not review in your
22 motions.

23 Ms. Summons.

24 MS. SUMMONS: Good afternoon.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good afternoon.

1 MS. SUMMONS: Dorie Summons, DESE Charter
2 Office.

3 Arkansas Military and First Responders Academy
4 is requesting to change the opening date from August
5 2022 to August 2023. The Charter Authorizing Panel
6 reviewed this amendment and approved it unanimously.
7 Dr. Don Hall, he's on the Zoom, in case you have any
8 questions for him.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We'll check and see.

10 Anyone have a question? It's just a push-back
11 of the start-date. I think they gave you the reasons
12 in the packet.

13 Okay. All right. Do we have a motion?

14 DR. MOORE: I'll move to approve.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a motion by Dr. Moore
16 -- to not review?

17 DR. MOORE: To not review.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

19 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do we have a second?

21 MR. SUTTON: Second.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.
23 All in favor?

24 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

1 All right.

2 b) IDEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARKANSAS AMENDMENT REQUEST

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Go ahead, Ms. Summons.

4 MS. SUMMONS: Okay. We have another one. The
5 IDEA Public Schools of Arkansas is requesting to
6 change the opening date from 2023 to 2024. The
7 Charter Authorizing Panel reviewed their amendment
8 request and approved it unanimously.

9 Sam -- Mr. Sam Goessling was on a little bit
10 earlier. I'm not sure if he's still -- oh, yes, he's
11 on the Zoom --

12 MR. GOESSLING: Yes, ma'am.

13 MS. SUMMONS: -- if you have any questions.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. We'll see
15 if we have any questions.

16 Anyone have a question? This is also a push-
17 back in start.

18 DR. MOORE: I did. Are they opening two
19 different campuses?

20 MS. SUMMONS: Yes.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay.

22 MS. SUMMONS: And he can explain it a little bit
23 better. They had identified one, but they hadn't
24 identified the second one. And they were also trying
25 to find and train an executive director for the

1 program.

2 DR. MOORE: Okay. So this would be for all of
3 those campuses?

4 MS. SUMMONS: Yes.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

7 All right. We're ready for a motion to review
8 or not review.

9 MR. HENDERSON: I make a motion not to review.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I have a motion by Mr.
11 Henderson not to review.

12 DR. MOORE: I'll second that.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Dr. Moore.

14 All in favor?

15 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

17 All right. The -- I think that's it. Thank
18 you.

19 11) VIRTUAL ARKANSAS DIGITAL LEARNING PRESENTATION AND Q&A

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. So the next thing
21 is our Virtual Arkansas Digital Learning
22 Presentation, Questions and Answers, with Mr.
23 Ashworth and Dr. Benton.

24 MS. COFFMAN: Yes. At the last board meeting,
25 when we discussed digital learning plans you

1 requested a brief, quick report. And we have Mr.
2 Ashworth available.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

4 MR. ASHWORTH: Good afternoon.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good afternoon.

6 MR. ASHWORTH: It's really, really good to be
7 here in front of you all today. I know you've had a
8 long day. I do have a presentation that I think you
9 have access to. I don't know if they're going to
10 pull it up. I am not going to spend a whole lot of
11 time. I know it's getting late in the day and you
12 don't want to go through a PowerPoint presentation
13 with me.

14 There are some things that I do want to go over
15 with you --

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

17 MR. ASHWORTH: -- just about Virtual Arkansas,
18 so you get a full understanding of who we are and
19 what we do.

20 My name is John Ashworth, as they said,
21 executive director and superintendent of Virtual
22 Arkansas. Dr. Brandy Benton was with me this
23 morning; she had some obligations this afternoon. So
24 I'm sorry she couldn't be here as well.

25 We are the state virtual school for Arkansas.

1 That's what we're classified as. I don't necessarily
2 like that term because it says "school." We're not a
3 school, we're not an LEA, we don't grant diplomas; so
4 that's important to understand. We are a
5 supplemental program and we're a partner with public
6 schools all around the state.

7 One of our main jobs -- and sometimes people
8 call and they say, "What is it that you -- give me
9 one sentence, what is it that you do?" And this is
10 what my response is: we provide equity in educational
11 opportunity for students throughout the state,
12 particularly for those in the rural schools; because
13 if you compare the educational options for the
14 students in the rural schools, as compared to their
15 suburban and urban counterparts, there's a drastic
16 difference. And now to have options for their
17 education and what they can take. I can remember
18 when I was a small rural school principal back in the
19 old CIV days -- if any of you remember that, pressing
20 an interactive video -- we were able to offer three
21 additional courses at our small rural school with
22 that program. And I thought as a principal that was
23 unbelievable, we have three more options for my kids
24 that they didn't have before. But now the students
25 throughout the state of Arkansas through us have 146

1 options -- 146 courses they can choose from. So
2 we're very, very proud of that. I've been in
3 education 22 years. This has really been the most
4 rewarding aspect of that career because of what we do
5 in serving the state. And I think if I had any of my
6 staff members here with me today they would say the
7 same thing, they love what they do.

8 Virtual Arkansas is comprised of about three
9 campuses -- three campuses is how we term it. The
10 core campus is attached to Arch Ford Education
11 Service Cooperative; that houses our central office
12 and our core campus teachers. We have a Career and
13 Technical Education campus; that is attached to
14 Dawson Education Service Cooperative. And by the
15 way, with Arch Ford -- Mr. Grant is here with me
16 today; he's the director of Arch Ford Co-op. Darrin
17 Beckwith is with Dawson. And then we have our
18 concurrent credit campus with Southeast Co-op in
19 Monticello, and that's -- so those are three
20 campuses.

21 We offer lots of services, and the ones that
22 you're talking about -- we're talking about here
23 today is something that's new for us, and that's the
24 off-campus and fully online program. That's what we
25 term that program. It is new next year. In the

1 previous years -- and I'll go back and I do have some
2 data that I can show to you. But as far as pre-
3 pandemic, if you were to ask me how many students do
4 we serve that are off-campus, the answer to that
5 question would be almost zero. It just didn't happen
6 except for unique circumstances. For example, we did
7 have some students that may have had some medical
8 issues that were even in the hospital. So we had
9 some unique situations but in general, there were no
10 students off-campus; they were all on-campus in a
11 digital learning lab.

12 Pandemic hit and everything changed and
13 everybody had to adapt, and we had to adapt. We went
14 from zero to 20% of our students were off-campus.
15 That was a huge shift. We monitored that for the
16 first year. Then, for the second year -- we didn't
17 know what was going to come the second year. But as
18 it turned out, it maintained. We talked with our
19 partners around the nation who were seeing the same
20 thing. We looked at what they were doing in their
21 programs, and we wanted to do what was best for our
22 students, and even better. And so that's what we
23 believe we're doing this next year with our off-
24 campus and fully online program.

25 And on the -- you can see on the chart there --

1 if you'd keep it on that one -- yeah, that one is
2 good right there.

3 So that's a projection. 2020-21, we had 748
4 students from 97 districts. That was the first year
5 of the pandemic. Next year is 721 students from 119
6 districts. And then the projection for next year,
7 which is very hard to project -- we did the best we
8 can; a lot of districts are just now getting their
9 requests in -- 615 students is our projection from
10 about 90 districts. That's --

11 If you'll go to the next slide, please.

12 If you wanted to know a breakdown of what it
13 looks like by grade level, we serve 7th through 12th
14 grade. The most students are in the 12th grade, and
15 then it's almost an equal distribution in 9th, 10th
16 and 11th. And then it goes much lower in the 7th and
17 8th grade.

18 Next slide, please.

19 So if you want to look at our numbers that -- as
20 far as pass rate and completion rate, a pass rate is
21 90%. That's one of the highest in the nation for a
22 pass rate for an online program like ours.

23 Completion rate, which means they went through the
24 course and took the final exam, is 95%. Again,
25 that's one of the highest in the nation. I often get

1 asked what about the number of students that are off-
2 campus, and that's a breakdown over the last two
3 years -- this past year and the year before -- and
4 what we project for next year. The average number
5 per district is very low. The first year was 7.7 and
6 went down to 6.1; we project somewhere in between 6
7 and 7 next year.

8 Next slide, please.

9 I wanted to really highlight this. And I
10 listened this morning. Dr. Moore, you said
11 something, when the digital learning came up and the
12 online learning, and you said -- you said that --
13 something to -- I'm paraphrasing, but for most
14 students it's not a good thing, but for some students
15 it's what they need and what they want. And that's
16 exactly our view of that.

17 And I'm glad I put this in here; I want to go
18 over this with you. This is from the digital
19 learning collaborative that's headed by John Watson.
20 I would consider him the foremost expert in digital
21 learning. I just want to go through these. The
22 first thing he says, "More than ever, students and
23 parents want options." They just want options.
24 Maybe they don't even use those options; they want
25 those options. "Students and family want the power

1 to choose whether to attend a fulltime school onsite,
2 fulltime online school, or something in between." So
3 when they did a survey, what it came back is parents
4 want choices. This is nationwide, they want choices.
5 Then he goes on to say, "For most students and
6 families, onsite learning is a better fit." "Onsite
7 learning is a better fit," that's coming from the
8 leader of the online program, and I totally agree
9 with that statement. Online learning is a better fit
10 for most students; however, for a small percentage of
11 students and families online learning is a better fit
12 -- and that is a very small percentage and we have
13 data to back that up.

14 If we go to the next slide --

15 You're not going to see the data, but I'll
16 explain it to you. You can scan that with your phone
17 and you can look at the data. What this is is it's a
18 breakdown of all the districts, the number of
19 students that have 100% virtual that use us. And
20 then it's -- there's the 7th through 12th grade
21 population, the percentage of their 7th through 12th
22 grade population that are -- that chose to take
23 online learning. That number is 1%. It's 1% -- and
24 actually it's .97%. So it's very, very low, those
25 that are choosing or electing to take online

1 learning. The key word there is they chose it.
2 Okay. We have districts that come to us and we want
3 to help districts in any way we can, because they get
4 in hard situations. Sometimes a district will have a
5 teacher that passes away; we've had that.
6 Unfortunately, it happens almost every year -- and
7 they have nowhere to go and they'll come to us and
8 we'll say, "We'll fill in for you until you can get
9 that -- till you can get another teacher."

10 The worst case scenario is where the students
11 are placed with no choice. Some of them will do
12 fine, a lot of them will do fine; some of them will
13 not, because they don't want to be there. But when
14 we have choice we see a lot of success. And so
15 that's going to show you how many choose at least
16 with us through their district, and it's 1%.

17 Next slide, please.

18 This is my -- I think my last slide. But here's
19 the challenges and solutions; that's one thing that I
20 knew you were wanting to hear about. One of our
21 challenges is exam proctoring because we require all
22 of our students to -- for their assessments to be
23 proctored, an adult watching. That is very hard
24 because we put that requirement on the local
25 districts. That works fine and well with our online

1 supplemental program that we've always operated in
2 the past. When you have a child away from the
3 district, that becomes a challenge; that can be --
4 because that proctoring is placed on the local
5 district. They found out that can be extremely
6 challenging. We are taking over the proctoring next
7 year.

8 The other challenge that we saw is supporting
9 and providing interventions and support for students
10 at a distance. Brick-and-mortar school districts are
11 not built for that. It is a challenge when they're
12 trying to switch over to that. We saw the challenge
13 and they verbalized that challenge with us. As a
14 supplemental program, we didn't have anything in
15 place to provide all the support that we previously
16 relied on the local district. So what we're going to
17 do is we're going to take over those support
18 structures, not totally, because they still -- the
19 students still belongs to the district, but we are
20 going to provide extra support starting next year.
21 We're really excited about this. We have looked
22 around the nation and looked at the type of
23 structures they have in place, and we feel like this
24 is the best one in the nation. And we're going to
25 have a dedicated principal that's totally focused on

1 offline students. We have dedicated teachers that's
2 totally focused on those students that are off-campus
3 and at home. We have a Special Populations
4 coordinator that's going to coordinate with the
5 districts, to anybody, any student that's special
6 education, ELL, 504, or needs extra assistance in any
7 way. We're going to have an ELA student success
8 coach, a math student success coach. We have hired a
9 reading specialist who is also going to be monitoring
10 students that struggle and can even test those
11 students.

12 And so those are the supports we're going to
13 have in place and we're really excited to offer that
14 for next year, and we're getting a lot of good
15 feedback so far.

16 So, I'll take any questions that you have.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We'll see what
18 questions we have.

19 Guys over here, do y'all have questions -- Mr.
20 Henderson, Mr. Sutton?

21 All right. Over here?

22 Dr. Moore?

23 DR. MOORE: Thank you for coming and I think I
24 might've been the one requesting it, because I was
25 concerned about how the fully virtual looks different

1 than the support role that y'all played before where
2 a student would take one or two courses from you. So
3 I'm glad to hear --

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

5 DR. MOORE: -- how y'all have adapted and
6 changed when you have, you know, 600 students now
7 that will be doing the fully virtual option.

8 When they're doing that, though, they still -- I
9 mean, they're still -- like you said, they're still
10 getting their degree from their local district?

11 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes.

12 DR. MOORE: And is that local district still
13 required to have someone on staff to check-in --

14 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes.

15 DR. MOORE: -- with those students?

16 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes. We still have a -- we call
17 it a facilitator or a point-of-contact at the local
18 school. It will look different than what our normal
19 facilitators do, because normally our Virtual
20 Arkansas facilitators are at the school with the
21 students in the room.

22 DR. MOORE: Right.

23 MR. ASHWORTH: This is just going to be a point-
24 of-contact that's going to be monitoring the students
25 and we're going to be helping them monitor those

1 students as well. I mean, we're going to be
2 monitoring attendance and logging in and
3 communicating with them. But they can also pull
4 reports, share that with their counselor and their
5 principal --

6 DR. MOORE: Okay.

7 MR. ASHWORTH: -- and say, "Here's what the
8 students are doing."

9 DR. MOORE: Well, it's great to see these
10 coaches that you're going to have working with them.
11 In the event that a student is not doing well, you
12 all communicate with that facilitator to have that
13 conversation with the local district?

14 MR. ASHWORTH: Absolutely. Yes. We'll -- it's
15 -- we -- it's a team. We're still a team with the
16 district; we're just taking on some more support
17 roles. But we're still a team with the district.

18 DR. MOORE: And then as far as scheduling goes,
19 are they scheduling with your local school counselor?

20 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. But they can pick from any of
22 your 146 courses in that case?

23 MR. ASHWORTH: That's right, they can. They can
24 pick between any of those courses. We do also have a
25 student success counselor that we're hiring. I don't

1 think I mentioned that. That student success
2 counselor will coordinate with all the counselors
3 that we're helping serve. But they're also going to
4 be providing some opportunities -- SEL, going to be
5 monitoring that and coordinating with the local
6 districts.

7 DR. MOORE: Do you all provide AP and concurrent
8 credit?

9 MR. ASHWORTH: Absolutely.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay.

11 MR. ASHWORTH: We have 22 AP choices and I think
12 17 concurrent credit choices.

13 DR. MOORE: Awesome. Thank you. Thank you.
14 Because I know we have a lot of districts today that
15 we're seeing, they're switching to Virtual Arkansas
16 to give their students those opportunities. So,
17 thanks for coming in today.

18 SECRETARY KEY: Russian?

19 MR. ASHWORTH: We are adding -- I will say
20 foreign language, world languages is our top
21 enrollment for Virtual Arkansas. We are not adding
22 Russian. We will look into adding Russian. We are
23 adding Latin for this year. We are adding Latin. So
24 we offer about five or six now world language
25 courses.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Just curiosity, what --
2 previously, the cost per district is per student.
3 Correct?

4 MR. ASHWORTH: It's per enrollment, not per
5 student. It's per enrollment.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Per enrollment -- or
7 per class if they take -- so you're providing extra
8 supports and different things that you're doing. Is
9 your price --

10 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- going to go up?

12 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes, ma'am.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

14 MR. ASHWORTH: For that program it's \$350 per
15 half-unit.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So \$350 per --

17 MR. ASHWORTH: Half-unit.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

19 MR. ASHWORTH: So if you multiply that out, that
20 turns out to be \$4200 for a year. So that's about
21 57% of their ADM --

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

23 MR. ASHWORTH: -- that they can give you.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. So that would be
25 someone that was fully virtual, that would be the

1 cost --

2 MR. ASHWORTH: Fully virtual, yes.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- cost to the district?

4 MR. ASHWORTH: Yes.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Is the ones
6 that are going to be onsite at the district just
7 taking a course, is that price also increasing or --

8 MR. ASHWORTH: Right.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- is that just fully virtual?
10 Okay.

11 MR. ASHWORTH: Just for the virtual.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

13 MR. ASHWORTH: That's right.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

15 MR. ASHWORTH: And something interesting to know
16 is, just so -- I think it's good information for you
17 to have -- the average number of students per
18 district, we serve 222 districts this year, 36,000
19 enrollments, half of them in the fall, half of them
20 in the spring; 99% of the rural schools utilize us
21 and 94-1/2% of all district in the state utilize us
22 in some capacity. The majority of those are at
23 school under the watchful eye of their facilitator.
24 But the average number of students in those districts
25 that use us for -- not students -- enrollments is 75;

1 so it's not that many per district. It's just spread
2 out.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

4 All right. Any other questions?

5 Ms. Freno, do we need to do any -- we don't need
6 to do any kind of a motion, because this was just a
7 report. Correct?

8 MS. FRENO: That is correct.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

10 MR. ASHWORTH: Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you for coming. We
12 appreciate it very much.

13 MR. SUTTON: Very informative.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

15 12) CONSIDERATION OF ACT 1240 DIGITAL LEARNING WAIVER REQUESTS

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. What ideas do you
17 have on -- are you batching some of these together or
18 how are we doing it?

19 MS. COFFMAN: Yes, we are packaging these
20 together.

21 Today, my colleague Tally Harp has 32 digital
22 learning waiver requests for your review. Just as a
23 quick reminder, these primarily are renewals, because
24 maybe they only requested one year last time.
25 Remember, a lot of them came and said one year; we

1 want to see what the data says before we commit to
2 something long-term. Some of them are coming for
3 revisions, they've learned a lot of lessons, and some
4 are asking for one-year, two-year, or three-year. If
5 you recall, last month you approved up to two years
6 so they'll all kind of end at the same time.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 MS. COFFMAN: Just as a reminder of that. And
9 I'll turn it over to Tally.

10 MS. HARP: Good afternoon. Tally Harp, District
11 Support Team.

12 So what we did was we put them in batches of
13 five, their co-op consortium that they're in, to try
14 to align them just a little bit.

- 15 a) CEDARVILLE
- 16 b) COUNTY LINE
- 17 c) OZARK
- 18 d) MAGAZINE

19 MS. HARP: So the first group is four with Guy
20 Fenter: Cedarville, County Line, Ozark, and Magazine.

21 Of those four, the only one that made any
22 changes from last year's approved plan was
23 Cedarville, and they just changed their secondary
24 provider from Virtual Arkansas to APEX.

25 Cedarville, County Line, Ozark, all have

1 requested two years; Magazine has requested three.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And we had a long discussion
3 last time that we kind of wanted to stick with two
4 years, just so that we would have the data and
5 everybody would come and we wouldn't have them all
6 spread out. Is that correct?

7 MS. HARP: Yes, ma'am.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So can -- I we can just
9 say -- I'm speaking for the Board, so I need to be
10 quiet.

11 So, Dr. Moore.

12 DR. MOORE: I agree that we want them all to end
13 at the same time.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

15 DR. MOORE: First, do we have the districts on
16 the line?

17 MS. HARP: Some of them are online, some of them
18 were on earlier and --

19 DR. MOORE: Yeah, I understand. It's been a
20 long day. I didn't know if Cedarville -- if y'all
21 had any -- because from my understanding, they're
22 switching to the APEX platform which would require
23 their local teachers to do a lot of that, if they had
24 input from their local teachers.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Cedarville -- is anyone from

1 Cedarville on?

2 MS. HARP: (Nodding head up and down.)

3 MS. COOK: I'm here; however, I'm elementary and
4 we still use -- we're using Guy Fenter for our part
5 for elementary; so I'm not a very good one to answer
6 for high school. But I believe Ms. Patty Murphy is
7 on here as well.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Is there someone from the high
9 school, from Cedarville?

10 MS. HARP: I do know that their teacher role --
11 they have looked at their teacher role as virtual.
12 So I don't have the actual application in front of
13 me; I just have a -- I'll just do a quick little
14 summary for the Board. So I know that they -- the
15 teachers that will be providing the courses for them
16 will be virtual only; they won't be serving a dual
17 role.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay. That makes sense.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So we need
20 a motion for Cedarville, County Line, Ozark, and
21 Magazine. And this motion would be to approve their
22 digital learning waiver for two years.

23 Do we have a motion?

24 MS. McFETRIDGE: So we're asking Magazine then
25 to modify theirs for two years?

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

2 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

3 MS. HARP: Yes, ma'am.

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make that motion then for
5 two years.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I have a motion from
7 Ms. McFetridge. Do we have a second?

8 MR. SUTTON: I'll second that.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.
10 And all in favor?

11 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
13 Okay.

14 e) LAKESIDE (GARLAND)

15 MS. HARP: Okay. The next one is Lakeside
16 (Garland) and they are with the Dawson Consortium.
17 They changed K-6 from district directed curriculum
18 and teachers to the consortium, and they changed 7-12
19 from Florida Virtual to Virtual Arkansas.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

21 MS. HARP: And they also requested three years.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Okay. We need a motion
23 on Lakeside, in Garland County. And I think we are
24 sticking with two years.

25 MR. SUTTON: I'll make the motion to approve a

1 two-year plan.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Mr.
3 Sutton to approve it for two years.

4 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.
6 All in favor?

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
9 Okay.

10 f) COTTER

11 MS. TARP: Okay. The next one is Cotter School
12 District. They had a one-year approved plan and have
13 submitted the same plan that was approved last year
14 with no revisions, and just for another year.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions on
16 Cotter?

17 MS. McFETRIDGE: I make the motion that we
18 approve Cotter.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion to
20 approve Cotter from Ms. McFetridge.

21 Do we have a second?

22 MR. SUTTON: Second.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.
24 All in favor?

25 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

2 g) DEER/MT. JUDEA

3 h) HARRISON

4 i) NASHVILLE

5 j) MOUNTAIN PINE

6 k) MARKED TREE

7 l) RIVERSIDE

8 MS. HARP: Okay. The next batch we have is
9 seven, and it's Deer/Mt. Judea, Harrison, Nashville,
10 Mountain Pine, Marked Tree, and Riverside. So, for
11 example, Deer/Mt. Judea changed their 7-12 to Virtual
12 Arkansas; same thing with Harrison. Nashville,
13 Marked Tree, and Riverside resubmitted the same plan
14 that had already been approved, with no revisions.
15 And then Mountain Pine changed from using a provider
16 to doing theirs through the district. They were not
17 tied to any consortium. But their years do vary, so
18 we have three years for Deer/Mt. Judea and Harrison,
19 and then Riverside and then the others have requested
20 one year. So we -- I don't know if y'all want to do
21 those together or separate.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

23 DR. MOORE: Is Deer/Mt. Judea on line?

24 MR. GRAHAM: Ma'am?

25 MS. HARP: Yeah, Mr. Graham.

1 DR. MOORE: Yes. I believe -- and I can't find
2 the data right now. I think I saw where y'all had a
3 large number of virtual students. How many do you
4 have for this coming year signed up?

5 (A MOMENT OF SILENCE)

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Did you hear the question?

7 MR. GRAHAM: Who was that addressed to?

8 DR. MOORE: To Deer/Mt. Judea.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Anyone from Deer/Mt. Judea on?

10 (A MOMENT OF SILENCE)

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I don't think so.

12 DR. MOORE: Do you know -- I feel like at our
13 last meeting or the meeting before that we had a list
14 of how many --

15 MS. HARP: Huh-uh.

16 DR. MOORE: No? Okay. Maybe I made this up.

17 MS. HARP: I know that we looked at the numbers
18 from --

19 DR. MOORE: Like five districts?

20 MS. HARP: -- the ones that we approved last
21 month.

22 DR. MOORE: Uh-huh.

23 MS. HARP: But I don't think that we've looked
24 at these yet.

25 DR. MOORE: Okay.

1 MS. HARP: We had asked, because we sent that
2 email.

3 DR. PFEFFER: In Cycle 2 -- or Cycle 1 -- no,
4 one of the cycles will have students who are fully
5 virtual on it.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Do you know anything about
8 Mountain Pine? Are their teachers going to be fully
9 virtual? Because I saw they were going to --

10 MS. HARP: I'll tell you.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: -- district. Do you know if
12 they're going to be --

13 MS. HARP:

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah, if they're going to have
15 a dual role or if they're going to be virtual only?

16 MS. HARP: Yes, ma'am, I can tell you.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Of course, I know a lot of the
18 ones that had dual roles have been away from that,
19 and then this one -- this district is moving toward
20 district and --

21 MS. HARP: So they are planning to have
22 synchronous and asynchronous instruction. They're
23 using their district teachers, looks like virtual
24 only.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

1 MR. GRAHAM: Ma'am, can I ask if Nashville can
2 request to go to two years? Our application actually
3 says one, and we'd like to amend that to go to two
4 years.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We will put it before the
6 Board.

7 Okay. So we're looking at Mt. Judea for two
8 years, Harrison for two years, Nashville for two
9 years, Mountain Pine for one year, Marked Tree for
10 one year, and Riverside for two years.

11 Okay. Any other questions from the Board?

12 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

13 MS. McFETRIDGE: Can I say -- I'll make the
14 motion to approve what you just stated.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That works. That works.

16 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Ms. McPetridge made a motion
18 to approve the digital learning plans for the times
19 stated. And do we have a second?

20 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson.
22 All in favor?

23 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
25 All right.

- 1 m) GREENBRIER
- 2 n) WHITE HALL
- 3 o) GRAVETTE
- 4 p) WONDerview
- 5 q) BRYANT

6 MS. HARP: All right. We have the next group,
7 which is five school districts affiliated through
8 Virtual Arkansas. Greenbrier, White Hall, Wonderview
9 all removed K-6 from their program, so they are now
10 only 7-12 Virtual Arkansas. Gravette made no
11 revisions to their plan, and Bryant changed their 7-
12 12 to Virtual Arkansas.

13 Wonderview and Bryant have requested three
14 years; Greenbrier, White Hall, and Gravette have
15 requested one.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So we're looking at
17 Greenbrier for one year, White Hall for one year,
18 Gravette for one year, Wonderview for two years,
19 Bryant for two years. Any questions on those
20 districts?

21 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

22 MR. SUTTON: I'll make a motion based on your
23 reading.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We have a motion
25 to approve the -- those districts for the times

1 stated. Do we have a -- by Mr. Sutton. Do we have a
2 second?

3 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

4 DR. MOORE: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Second by Mr. Henderson.

6 All in favor?

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

9 Y'all are pooping out on me. Okay. We've got a
10 ways to go. Come on, we can do it. Two more
11 minutes. Come on, you can do it.

12 r) FARMINGTON

13 s) CLINTON

14 t) GUY-PERKINS

15 MS. HARP: Okay. The next group is Arkansas
16 River, and that's Farmington, Clinton, and Guy-
17 Perkins. Farmington changed their consortium to
18 Arkansas River for their K-6. Clinton has no
19 revisions. And Guy-Perkins is only doing K-6 through
20 Arkansas River and has removed 7-12. All three have
21 requested three years.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So this would be
23 Farmington, Clinton, and Guy-Perkins, all for two
24 years.

25 MS. HARP: Yes, ma'am.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any questions on those?
2 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

3 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make that motion that we
4 approve these last --

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So we have
6 a motion to approve by Ms. McFetridge.

7 MR. SUTTON: Second.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.
9 All in favor?

10 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
12 All right.

13 u) BALD KNOB

14 v) MAMMOTH SPRING

15 w) SOUTHSIDE (INDEPENDENCE)

16 X) LAWRENCE COUNTY

17 y) BATESVILLE

18 z) IZARD COUNTY CONSOLIDATED

19 aa) WYNNE

20 ab) SLOAN-HENDRIX

21 ac) CALICO ROCK

22 MS. HARP: Okay. The next group is the Tri-
23 Region Consortium. And the Tri-Region Consortium did
24 change from a K-6 to a K-8 plan, so the districts
25 here have revised their applications to reflect that

1 grade level band. Bald Knob, they did change
2 consortiums completely, so they -- instead of -- they
3 were with Wilbur Mills, and so now they're with the
4 Tri-Region. Mammoth Springs changed to K-8;
5 Southside, no changes there; Lawrence County, no
6 changes; Batesville, Izard County, Wynne, Sloan-
7 Hendrix, and Calico Rock -- all no changes, just
8 changing that grade level band. And they have all
9 requested three years, except for Sloan-Hendrix
10 requested two.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So we're
12 looking at Bald Knob, Mammoth Springs, Southside
13 (Independence County), Lawrence County, Batesville,
14 Izard County Consolidated, Wynne, Sloan-Hendrix, and
15 Calico Rock -- and these are all for two years.

16 Any questions?

17 MS. McFETRIDGE: Yes, I've got a question. Some
18 of them have asked for grades through 6th grade. So
19 I'm confused by your statement. Are all the
20 districts to be changed to K-8?

21 MS. HARP: All of the districts that have gone
22 to the -- that are in the Tri-Region have changed --
23 adapted theirs to K-8. Yes, ma'am.

24 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

25 MS. HARP: And so the ones that -- whoever they

1 had before for their 7-12, they kept the same. So
2 like the majority of them had Virtual Arkansas --
3 Lawrence County, Sloan-Hendrix, Calico Rock all had
4 Virtual Arkansas, so they changed those grade bands
5 from 7-12 to 9-12.

6 DR. MOORE: I have a question for Bald Knob. Is
7 Bald Knob on?

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Is there anyone from Bald Knob
9 on?

10 MS. DUGGER: Yes, ma'am. I'm here.

11 DR. MOORE: So you all are moving from Virtual
12 Arkansas to APEX. Is that correct?

13 MS. DUGGER: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. We have a
14 teacher that will have periods in the day that will
15 be assigned to those kids. And then if she can't
16 help, she will reach out to the other teachers in the
17 high school at that level. But we -- at this time we
18 have zero virtual students signed up.

19 DR. MOORE: Okay. Does APEX provide the
20 curriculum or is that --

21 MS. DUGGER: Yes. APEX will be providing the
22 curriculum.

23 DR. MOORE: Okay. So you --

24 MS. DUGGER: Yes, ma'am.

25 DR. MOORE: -- won't have teachers in dual roles

1 in that sense?

2 MS. DUGGER: Yes. Yes. But like I said, at
3 this time -- last year we had four and they were all
4 seniors, and this year we have zero.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

6 MS. DUGGER: Uh-huh.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

8 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

9 MR. HENDERSON: I make a motion to approve the
10 requests for the districts that were stated.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We have a motion
12 to approve from Mr. Henderson.

13 Do we have a second?

14 MR. SUTTON: Second.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Second by Mr. Sutton.

16 All in favor?

17 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

19 ad) FORT SMITH

20 ae) VILONIA

21 af) EL DORADO

22 MS. HARP: Okay. We're down to the last three.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

24 MS. HARP: And they are secondary programs.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So we're going to make it.

1 MS. HARP: So we have Fort Smith, Vilonia, and
2 El Dorado. Fort Smith changed their program to 9-12
3 and took off K-8; last year it was opposite. Vilonia
4 didn't make any revisions; they are 9-12 still. And
5 then El Dorado changed from Flex Point to the
6 district curriculum. And I did look and their
7 teacher role is virtual only, so they will have a
8 dedicated teacher for that. And then Fort Smith has
9 requested three years; Vilonia, one year; and El
10 Dorado, three years.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So this would be Fort
12 Smith two years, Vilonia one year, El Dorado two
13 years.

14 Anyone have a question about any one of those
15 plans?

16 All right. We're ready for a motion.

17 MS. McFETRIDGE: I'll make the motion as was
18 stated.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.
20 McFetridge.

21 MR. SUTTON: Second.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

23 All in favor?

24 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

1 All right. Thank you. We did that.

2 All right, guys. I think --

3 MS. NICHOLE CUNNINGHAM: Ms. Newton, I have a
4 quick question.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, ma'am.

6 MS. CUNNINGHAM: I'm from Ozark Mountain School
7 District and I am here for a digital learning waiver,
8 and our district was not mentioned.

9 MS. HARP: They're not on our list.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: They're not on the list.
11 They're telling me that you're not on the list.

12 MS. CUNNINGHAM: Okay. We received an email
13 yesterday to be in this Zoom today.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. Tally and --

15 MS. HARP: I can double-check that (inaudible,
16 not at the microphone).

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Who did you receive it from?

18 MS. CUNNINGHAM: Tracy Holland. My
19 superintendent, Jeff Lewis, received it and asked me
20 to be here in his place. I'm Nichole Cunningham.
21 And it came from -- no, it came from Tally Harp to
22 Jeff Lewis, to be on at 10:00 this morning, July
23 14th.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: That may be what it is --

25 MS. HARP: Ozark was on here. I wonder if there

1 was a mix-up.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I bet it was. I bet it was.

3 MS. HARP: Because we were sending those emails

4 --

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah. This -- there was one
6 for Ozark, and so I bet that's the difference there.

7 Ms. Harp is going to reach out to you here in
8 just a few minutes and get the details worked out.

9 MS. CUNNINGHAM: Okay.

10 MS. HARP: Can you tell me your name again?

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Nichole --

12 MS. CUNNINGHAM: My name is Nichole Cunningham.

13 MS. HARP: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Cunningham.

14 MS. CUNNINGHAM: Jeff Lewis is the
15 superintendent.

16 MS. HARP: Okay. I will be in touch with you
17 later today. Okay?

18 MS. CUNNINGHAM: Okay. Thank you.

19 MS. HARP: Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Okay, that's what
21 I was going to ask, to keep Ms. Sharon from having to
22 come back tomorrow. Okay. All right.

23 MR. SUTTON: And Mr. Sutton.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Huh?

25 MR. SUTTON: And Mr. Sutton.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: And Mr. Sutton. All right.

2 13) DAWSON EDUCATIONAL SERVICE COOPERATIVE EVALUATION

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dawson Co-op Evaluation. Ms.
4 Smith.

5 MS. SMITH: Hey. And Darrin Beckwith is on the
6 Zoom. He's the director of Dawson Co-op.

7 So this is a big deal for the co-op. Let me
8 just say that. Okay. So I do want to just take a
9 minute. Co-op evaluations come around once every
10 five years, and so it is starting. Darrin let me --
11 and I'm in charge of all the co-op evaluations this
12 year, and so Darrin let me come and do the first
13 evaluation with him in May. I took the summer off
14 because that's the biggest time for co-ops, and then
15 I'll start back out again in September. I've got two
16 already planned for September.

17 But Dawson Co-op, the evaluation occurred in
18 May. You didn't get the report in June because I
19 went on vacation and left you guys here. But they
20 had excellence ratings throughout their evaluation.
21 The number one word to describe the co-op throughout
22 all of our interviews -- and we did comprehensive
23 interviews with superintendents, principals, teacher-
24 centered coordinators, staff at the co-op -- was the
25 word responsive -- that they were responsive. And

1 they serve 22 districts in their region, and the
2 smaller school districts -- I mean, if we heard it
3 once we heard it a million times that the co-op was a
4 critical partner in meeting the needs and services of
5 students and their districts and that they could not
6 make it without them -- over and over again. The
7 larger districts talked about the partnership and the
8 ability to network and how the co-op would set that
9 up, and also the ability of the co-op to be able to
10 address needs of their singletons that they weren't
11 able to address. So they had an excellent
12 evaluation. I was thrilled to be there that day.

13 Darrin, do you want to say anything?

14 Oh, you're muted still. There you go.

15 Still can't hear you.

16 MS. SMITH: Darrin, that was wonderful, whatever
17 you said. I have no idea what you said.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I bet he has -- I think maybe
19 that's it.

20 MS. SMITH: Last chance.

21 Still can't hear you, so I'm cutting you off
22 now.

23 Well, I can tell you that Darrin and his staff
24 were excellent to work with, provided all the
25 information in a timely fashion. The districts that

1 work with them gave very favorable remarks. If you
2 guys have any questions for me, I'll be happy to
3 answer those.

4 But each of the evaluations, once they're
5 completed I'll bring them to you. They are an action
6 item for you to approve. So we're going to spread
7 them out throughout the year. The last time they did
8 it, they brought them all to you at one time and did
9 a presentation. I'm going to load the evaluation
10 sheet each time and ask them to be on there, so if
11 you have any questions about something they'll be
12 there for you. Next month -- they all submitted an
13 annual report, and there will be all 15 annual
14 reports on there but that is just a regular thing
15 that happens every year. So that will be on the
16 August board meeting, and then we'll come back later
17 with more evaluations.

18 MS. McFETRIDGE: They have a 96 approval rating.
19 I think they did real well.

20 MS. SMITH: They did. They did excellent.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

22 MS. SMITH: They were excellent.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

24 MS. McFETRIDGE: That's great.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It's hard to get 96% of people

1 to agree on anything. So, yeah, that was great.

2 DR. MOORE: And you may have said this, but how
3 often do we do these evaluations?

4 MS. SMITH: Once every five years. The rules
5 state that it has to be done at least once every five
6 years.

7 DR. MOORE: Well, as I was reading through this
8 I was thinking of how helpful it is for them, you
9 know, to have that needs assessment almost with y'all
10 talking to people to understand where they are and
11 where they can go. And, obviously, they're doing
12 great, but still are things to work on.

13 MS. SMITH: Well --

14 DR. MOORE: We all do, so --

15 MS. SMITH: And the thing that was so easy with
16 -- to work with Mr. Beckwith and his team was when we
17 set up the evaluation day we set up Zoom interviews
18 for different groups. And one of the questions we
19 asked Darrin was, "What do you want to know? What do
20 you want to learn from this so that you can grow?"
21 And they really said, "We feel like we do a good job
22 with our smaller districts, but we really want to
23 hear from our larger districts what we can do." And
24 so we really like posed those questions and we put it
25 out there to the districts on "your co-op wants to

1 know this information." And so Darrin's group was
2 receptive to information that we gathered and it was
3 a great day, so --

4 MR. BECKWITH: Can you hear me now by chance?

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, we can hear you.

6 MS. SMITH: Man, I thought we were going to luck
7 out, Darrin.

8 MR. BECKWITH: Okay. No, I never, ever want to
9 follow Stacy, but I'll have to do what I've got to do
10 here.

11 The thing I would say was compared to the last
12 co-op visit -- I'm going into my seventh year, and
13 compared to how we did it the first time I felt like
14 it was really a deeper dive than what we did. You
15 know, just like everybody else, the evaluation system
16 was, you know, at times -- you've got to grow with
17 the times and we hadn't done that. And I want to
18 applaud Stacy and her group for doing that; they went
19 out and totally revamped the process. And, you know,
20 it really gave us pause, time to pause and really
21 look at some areas that we feel like and we know we
22 can get better in. And it's always great to have
23 that set of outside eyes on you.

24 And I want to say one more thing before I get
25 off of here: I think it's important for you guys to

1 know that Secretary Key and his crew, they're doing a
2 fantastic job. I've been in education -- I'm going
3 into year 27, and I just think it's important that
4 you all know how responsive they are. It's been --
5 hasn't always been that way, I'll say it like that.
6 But they do an incredible job. If they say, "Hey,
7 you know, I'm heading into a meeting, I'll call you
8 back," it may be 8:00 at night but they call us back.
9 And I know y'all get to hear a lot of good things
10 about schools, but I just wanted to make sure that we
11 have the opportunity to tell them they do a great job
12 as well.

13 MS. SMITH: Thank you. Appreciate you, Darrin.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Congratulations, Mr. Beckwith.
15 I know from experience that y'all do a great job down
16 there. So thank you for all that you do and all you
17 do to help schools and teachers be effective for
18 students. So, thank you.

19 All right. So I think we need a motion to
20 approve this evaluation.

21 MS. McFETRIDGE: I make the motion to approve.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion by Ms.
23 McFetridge.

24 DR. MOORE: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Dr. Moore.

1 All in favor?

2 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We have a couple
4 of rules.

5 14) PROPOSED RULES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT RELEASE: DESE RULES
6 GOVERNING THE SUCCEED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a couple of rules.

8 Ms. Salas-Ford. You've had a long day waiting on us.

9 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah, but I don't mind at all.

10 And I promise to be quick since these are the last
11 two things keeping you from adjourning for the day.

12 Courtney Salas-Ford for the Department.

13 The first rules for your consideration for
14 public comment are the rules governing the Succeed
15 Scholarship Program. These were updated to include
16 the provisions of Act 689 and 741 of 2021. So we are
17 asking for approval to release these for public
18 comment pending Governor's office review.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions on the
20 rules for Succeed Scholarship?

21 Okay. We're ready for a motion then.

22 DR. MOORE: I'll move to approve the proposed
23 rules for public comment pending Governor's office
24 approval.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a motion by Dr. Moore.

1 MS. McFETRIDGE: Second.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McPetridge.

3 All in favor?

4 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

6 15) PROPOSED RULES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT RELEASE: DESE RULES
7 GOVERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES, SECTION 18.00
8 RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. One more item.

10 MS. SALAS-FORD: These are Section 10 of the
11 Special Education rules governing mediations and due
12 process hearings. These are actually not the result
13 of legislation. The Special Education Office
14 recently underwent monitoring from the U.S.
15 Department of Education, Office of Special Education
16 Programs, and were notified of a conflicting
17 provision in these rules. The Special Ed. office had
18 already been looking at revising the rules over a
19 lengthy process. So we took out the provision that
20 conflicts with IDEA, which had to do with expedited
21 due process hearing timelines, and then we just
22 cleaned up a few other things regarding due process
23 hearing procedures.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

25 MS. SALAS-FORD: And we are asking for your

1 approval to release them for public comment pending
2 Governor's office review.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions on these
4 rules?

5 DR. MOORE: I did. I didn't quite understand.
6 So when -- is it taking out the expedited review or
7 replacing it with a different type?

8 MS. SALAS-FORD: In one of the sections that we
9 had in our rules it said that the hearing officer
10 could provide an extension of the timeline for a due
11 process hearing, which typically is required to be
12 completed within 20 days. Under IDEA, extensions are
13 not permitted.

14 DR. MOORE: Okay.

15 MS. SALAS-FORD: And so we took out that
16 allowance for extensions and it's strictly required
17 to be 20 days.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay. So it mirrors federal now.
19 Okay. Thank you.

20 MS. SALAS-FORD: Uh-huh.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

22 All right. We need a motion.

23 DR. MOORE: I'll move to approve the proposed
24 rules for public comment release pending Governor's
25 office approval.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a motion by Dr. Moore.
2 Do we have a second?

3 MS. McFETRIDGE: Second.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Ms. McFetridge.
5 All in favor?

6 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?
8 All right.

9 MS. SALAS-FORD: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

11 CLOSING COMMENTS

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any new business?

13 Ms. Freno, do we have any public comments?

14 MS. FRENO: No, there are no public comments.

15 No one is here to make a public comment. I believe
16 there were some on the sheet --

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

18 MS. FRENO: -- earlier, but there's no one here
19 to make a public comment.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Nobody here, but they're
21 coming back tomorrow. Okay. All right.

22 ADJOURNMENT

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So we move to the very last
24 item on the agenda, which is adjournment. So I think
25 we are adjourned. You've done enough for today. All

1 right.

2 DR. MOORE: Do we need to make a motion?

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

4 MR. SUTTON: Do I need to make a motion?

5 SECRETARY KEY: No. Do you object?

6 MR. SUTTON: I do not object.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think we just --

8 MS. FRENO: Are y'all going to make a motion to
9 adjourn? Because I did not hear it.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. Freno says we have
11 to make a motion to adjourn. Okay. So, Mr. Sutton
12 --

13 MS. FRENO: Just two seconds.

14 MR. SUTTON: Motion.

15 DR. MOORE: Second.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Dr. Moore.

17 All in favor?

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

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22 (The Action Agenda was concluded at 5:07 p.m.)
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VI.2. HARMONY GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXHIBIT ONE (1)

Sharon K. Hill, CCR

VI.2. HARMONY GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXHIBIT TWO (2)

Sharon K. Hill, CCR

VI.5(a) - HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXHIBIT ONE (1)

Sharon K. Hill, CCR

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VI.6.(e) - GOYNE SCHOOL CHOICE APPEAL
EXHIBIT ONE (2)

C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)
) ss.
COUNTY OF SALINE)

I, SHARON K. HILL, CCR, a Certified Stenomask Reporter and Notary Public before whom the foregoing proceedings was taken, do hereby certify that the same is a true and correct transcription before the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, State Board of Education, in Little Rock, Arkansas, on July 14, 2022, that the said proceedings was reduced to typewritten form by me or under my direction and supervision; and that the foregoing pages constitute a true and correct transcription of all proceedings had in said matter.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I have no contract with any parties within this action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial agency, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties to the action.

WITNESS, MY HAND AND SEAL, THIS DATE: July 24, 2022.

SHARON K. HILL, CCR
Certified Court Reporter
Certificate No. 670