

ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

DECEMBER 11, 2025

9:00 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. ADRIENNE WOODS, Chair
MS. LISA HUNTER, Vice Chair
MR. JEFF WOOD
MR. KEN BRAGG
DR. GARY ARNOLD
MR. DAVID PEACOCK
DR. AARON ABBOTT

NON-VOTING BOARD MEMBERS:

MR. JACOB OLIVA, Secretary of Education
MS. JEANIE WILCOXON, Arkansas Teacher of the Year

ALSO APPEARING:

MS. STACY SMITH, Deputy Commissioner - DESE
MS. COURTNEY SALAS-FORD, Chief of Staff

LOCATION:

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

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P R O C E E D I N G S

ACTION AGENDA

**1. REVIEW OF DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLANS THAT RECEIVED A "F"
LETTER GRADE**

CHAIR WOODS: Well, then we will move forward with the action agenda. Okay.

At this time, I'm going to turn it over to Stacy. And we'll have Stacy Smith come introduce and set our agenda for the next bit.

SECT. OLIVA: Sure.

And as Stacy's making her way up, I just want to kind of give some context or some background to why we invited some of the school districts to be in front of our board today. As many of you know we've -- we've been in a pretty long journey of building out a system to support students and school districts to make sure that every student has an opportunity to be on path to be a presidential scholar; right? And as we've been redesigning the system and you've been a part of this process throughout this journey as we've -- we've updated standards; we've looked at professional development, implementing high-quality instruction material, building out a new assessment system so that we can get real-time information on student performance and garner supports and make

1 instructional decisions throughout the school year.
2 We built out a new way that we grade schools and we
3 released -- which I think is a world class
4 accountability model that measures, in a clear and
5 concise manner, the overall performance of a school,
6 whether or not kids are learning, whether or not
7 they're at grade level. Are they graduating? Are
8 they graduating to be success ready, ready to be
9 successful in life? And one of the tasks that we
10 were given through legislature was to come up with a
11 district grade, and this is the first time that we've
12 done this. To me, this is a pretty historic moment
13 because a lot of times you might just look at a -- a
14 school district and if they're a real small school
15 district -- some school districts only have one
16 campus. So if you're going to say, what's the
17 district grade? Well, it's the grade at the one
18 school. And the community knows; the parents know.
19 As we're empowering parents and looking for choice,
20 we want to give them information that helps them make
21 the best decisions that works for their families.
22 Well, in more medium size or even larger districts,
23 sometimes we're targeting a few schools where they
24 may be performing over -- well. They may have some A
25 and B schools, but maybe there's a couple D and F

1 schools and it's really looking at the way we target
2 and support school districts in particular,
3 especially if they have a campus that's not
4 performing at the level that we would like to see.
5 Well then, now that we've done district grades, what
6 -- what that means is that we've aggregated the data
7 of all the students within the district and said
8 overall, how well is the district performing?

9 Well, when we calculated those district grades
10 there -- there's, I want to say, 12 districts and
11 networks that showed up on the list. And to me, we
12 need to make sure we're doing our job and our
13 diligence as a Board to ensure that the district has
14 the right plan in place and that we can provide the
15 support for those districts to eliminate failure.
16 And we're not talking about eliminating failure as
17 we're going to adopt a three-to-five-year plan, this
18 is rapid improvement that we expect to see within
19 this school year. And when we talk about acting with
20 urgency, that's why we wanted to make sure we got
21 this data out, that we're immediately working with
22 districts and we're able to inform this Board to make
23 sure that there's a plan in place. What I can tell
24 you is, when we looked at those F networks in school
25 districts, one of them this Board is already very

1 familiar with, and that's Blytheville. And we've
2 already taken some severe action and put some
3 protocols in place. So we didn't invite them to come
4 back to the Board for a district plan approval
5 because we've already gone through that process.
6 It's probably getting to the point of the year now
7 where, maybe in January, I'm thinking it's a good
8 idea to do an update because it's -- it's the middle
9 of the school year. Now that we've put some new
10 systems and piece is in place to see what that
11 progress monitoring data is saying. Some of the
12 schools were charter networks, and if we have charter
13 schools that aren't really supporting the students in
14 a manner that we expect, we're going to hold them
15 just as accountable. And those charter schools and
16 networks are actually going next month for the
17 Charter Authorizing Panel to present their plans
18 because this isn't about being punitive, this is
19 about how do we make sure we're all rowing in the
20 same direction together.

21 Well, we have six traditional districts that
22 we're going to hear from today to do an overview of
23 their district improvement plan and talk about the
24 stuff that they've already done to make sure that
25 we're supporting students and teachers and leaders

1 and what we can help support them moving forward. I
2 will tell you as I've met with all of these districts
3 and I've had an opportunity to meet with every
4 superintendent, visit their districts, I can tell you
5 that it's encouraging having these conversations
6 because every one of these superintendents have a
7 plan. They're owning the data and they don't want to
8 see failure in their communities as well. And so I
9 -- I've told them this is your chance actually to
10 come in and spotlight how you've been proactive and
11 how you're going to lead the state in improving
12 learning and how we can be a partner with you. And
13 what we've done is ask the districts to give some
14 assurances that we can hold them accountable to and
15 they want to be held accountable, that we're going to
16 review to make sure we agree with their strategy and
17 plan.

18 But it's really a three-pronged approach. One,
19 we know that leadership matters, so we want to hear
20 from the superintendent. What are they doing to
21 support their principals and their teachers and
22 leaders and the decisions that they're making? Two,
23 governance matters. We want to hear -- we've asked
24 the superintendent to bring their board chairs. Some
25 have brought almost their entire board. Because what

1 are the elected officials doing to make sure that the
2 operations are working in a manner that's efficient
3 in producing the outcomes? And three, we know that
4 direct support matters. And we've asked the co-op
5 director to come and be part of this meeting to talk
6 about their role in making sure that we're giving
7 teachers and leaders the resources and support that
8 they need, and how are they going to be a direct
9 support organization as a educational cooperative to
10 eliminate failure. So as we hear from these
11 districts, I think it's important to know why this is
12 a big deal; right? Because when we say that a school
13 district is an F, that -- that's a black eye on that
14 community and we need to fix that; and we need to
15 make sure we're doing our part in supporting and
16 ensuring that the right work is happening. And
17 that's why we're going to bring those folks in here
18 and up -- and have some updates today.

19 So Stacy's going to introduce each of the
20 districts, give a little bit of historical overview
21 or kind of perspective of the state -- of the state
22 of the district and then we've asked the
23 superintendents to provide an update on their plan.

24 MR. BRAGG: Can I ask a question?

25 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah -- I don't know if there's

1 any -- you might want to see if the Board has any
2 questions.

3 CHAIR WOODS: All I was going to say is just the
4 general flow is each district is going to have 15
5 minutes to do your presentation. I think Sheila --
6 Ms. Whitlow is going to be our timekeeper and she'll
7 keep us moving. And we'll open it up for questions
8 after the presentation.

9 MR. BRAGG: Before we -- I'm -- I know we've set
10 a baseline here, but how are we actually measuring
11 the progress? Are we putting a time frame on this?
12 Or if they're making incremental progress over time,
13 is that what we're meaning?

14 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. So you know I -- I go back
15 to we have to eliminate failure. We have an F
16 district in front of us. We're not going to let them
17 to continue to be an F, so we're going to put
18 together a plan that we're going to review. We're
19 going to monitor that plan to make sure we're doing
20 what we're supposed to be doing, and if achievements
21 not improving and we're doing what we're supposed to
22 be doing, maybe we need to adjust the plan. Or if
23 achievements not improving and they're not doing what
24 they're supposed to be doing, we need to call them
25 back and hold folks -- adults accountable. And if we

1 have a system that's continuing to fail, that system
2 may need to look different in the year or two. And
3 that's what happened to Blytheville. If you
4 remember, we went to Blytheville, had a meeting in
5 their community, shared their data with the school
6 board and said we're going to collectively come up
7 with a plan to implement. They agreed. We agreed --
8 our Board agreed on that plan. We kept asking them
9 to come up and give updates on the plan. The
10 dysfunctional adults running that system could not
11 implement that plan. So eventually we came to this
12 Board and so we got to get these adults out of the
13 way and get some new adults in there. And we did
14 that. And today is setting that baseline to say, we
15 got to get this right. And I'm not talking about in
16 three to five years from now. We need to see
17 improvements throughout this school year in January.
18 And these F's need to go away when we issue grades
19 next summer.

20 MS. SMITH: Okay. So I'm going to kind of just
21 give you a little bit of background too on specifics
22 of what they were asked to present to you today.

23 Each district, again, has been told that they
24 can give a 15-minute presentation. They've been
25 asked not to just belabor data that you already have,

1 but to really focus on the specifics of the actions
2 in which they are working on in their districts for
3 improvement, like what are they actually doing;
4 right? You also had on the agenda today an assurance
5 statement. All right. The Department actually wrote
6 the assurance statements, which are -- is very action
7 oriented. That they're monitoring, that they're
8 collaborating, that they're evaluating, that they're
9 -- they're doing certain actions based on what their
10 district strategic plan was, right?

11 Mr. WOOD: Do we have a copy of that?

12 MS. SMITH: Yes. It was on the agenda, but I'll
13 get you a copy if you don't have it.

14 MR. WOOD: Never mind. I see it. I'm sorry.

15 MS. SMITH: Okay. That's okay.

16 And so this is today what you're actually
17 accepting. You're accepting the district's assurance
18 that they are doing what they're saying to you today
19 that they're going to do, all right? District letter
20 grades -- the Fs that they have is based on our
21 accountability system, which is based on their
22 achievement scores on the ATLAS state exam. It's
23 based on their growth scores from that exam. As well
24 as their lowest quartile growth scores, which really
25 focuses on systems of support and remediation. And

1 it also focuses on graduation rate and students
2 graduating success ready, graduating with those
3 higher distinctions, okay? So today the conversation
4 should be very academic, student-outcome focused and
5 what they're doing to move that needle. All right.
6 The first district today -- again, Sheila is going to
7 kind of -- if you see the district going over there
8 15 minutes, she's going to get up and let them know
9 and then we'll keep this moving at a pretty steady
10 pace.

11 CHAIR WOODS: So just to confirm, any motion
12 will be to either accept or reject the district's
13 statement of --

14 MS. SMITH: To accept their assurances that they
15 -- what they're saying today. And again, this is a
16 public record and opportunity for this Board to
17 either affirm that what you're hearing from the
18 district today, what they're working on, sounds like
19 a good plan. It's also the opportunity for this
20 Board to say, have you thought about this? Why do
21 you do this? This doesn't make sense to me. All
22 right? So this is a public-record opportunity today
23 to give feedback; right? And to hear -- and say what
24 they're doing. Again, as Secretary Oliva said in a
25 few months, if our visits are -- we're going to

1 schools and we're like, you know what this is --
2 these are the things they said they were doing.
3 We're not seeing it. Then we can bring them back.
4 All right. So it's our monitoring method to be able
5 to say, here's what we say we're doing and us being
6 able to monitor those actions.

7 Any other questions?

8 **1.a. WATSON CHAPEL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

9 MS. SMITH: Okay. First district today is
10 Watson Chapel School District. Superintendent of
11 Watson Chapel is Dr. Keith McGee. He is in his
12 second year at the school district. One of the
13 questions one of the Board members asked previously
14 was how far are districts away from the next letter
15 grade? So they're actually 2.89 points away from the
16 district letter grade of a D, okay? They are in the
17 Arkansas River Cooperative. They -- the school
18 district is made-up of four schools. Things that
19 kind of jumped out in terms of questions or things
20 that this Board may want to ask today or -- or have
21 the superintendent dig into a little bit at some
22 point: right now the district has 20 percent of
23 their teachers on a teacher licensure plan, meaning
24 20 percent of their teachers are unlicensed. Okay.
25 So what kind of supports are they providing those

1 teachers? How are they ensuring that quality
2 learning is happening in those classrooms?

3 So about 78 percent, 79 percent of the teachers
4 are licensed in Watson Chapel. Of their four schools
5 -- this was a concern that kind of jumped out to us.
6 Their 2024 simulated grades, which was the first year
7 we ran our new accountability system based on our
8 ATLAS assessments, two of the schools had Cs, two of
9 the schools had Ds. And so when they came out with
10 their 2025 grades, all four schools had dropped to an
11 F. Watson Chapel is a school district that we have
12 brought to this Board before and had some attention
13 -- conversations, kind of got it -- kind of got back
14 on track.

15 They have had new leadership and new
16 superintendents since that time, but again, probably
17 to dig down deeper into how are we ensuring that
18 quality is happening in the classroom? And what does
19 that growth piece look like? Other data that jumped
20 out was that no school last year increased in growth
21 from the previous year's ATLAS exam. So first ATLAS
22 exam, second ATLAS exam, all four schools dropped in
23 their growth data. So that's an area of questioning
24 or what you're listening for today to hear. How are
25 we improving that? Okay?

1 So at this time, I'm going to ask Dr. Keith
2 McGee to come up and to present the actions that the
3 district is taking.

4 SUPT. MCGEE: Well, good morning, State Board
5 Members. Ms. -- Madam Chair, Members of the State
6 Board, Secretary Oliva, I am pleased to join you to
7 share this plan that we are doing.

8 I also want to acknowledge our local board here.
9 I want to tell you just a little bit of context about
10 Watson Chapel. I am very big about all of our
11 teachers being licensed. Prior to last year, with my
12 arrival 17 months ago, it was about 40, over 40
13 percent. Nearly 50 percent of those teachers was on,
14 at that time, 1240 waiver. We have cut that down.
15 We had cut that down before the new law came in,
16 where we only had about maybe 20 at that time. So
17 that's roughly -- reflect right now about 20 percent
18 of our teachers are licensed.

19 So I'm going to jump right in here. You know
20 the purpose here. I'm going to skip this. But I do
21 want to point out the purpose. This is just a clear
22 overview of what -- overview what we have done and
23 what we're doing and really outline the systems we
24 had. Systems were a huge challenge for us. It
25 continued to be a challenge as well as you had talk

1 -- hear me talk about leadership. Here for the root
2 cause here that -- since my arrival that I've
3 determined, along with my team, and members of my
4 team is here as well, we are very inconsistent in
5 using our HQIM, high-quality instructional material.
6 I do want to thank our board, our local board,
7 because they approve of high-quality instructional
8 material that are state-approved. We are
9 inconsistent using that, those things.

10 We didn't have a guaranteed vital curriculum.
11 We now have one at a standard base. We was just kind
12 of all over the place. Our Tier 1 core instruction
13 was a huge challenge, when all means all. My -- it's
14 my job that I feel like, and -- and I've encouraged
15 my staff here in Pine Bluff that all of our scholars
16 should have the opportunity. No matter the zip code,
17 it should never be an obstacle. It should be an
18 opportunity, just like you just announced those
19 presidential scholars. That's what I want my
20 scholars to have. And -- and -- and I also challenge
21 my district, my leaders that the zip code cannot
22 determine their destiny. It cannot. Again, I echo
23 Secretary Oliva's sentiments in his remarks. I've
24 been preaching that same sermon, and I will continue
25 to preach that sermon, and my actions will line up.

1 Another cause of that is our leadership, our building
2 leadership, the -- the human capital district
3 leadership. The system has just been ineffective.
4 And one of the huge pieces before is the culture. We
5 just have a strong -- the culture was not
6 student-focused. It just wasn't student-centered.

7 So our board, I'm pleased our board has adopted
8 a new strategic plan, revised our vision and mission.
9 I didn't put that in there, but our vision is simple:
10 preparing today's students for tomorrow's
11 opportunity. The first priority -- and priority one
12 and two can flip-flop, but number -- I want to say
13 with priority two, creating positive safe cultures.
14 If you recall, Watson Chapel had an issue with
15 safety. Safety was a huge issue. We now have
16 addressed those issues, so scholars can feel safe.
17 And how do I know that? Because I meet with them
18 monthly, middle -- elementary, middle and high
19 school. And they have told me that -- that they now
20 feel safe. Now we -- we got to -- we have a long way
21 to go with that as well because mental health is
22 still real. But the other thing that the board
23 adopted is priority number one -- I kind of flip-flop
24 -- which is accelerate student outcomes. This local
25 board is now focused on how we move students in the

1 right direction. Priority three, making sure that
2 we're operating efficiently, our finance, making sure
3 that we are putting our funding back to our
4 priorities. And then lastly, making sure that we
5 continue to build meaningful partnerships, not only
6 with our parents, but our community.

7 So the biggest piece, the governance here is
8 again just a -- that new strategic plan. You know
9 that we are currently building a \$40 million high
10 school that is set to open in the fall, and it's
11 going to be beautiful. But also, our board is --
12 continued to make sure that the -- our funds, as I
13 stated earlier, reflects our priorities.

14 So one of the -- a huge challenge -- because I
15 said HQIM was a challenge for us. We are focused on
16 that, making sure that all of our scholars are at
17 grade level or above. And how do we do that? Making
18 sure that we are using a high-quality instructional
19 material with integrity. And I say integrity because
20 it need to be, and I know that we -- Secretary Oliva
21 states he has to visit the school. It doesn't -- I
22 want -- I want to set and create a culture. It
23 doesn't matter who shows up and when, that we're
24 going to be teaching, regardless, at that grade
25 level. I pop in, and you'll see that here daily

1 minute. The actions that we've taken is fully work
2 and support each of our campuses' building principal,
3 assistant principals, instructional facilitator, how
4 to use the HQIM.

5 And let me back up a little bit and add to this
6 context. We did not have a district team that
7 supported instruction. We now have that, and you
8 will see that we have hired executive director of
9 curriculum and instruction. We now have a team of
10 about five or six that goes out. It is my job -- and
11 I say this, and I don't mean any disrespect at all.
12 My job is to set up a system where the district
13 support the instruction and not depend on the co-op
14 or the Department that this is occurring. We now
15 have that system set up. So the biggest piece right
16 there is to continue with the coaching lab and the
17 expected results. We want the rigor and the student
18 engagement and just consistency of instructional
19 practicing.

20 Goal number two, in terms of academic, we got to
21 have what we call the multi-tiered system of -- of
22 support. We have trained, and we implemented that.
23 And that is a -- that is forthcoming. We've started
24 that process. Again, our building leadership,
25 sometimes it's a challenge for them on what they need

1 to look like. We have modeled for them. We've even
2 taken them to school sets -- settings to show them
3 what they look like because again, that is just a
4 culture there that we want to make sure the -- the
5 support of those kids.

6 We got to learn how to use data-driven
7 instruction, what does our data say, and use
8 real-time data from our common formative assessment
9 to our student work, to the observations, to the
10 drop-ins. We got to continue to build that. Some of
11 the things that we do with that is our professional
12 learning communities. They meet weekly. We built in
13 a new schedule, so they got time to work day --
14 weekly inside those professional learning communities
15 to look at the data, what does this data say and
16 drive that instruction, the interventions. And you
17 see that there. And the system strategy that we need
18 to do from the district level and the building
19 operations here is create those things, make sure it
20 is efficient, that we can streamline all of our
21 processes so our schools, our building leaders,
22 assistant principal, instructional facilitators, they
23 don't have to have what -- the state uses some type
24 of red tape. We want to remove the red tape from the
25 district. So we are realigning that piece. So we've

1 aligned that so far, and those things there.

2 We're going to keep us moving. We continue to
3 train professional development for our leadership.
4 We have biweekly trainings for our principals,
5 instructional facilitators. And then we come back,
6 and we retrain the assistant principal, what they're
7 trained. We bring in some of my colleagues from
8 across the state to share as well. So we also meet
9 with our principals because you'll see in a minute
10 that we have done, from the district level to this
11 date -- well, really the end of November -- 142
12 walkthroughs. So those walkthroughs that -- we found
13 out earlier in September that there was a challenge
14 for our building leaders, our principals. So we now
15 created a system where they check in week --
16 biweekly, individually, and we score them on the
17 rules, the LEADS rubric which is the principal's
18 rubric to evaluate them. And the professional
19 learning for teachers, we also -- let me go back to
20 another challenge that I didn't mention. Previously,
21 we didn't build in the professional development for
22 our teachers. Now we have those professional
23 development days spreaded out. And we purposely
24 spreaded that out so that when principals able to
25 collect that data, CFA data, we collect that data, we

1 can determine what professional development is needed
2 during the school year so they can make adjustments
3 so that we can see improvement in student outcomes.

4 How we monitor this? We look at the data
5 quarterly; and I will say that my team look at the
6 data weekly. Again, the walkthroughs, you see that
7 number here in the check-ins. And we go and we --
8 when we're doing our walkthroughs, we documented the
9 HQIM, and it's the -- connected to the standards. So
10 the principals are required to conduct eight to ten
11 observations weekly. They're also required to the
12 week -- attend the weekly leadership team meetings.
13 And they also must review those data weekly so when
14 we do our check-ins with them, we have already looked
15 at the data as well. So we are having this
16 conversation with them. And then lastly, they got to
17 continue to track quarterly on the student
18 improvement plans. And you can see the timeline for
19 implementation.

20 Still, I'm -- I'm very big on culture and
21 continue to connect with our community. We got to
22 continue. I think that -- it's three phases that I
23 looked at once on my arrival 17 months ago. It's
24 three phases. Number one, the safety. Number two
25 was the academics. And number three, there was a

1 disconnect with our community in terms of
2 partnership. So we now are -- have addressed the
3 safety piece, and we are definitely connected with
4 our community partners. We have -- we're constantly
5 -- Relyance Bank is one of our big partners, Central
6 Moloney. So we're connecting back. So now we have
7 to continue to improve this academic piece. That's
8 what you see here.

9 And obviously, the City of Pine Bluff, just that
10 area, the recruitment, retention and retaining of our
11 teachers and really putting high-quality teachers in
12 front of our scholars, but also putting high-quality
13 leaders inside of those buildings. The board, at
14 this past Monday's board meeting, I brought to them
15 to a one-time bonus for our teachers so that we can
16 show them to -- how -- how much we value them; and
17 the board approved that unanimous. So we got to try
18 to keep them there. Just sitting here -- just while
19 I'm sitting here at the State Board, we just had a
20 resignation. Just while I was just sitting here. So
21 now that's a teacher that we got to turn around and
22 find in the middle of the school year.

23 So we're being creative and -- and -- and we're
24 going to continue to be creative, and we're not going
25 to run from it. I'm an old coach. I played

1 basketball, two torn Achilles tendons and a shoulder
2 -- tore my shoulder. So what I'm talking about is
3 I'm a -- I'm very competitive. Why can't my scholars
4 be -- receive a US presidential scholar? Why can't
5 my scholars be a National Merit? That's what I'm
6 sharing with my -- my principals, my team. And I'm
7 going to do everything from this seat to ensure they
8 have that opportunity.

9 As I get ready to close and go through what we
10 need, I will say this again, our zip codes cannot be
11 an obstacle for our scholars. It will become an
12 opportunity. And what we need from that, from our
13 co-op, is continue to -- the additional content
14 support, teacher training, the job-embedded on the
15 high-yield instructional strategies, but grade-level
16 rigor, but the student engagement and the guidance
17 there you can see.

18 I'm assuring you that we are committed from the
19 updates that we are going to continue to monitor the
20 student performance because I -- I, the
21 superintendent, Dr. Keith McGee, reserve one day a
22 week, spend all day in the classrooms. That's -- and
23 I strategically do that so that I can be able. Then
24 I also do random pop-ins because that's the right
25 thing to do for our scholars. And lastly, we're

1 going to continue to strengthen the staff and the
2 leadership stability because that is an obstacle, and
3 the progress of implementation and monitoring
4 instructional initiatives.

5 And with that, and I do want to recognize my
6 board president, Mr. Mack Milner, is here, and then
7 Ms. Cathi Swan, with -- the co-op director. We'll
8 take any questions.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. --

10 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you, Dr. McGee. Clear --
11 clear presentation. I just wanted to inquire about
12 -- and thank you for highlighting your root causes.
13 And I'd like to go to that slide where it comments on
14 culture and expectations. Could you comment on what
15 -- to me, there's a gap somewhere where it says
16 strong culture, where students were not the focus. I
17 mean, that's quite an admission. Thank you for
18 zeroing in on that. You've agreed with us all, the
19 culture, each strategy, hands down. But on the next
20 slide, the strategic goals for improvement, when we
21 go to culture, which is priority two, as it should
22 be, if not one, it -- it -- it defaults back to
23 staff.

24 SUPT. MCGEE: So let me say this, it is priority
25 one. I didn't want to put all of the bullets in

1 there.

2 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

3 SUPT. MCGEE: So inside of our strategic plan,
4 which we -- we just approved on Monday, you'll see
5 they have -- each one of those priority have goals,
6 and they have culture breaking down by itself in
7 terms of safety.

8 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

9 SUPT. MCGEE: And in terms of -- it -- it -- you
10 -- I just couldn't put it all in there. I didn't
11 have 15 minutes.

12 DR. ARNOLD: I understand.

13 SUPT. MCGEE: But you don't know I'm a Baptist
14 preacher.

15 DR. ARNOLD: Hey.

16 SUPT. MCGEE: And I could be a little long-
17 winded. That's why Ms. Whitlow is -- has already
18 given me the finger. So --

19 DR. ARNOLD: What finger?

20 SUPT. MCGEE: So I -- I -- that's the reason
21 why.

22 DR. ARNOLD: This one.

23 SUPT. MCGEE: So that's the reason why I didn't
24 put it in there.

25 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah, that's great. That's fine.

1 But if you could -- if you could comment just one
2 more time about the -- the -- the -- the relationship
3 between the student culture and your staff morale or
4 cultural issues around them.

5 SUPT. MCGEE: So I -- I would say that the
6 students weren't the focus prior to me getting there.
7 And how do I know that? Because there were decisions
8 made what's best for adults. Our master schedule in
9 each of our buildings, it should be driven by the --
10 what the students' needs are, not to accommodate a
11 coach.

12 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah.

13 SUPT. MCGEE: Or accommodate a certain person.
14 So when I say that that's what it was occurring,
15 which leads a gap and a void to put a high-quality
16 teacher in front of the student. So those decision
17 even -- and I'm just going to be a -- again, I'm -- I
18 don't know no other way than to be transparent. Even
19 from our central office, we weren't making a decision
20 that was based on staff. Our principals didn't even
21 have a budget. They weren't able to use their money
22 to put up support. We have realigned all of that.
23 So we couldn't necessarily do before-school or after-
24 school tutoring program. They didn't have a budget.

25 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah. Well, I would only suggest,

1 Dr. McGee, that that -- those comments about students
2 driving the strategy versus staff be more reflected
3 on the slide strategic goals for improvement.

4 SUPT. MCGEE: Yeah.

5 CHAIR WOODS: I'll stay on this side. Sorry to
6 --

7 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah. I had a couple of
8 questions. What kind of research are y'all doing in
9 terms of why teachers are leaving? Is it for safety,
10 for pay, for frustration?

11 SUPT. MCGEE: We -- we -- we've done a survey, a
12 exit survey. A couple of things. Number one, the
13 pay which we are working on that. And number two,
14 some of them just leave because of the
15 accountability.

16 MR. PEACOCK: And that's a good thing though;
17 right?

18 SUPT. MCGEE: Yeah.

19 MR. PEACOCK: In that -- in those situations.

20 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes.

21 MR. PEACOCK: The -- you talked about the
22 principals reporting out instead of you going to them
23 and doing the walkouts. Biweekly, I think you said
24 they report to you. Can you give us a specific
25 example of where a principal identified -- reported

1 out there was an issue that was identified and how
2 y'all addressed it?

3 SUPT. MCGEE: So I don't want to go in a lot of
4 context. I want to go back to the slide that I said
5 that. Remember, I said it was -- we meet with them
6 weekly with LEADS when they do not report back like
7 that. So that's how we're holding them accountable
8 because they can't. That is a challenge. So we --
9 it's almost I don't want to go a whole lot of detail
10 because of how we set it up. That's just a challenge
11 why our leaders can't identify those things. And one
12 of the things that we have with our conversation with
13 them then, if you don't have any context or asking us
14 for support, and we are looking at your data, then
15 share with me how you are holding your teacher
16 support. Are they on the plan? So I just leave it
17 like that if -- if I may.

18 MR. PEACOCK: All right. Thank you.

19 SUPT. MCGEE: Uh-huh.

20 DR. ABBOTT: You mentioned you're doing things
21 to create a, I guess, a more safe environment at the
22 school. Can you be more specific about what -- what
23 you're doing?

24 SUPT. MCGEE: So just a little bit again, for
25 those that don't know, several years ago, Watson

1 Chapel had a shooting inside the school where a young
2 man died. That culture. So we have not only put
3 more security inside, but we've now created our own
4 police department with -- a certified officer is
5 there. We have a police department. We realigned
6 that piece. We now have more safety measures.
7 They're doing checks. I directed them to have -- to
8 do classroom checks. As a former principal, I used
9 to make my security go do random checks. That is
10 occurring now. And if you look at our discipline
11 data, and I -- I didn't pull it up, but it's down
12 tremendously from one year. To be honest with you,
13 we just had a major incident at a high school last
14 week. For us, that's a celebration. That is a huge
15 celebration. And -- and -- and I know this because
16 my scholars tell me, said, "Dr. McGee, you know, I
17 feel safe in the school now." The mental health
18 piece is what we're working on because they have
19 talked to me about they need someone there to talk
20 to. So those are things that we're looking at. We
21 are putting -- we reroute our -- how kids come in and
22 how they exit. We strategically put people in place
23 to monitor. So those are things that we're doing.

24 DR. ABBOTT: You said that you've been having
25 conversations with students, and they -- they have

1 told you they feel more safe, and --

2 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes. Compared to when I first got
3 there. When I met with them, when I first arrived 17
4 months ago, they was very concerned. And just last
5 -- in the middle of last year, we made those
6 adjustments, and they said, "Dr. McGee -- " they --
7 they feel safe. That's not the issue right now.
8 Now, the issue that they're talking about when we say
9 safety because it is safety to me, is the mental
10 health, the mental health support.

11 MS. KEENER: Well, I -- I remember not too long
12 ago -- this wasn't when you were here, but I do
13 remember us bringing it, coming to our attention that
14 day one, day eight, day ten, students still didn't
15 have schedules. So to go from the very basics not
16 being met to working on quality and seeing
17 improvements is remarkable. I'm excited to continue
18 watching how you've changed. You remember that?

19 SUPT. MCGEE: So thank you. Yes. It -- it --
20 it has been -- and we're not only doing that. We --
21 we -- we're now getting contracts out. Our contracts
22 will be coming out in March.

23 MS. KEENER: Okay.

24 SUPT. MCGEE: So we are going to lock everybody
25 in in March, those that we want. So we are trying to

1 be intentional to make sure our basic needs for our
2 scholars are met and how to operate a school. And
3 again, our system was -- we just had -- I think
4 Secretary Oliva, you say this all the time, bad
5 people beat good systems. We refine the systems, and
6 they're good systems, and we got to continue to
7 elevate. We're using the thing now, "Elevate Your
8 Impact." Everybody has to elevate the impact. So
9 thank you.

10 MS. KEENER: Well, and I have a question. Oh,
11 I'm not sure when it's appropriate, but for the co-op
12 that supports Watson Chapel, is that when --

13 CHAIR WOODS: I was going to say let's get
14 through maybe him, and then I may have some questions
15 for the board chair. And so --

16 MS. KEENER: Perfect.

17 CHAIR WOODS: -- do you have any for him?

18 MS. HUNTER: Actually, I do.

19 So Dr. McGee, first of all, I -- I am a resident
20 of Jefferson County, so I actually follow probably
21 you and the Pine Bluff School District a little
22 closer than I do the other districts. And so I
23 applaud all of the work that you have done. It is
24 remarkable.

25 SUPT. MCGEE: Thank you.

1 MS. HUNTER: You used a word that's already been
2 used in what you've been able to do in such a short
3 period of time. I do think that oftentimes the
4 community, not just ours, but the community at large,
5 looks to the schools to solve all the problems of the
6 communities. And that's just simply not possible.
7 We -- I think we all understand and appreciate the
8 position that all of our schools are put in. That
9 said, I think that there is a lot of -- you -- you
10 mentioned family engagement, community engagement. I
11 think that that is a huge underpinning of success for
12 not just your district, but all the districts. Can
13 you talk a little bit about how you are trying to
14 impact that? The families in the community?

15 SUPT. MCGEE: So I hadn't fully gotten to it
16 yet, but I'm going to implement a parent meeting with
17 the superintendent. I don't know if I'm going to
18 call it something with lunch or -- because I want to
19 accommodate the parents. The -- it's a challenge for
20 us to get parents to come out. So I'll just be
21 honest with you, it's a challenge. So we are
22 creative. So when we have a -- community meetings,
23 we are creative. We let the kids perform because
24 they're going to come out and see their kids. And --
25 and then we'll have that -- those conversations. But

1 I still want a -- a small nucleus of parents to kind
2 of just meet with, to get feedback, and then use that
3 as a stepping stone to go and elevate to get the
4 other parents involved. My plan is to start it after
5 the break. It is -- we are trying, but we just got
6 to continue to be creative to get them there.

7 MS. HUNTER: Yeah. It -- it's -- it's tough
8 one.

9 SUPT. MCGEE: It is tough.

10 MS. HUNTER: Yeah. Thank you.

11 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Bragg? Mr. Wood?

12 MR. WOOD: I do have some questions if you got a
13 minute.

14 CHAIR WOODS: The floor is yours.

15 MR. WOOD: So a few -- a few. Well, first of
16 all, Dr. McGee, hi. Good to see you again.

17 SUPT. MCGEE: You too.

18 MR. WOOD: And you know, I have a lot of respect
19 for you. We go back quite a while into Little Rock
20 School District days, and I'm proud of what you've
21 done, where you've been.

22 I do -- I do have some hard questions. I'm
23 going to ask these questions of everyone that takes
24 the podium today. I want to start with some
25 foundational things. Do you agree that a lack of

1 growth is almost always an adult issue and not a
2 student issue?

3 SUPT. MCGEE: I certainly agree with that.

4 MR. WOOD: Okay. And do you agree that a lack
5 of achievement is almost always an adult issue and
6 not a student issue?

7 SUPT. MCGEE: I certainly agree with that --

8 MR. WOOD: Okay.

9 SUPT. MCGEE: -- because I think that we have
10 the ability to make a difference and motivate a kid.

11 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that poor students
12 can learn if adults do their job correctly?

13 SUPT. MCGEE: Certainly.

14 MR. WOOD: Okay. Very good. Can you tell me
15 who is the principal at Coleman Elementary School?

16 SUPT. MCGEE: Her name is Marcia Merritt.

17 MR. WOOD: Marsha Mary?

18 SUPT. MCGEE: But she's on leave.

19 MR. WOOD: She's on leave right now?

20 SUPT. MCGEE: Uh-huh.

21 MR. WOOD: Okay. How long has she been on
22 leave?

23 SUPT. MCGEE: I think an estimate, October.

24 MR. WOOD: Okay. How long has she been the
25 principal at Coleman Elementary School?

1 SUPT. MCGEE: Maybe three or four years, if my
2 mind serves me correctly. I don't know the actual
3 numbers, but it's around three or four years.

4 MR. WOOD: Okay. And have you done a
5 performance evaluation of her leadership of Coleman
6 Elementary School?

7 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes.

8 MR. WOOD: Okay. And you -- you believe that
9 she should continue leading Coleman Elementary
10 School?

11 SUPT. MCGEE: With due respect --

12 MR. WOOD: Sure.

13 SUPT. MCGEE: -- I would prefer not to answer
14 that because of how we are checking them in with
15 LEADS. I can assure you this, every principal is
16 being held accountable with integrity.

17 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. I'm going to --

18 SUPT. MCGEE: Because -- because if -- if -- if
19 something happened --

20 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

21 SUPT. MCGEE: -- that could come --

22 MR. WOOD: I understand. And fair enough. And
23 I'll -- I'll try to refrain from maybe getting that
24 specific, but I'm going to ask the same questions
25 about the other schools. Edgewood Elementary School,

1 who's the principal there?

2 SUPT. MCGEE: We have an interim.

3 MR. WOOD: An interim?

4 SUPT. MCGEE: Yeah.

5 MR. WOOD: How long have you had an interim?

6 SUPT. MCGEE: Maybe, like, late last year

7 because that principal medical.

8 MR. WOOD: Okay. So the permanent principal is

9 not there. You have an interim?

10 SUPT. MCGEE: He since has resigned and retired.

11 MR. WOOD: Okay.

12 SUPT. MCGEE: He -- he went --

13 MR. WOOD: Okay.

14 SUPT. MCGEE: He retired.

15 MR. WOOD: Okay. So that school is in a

16 transition. What -- what about Watson Chapel High

17 School? Who's the principal there?

18 SUPT. MCGEE: Mr. Neal.

19 MR. WOOD: Okay. And how long has he been the

20 principal?

21 SUPT. MCGEE: He's been the principal there for

22 maybe -- this is his second year, if I'm not

23 mistaken.

24 MR. WOOD: Okay. Two years?

25 SUPT. MCGEE: Uh-huh.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay. And what about Watson Chapel
2 Junior High School? Who's the principal?

3 SUPT. McGEE: Mr. Jeremy Vincent.

4 MR. WOOD: Okay. And how long has he been the
5 principal?

6 SUPT. McGEE: Probably about three years.

7 MR. WOOD: Three years?

8 SUPT. McGEE: About three years.

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. Do principals in your school
10 district at struggling schools have mentor
11 relationships with principals, whether in your
12 district or outside of your district, at schools
13 where student achievement and/or growth is more
14 prevalent?

15 SUPT. McGEE: I've assigned them one.

16 MR. WOOD: What does that mean?

17 SUPT. McGEE: I've assigned them a mentor and
18 making sure that they can pair up. Like our junior
19 high principal, he has a mentor principal out of
20 Northwest Arkansas.

21 MR. WOOD: Okay.

22 SUPT. McGEE: And so they each have one of -- a
23 mentor that they can talk to that -- to be honest
24 with you, that we contract with them.

25 MR. WOOD: Okay.

1 SUPT. MCGEE: That we contract with them.

2 MR. WOOD: Okay. And how long has that practice
3 been in place?

4 SUPT. MCGEE: Since I've -- since I've been
5 there and identified the need.

6 MR. WOOD: Okay. That's good.

7 SUPT. MCGEE: Uh-huh.

8 MR. WOOD: What about teachers? Do they have
9 mentor relationships with teachers that have higher
10 levels of high achievement and high growth?

11 SUPT. MCGEE: We encourage the principals to go
12 ahead and assign a mentor. As a district, we work on
13 provide -- the qualification of a mentor so that the
14 teach -- the principals know -- because that's their
15 job to go and supervise their own teachers. But we
16 try to give them, "Here's the ones that can be mentor
17 teachers."

18 MR. WOOD: Okay.

19 SUPT. MCGEE: And so those are questions that we
20 ask them because when we look at the individual data
21 of teachers. So that's our way of holding them
22 accountable.

23 MR. WOOD: Yeah, good. I would encourage you
24 that your mentor pool might not -- should be limited
25 to your own school district to identifying

1 high-quality teachers, or -- I -- I don't like using
2 that term. I don't know what the correct verbiage is
3 that -- that we use. But anyway, teachers that have
4 a higher level of high-achieving and high-growth
5 students, that pool should not be limited to your
6 school district. I would hope that you would seek
7 out teachers in other school districts to help bring
8 your teachers along because if I know anything about
9 the teaching fraternity, it is that they love each
10 other and they want to help each other because at the
11 root of everything is student achievement and growth.

12 SUPT. MCGEE: And we're -- and I will say this
13 for the record, we're not limited.

14 MR. WOOD: Okay.

15 SUPT. MCGEE: We're always open. That's the
16 reason why you hear me say that my principals'
17 mentors are not in the district. We -- we partner
18 with somebody that's successful.

19 MR. WOOD: So recently, your school district
20 approved a bonus for your teachers. Was that based
21 on merit, or was that an across-the-board bonus?

22 SUPT. MCGEE: No. Let me tell you why, the --
23 the -- the why behind that. Our teachers and our
24 classified staff have not received anything. The
25 culture and the staff morale was really low. So in

1 order for us to start to help to try to recruit and
2 retain -- retain some of our personnel, we want to
3 show them in good faith that we are working on a --
4 number one, a revised salary schedule, and we are
5 going to be able to hopefully be able to be somewhere
6 in the middle to compete with the salary. So I felt
7 the need to give them all a one-time bonus to hope
8 that it would boost the staff morale.

9 MR. WOOD: Uh-huh. Well, respectfully, I think
10 that adults who are contracted to do a job should
11 show up and do their job without a bonus. But talk
12 to me about your opinion of merit-based bonuses
13 because in the real world, when I have a hard time
14 motivating my three children to rake the leaves in
15 the backyard, when I put a \$100 bill on the table, it
16 changes pretty quickly whether or not the leaves in
17 my backyard get raked. And I wonder if -- if you
18 have three F schools and a D school and everyone in
19 the district gets a bonus, I -- I'm concerned that
20 where -- where is the external motivation, the
21 external opportunity for, you know, personal income
22 achievement? If everyone gets it, it doesn't matter
23 what -- what's going on in the classroom. But why --
24 why wouldn't you support, or do you support the
25 opportunity for bonuses to be merit-based so that --

1 SUPT. MCGEE: So I'm -- first, I'm not opposed.
2 I'm not opposed for that. But I would say this
3 before we can get into determining merit pay. Again,
4 I want to go back to when I said our systems, we were
5 kind of all over the place, including fiscal,
6 financial. So before I could do that, I think I want
7 to be a good steward of public dollars. I first need
8 to get up, analyze that. So I've made some changes
9 with the support of the board, moving away from a
10 private auditor to a legislative audit so that we can
11 get a better sense of where we are.

12 MR. WOOD: Yeah, fair enough. I think sometimes
13 a community might have a hard time hearing that not
14 everyone understands school financing, but you're
15 building a brand new, pretty school, and it does look
16 nice. I've seen it. It looks like it's going to be
17 a nice place for your kids to go to school. But when
18 you're investing, what? Was it \$40 million; is that
19 what you said?

20 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes.

21 MR. WOOD: In that, but -- but then you talked
22 about you're having a hard time retaining teachers
23 and whatever. What -- where do you rank? Where does
24 Watson Chapel rank in teacher pay in the State of
25 Arkansas?

1 SUPT. MCGEE: I hadn't looked at the rank, but I
2 would tell you that we are -- we meet the minimum,
3 and we do actually exceed some of the minimum because
4 we kind of do a step. So --

5 MR. WOOD: Okay. What is the average teacher
6 pay in Watson Chapel?

7 SUPT. MCGEE: It's -- it's -- the average is
8 50,000, but not all of the teachers get 50.

9 MR. WOOD: Well, that couldn't be. That
10 couldn't be it.

11 SUPT. MCGEE: They get -- some get based on
12 their masters, some get -- and after so many years,
13 we do a step. So it's -- I would think the average
14 is somewhere around -- without me looking at it,
15 somewhere around 50, 51 because we don't have enough
16 teachers.

17 MR. WOOD: That sounds like -- that sounds like
18 the minimum to me.

19 SUPT. MCGEE: Well -- and -- and that it may be
20 the minimum, but we do not have enough teachers that
21 are the -- masters. We are encouraging the masters
22 to -- we're working with Kevin Beaumont with IMPACT
23 to try to get some of our teachers to go into the
24 University of Arkansas system so they can get their
25 masters. So we are doing as many things as we can to

1 create and encourage teachers to go a little step
2 further. But we are not opposed to merit pay. It's
3 -- I think, for me, I need to know where we are
4 financially because -- and I just think that I would
5 rather take a step back to get it right so that I can
6 go through it.

7 MR. WOOD: I know, but you just handed out a
8 bonus to everybody. If you handed out a bonus to
9 less than everybody, it would be cheaper than the
10 bonus that you just did. But I don't want to get too
11 bogged down on that. I'm also concerned about
12 implementation of high-quality instructional
13 material. You -- you go around the classrooms, and
14 you identify teachers that are not implementing the
15 instructional material that y'all have chosen.
16 They're not implementing it with fidelity; is that
17 right?

18 SUPT. McGEE: Correct.

19 MR. WOOD: What -- what is the consequence for
20 that?

21 SUPT. McGEE: So I addressed that with the
22 principals.

23 MR. WOOD: Uh-huh.

24 SUPT. McGEE: And again, I want to go back to
25 that slide where I said the LEADS, and then we allow

1 that principal to bring the evidence on how he or
2 she's addressing it with that specific teacher.

3 MR. WOOD: Okay. Is -- is it possible to
4 terminate an individual who -- who isn't using the
5 materials that you've chosen?

6 SUPT. McGEE: Certainly. Certainly.

7 MR. WOOD: And you have -- do you have the
8 ability in your district to terminate quickly for
9 insubordination like that?

10 SUPT. McGEE: Certainly. I think before we --
11 yes, certainly, to answer your question, but I would
12 say this, we need to be strategic because we are also
13 struggling to find teachers. So if I terminate a
14 teacher and I don't have a teacher that I can go and
15 get -- and I'll just be honest with you, we needed an
16 ELA teacher for the high school. We just filled it,
17 maybe about two months ago. So we're working not
18 only with our University of Arkansas system, UAPB, to
19 get some of those programs. The residential, Dr.
20 Graham and I met, and we're going to look at that and
21 implement that with the college of ed. So we're just
22 -- it's a challenge for us if we get rid of a teacher
23 right then until we get a plan to how we can recruit
24 and retain some of them.

25 MR. WOOD: Let's talk about literacy a little

1 bit. Tell me about your screenings for dyslexia in
2 your K through 2.

3 SUPT. McGEE: So it's going well. I -- I would
4 -- I would brag on that.

5 MR. WOOD: Okay. Brag for a second.

6 SUPT. McGEE: This time last year, the screening
7 identified maybe 85 students in our 2nd grade if --
8 at that time, if they had to be promoted, wouldn't
9 have been promoted. When the data came back from
10 that summer term and the beginning of year screening
11 data, it was only 30. And out of 30, 19 of those
12 were students with IEP. And so it was only about 11
13 that we really need to focus on to continue to make
14 sure we have the intervention plans. And so the K-2
15 -- one of our focus in Watson Chapel is that K-2 is
16 not to let them get behind in the first place.
17 Several of our master teachers' designations are in
18 that K-2. So that is, in my opinion, right now, one
19 of our strongest area.

20 MR. WOOD: Are you now screening every
21 kindergartner?

22 SUPT. McGEE: Yes.

23 MR. WOOD: Okay. And what is your
24 identification rate of markers with dyslexia?

25 SUPT. McGEE: I didn't have it on me. I don't

1 -- I hadn't brought -- I -- I wish if I had known, I
2 would've brought it, but I can't speak to it right
3 now because I don't have it in front of me. But we
4 are addressing that with our dyslexia. And Ms.
5 Holland is also overseeing in -- in dyslexia.

6 MR. WOOD: Okay. And are you having
7 conversations with all of the parents of students who
8 identified with markers of dyslexia about the rights
9 that they have?

10 SUPT. MCGEE: Correct.

11 MR. WOOD: All of them?

12 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes.

13 MR. WOOD: Okay. And you're doing that in
14 kindergarten?

15 SUPT. MCGEE: First.

16 MR. WOOD: First grade?

17 SUPT. MCGEE: And 2nd.

18 MR. WOOD: Second grade? Okay. A couple of
19 years ago, I met a principal at a middle school in
20 either North Little Rock or Sylvan Hills or Sherwood
21 -- and I apologize, I don't remember exactly that
22 area. And I was impressed by the fact that this
23 principal had previously had a D school, and she had
24 transformed it to a B school. She had an individual
25 plan for every single student in her building. Every

1 teacher had a plan for every kid in their classroom.
2 Do your children in your schools have an individual
3 plan for every single one of them?

4 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes. Yes.

5 MR. WOOD: Okay.

6 SUPT. MCGEE: And I will say, you know, now
7 whether the plan needs some improvement? Yes. But
8 that is something since I've been there that we have
9 reinforced. They need to have these individual
10 educational plans.

11 MR. WOOD: Yep.

12 SUPT. MCGEE: So that they can address every
13 kid.

14 MR. WOOD: Okay. Well, Dr. McGee, a couple of
15 years from now, there will be no excuses; okay? All
16 kinds of tools are being laid in front of
17 administrators all over the state to do whatever you
18 need to do, and this Board is willing to support
19 anything we can do. The legislature, I believe, is
20 -- has an attitude of supporting administrators
21 however they can support them. I don't speak for
22 them, but that's my general sense. We -- we -- we
23 cannot have you or any other district leader come
24 back two, three, four years later and just have the
25 same "Oh, shucks, man. Just this, that, hem, haw."

1 And the reason I'm saying this out loud is because
2 these are lives that matter, and I want you to carry
3 that burden. I know you do, but I want you to every
4 day -- that every day that passes, every month that
5 passes, every school year that passes is extremely
6 important to the students that we are leaving behind,
7 and we must stop this, and there can be no excuses;
8 okay? We have to get to a point where all we talk
9 about is the turnaround and the achievement and the
10 growth, not the lack of; okay? I look forward to
11 your report in the future.

12 SUPT. MCGEE: And I'll turn around. So I -- and
13 I look forward to giving to you because the next
14 report that I will give you will be more of a
15 celebration.

16 MR. WOOD: Good.

17 SUPT. MCGEE: And I would say this right here,
18 in Watson Chapel, since my arrival, we don't tolerate
19 excuses. We're not making up excuses. I'm not
20 making up an excuse. I'm only giving you the facts
21 of what I see. But we also address those excuses.
22 We don't take them. We address the issue head-on.

23 MR. WOOD: Well, we'll see; okay? I believe
24 you. I'm just saying I hear that a lot. Okay. We
25 don't accept excuses. Everybody says it. But they

1 accept a lot of excuses. I hope you don't; okay?

2 SUPT. MCGEE: Okay.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Can I speak with your board
4 president, Mr. Milner? Thank you for coming.

5 MR. MILNER: Good morning, Board.

6 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Milner, can you tell me how
7 long have you been on the board?

8 MR. MILNER: About 12 years.

9 CHAIR WOODS: For 12 years?

10 MR. MILNER: Uh-huh.

11 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. And when did you become the
12 chair?

13 MR. MILNER: This time last year.

14 CHAIR WOODS: This time last year. Okay. When
15 you rose to this position, is this when you
16 identified that you needed a leadership change at the
17 superintendent level?

18 MR. MILNER: I'm sorry?

19 CHAIR WOODS: Is this -- is that -- were you
20 part of the decision to bring in a new
21 superintendent?

22 MR. MILNER: Yes, I was.

23 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Did y'all identify that, or
24 was that decision put on you that you needed to find
25 someone new? I -- I don't recall. Like, did the

1 previous superintendent resign?

2 MR. MILNER: Yes.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. So y'all did not make the
4 decision to remove the superintendent?

5 MR. MILNER: That's correct.

6 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Do you -- you all vote on
7 the school calendar; that's correct? How many days a
8 week do your kids go to school?

9 MR. MILNER: Five.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Five. Five days a week. Okay.
11 You guys set the budget. Do you think that the
12 objectives that your superintendent has put forth are
13 reasonable?

14 MR. MILNER: Yes.

15 CHAIR WOODS: You think that it can be
16 accomplished within the next year?

17 MR. MILNER: Yes.

18 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. How -- how does your board
19 hold your superintendent accountable?

20 MR. MILNER: Well, I can tell you that when we
21 hired this superintendent, there was several that
22 were qualified, but we looked at it very
23 strategically this time, and we wanted somebody that
24 could make a change.

25 CHAIR WOODS: Uh-huh.

1 MR. MILNER: We're tired of just getting by, and
2 we don't want to be coming up here. But we want
3 what's best for the community, and we want to be the
4 school of choice in our area. And so we looked for a
5 superintendent that was not only qualified but that
6 could -- my -- my words to him was we wanted somebody
7 that could grab the bull by the horns and make a
8 change and make a change from a culture up.

9 CHAIR WOODS: So -- but my question is like, how
10 are y'all holding him accountable?

11 MR. MILNER: Well, we evaluate.

12 CHAIR WOODS: Evaluations.

13 MR. MILNER: Yes, we evaluate.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. And then --

15 MR. MILNER: Matter of fact, he's up for
16 evaluation right now.

17 CHAIR WOODS: Excellent. What's your general
18 board makeup in terms of, like, is it just local
19 businesspeople? Does anybody have an education
20 background? Could you just give a brief overview of
21 who's on your board?

22 MR. MILNER: Some of us are businesspeople, some
23 are -- work in the community. I -- I don't know that
24 we have anybody. We used to have somebody -- somehow
25 the educational, but I don't think we do right now.

1 CHAIR WOODS: And I understand you're elected.

2 MR. MILNER: Yeah.

3 CHAIR WOODS: So you -- you get who the people
4 elect. I was just curious --

5 MR. MILNER: Yeah.

6 CHAIR WOODS: -- about your makeup.

7 Mr. Wood, do you have any questions of the
8 chair?

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah. On the -- I would like for you
10 to publicly address the across-the-board bonus in the
11 school district as opposed to a merit-based bonus.
12 Tell me about your view on that.

13 MR. MILNER: Can I -- can I -- can I start back
14 up just a little bit?

15 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

16 MR. MILNER: I -- I -- I want to mention
17 something in where we are and what is -- is going on
18 in our school. So you know, the reason you called us
19 up here because our grade letter dropped instead of
20 going up. But Dr. McGee has not been with us that
21 long. But I want to -- I want to approach it or
22 compare it to this. We're building a school, and if
23 you came to our area physically about two months -- I
24 mean, about ten months ago, you would've said, "What
25 a mess. There is dirt everywhere. There's mud.

1 There's water. They're digging up stuff. What are
2 you all doing?" So you wouldn't know unless you
3 looked at the plan, and you would've said, "You got a
4 big mess going on." But we had to tear down an old
5 school. It had a foundation, but that foundation was
6 for a one-story, old building. So the old foundation
7 had to be dug up so that a new foundation could be
8 put in so that we could build a nicer school, but a
9 school that's two-story, higher in quality, higher in
10 things that can be done in that.

11 That's the same thing that's going on in our
12 plan with the school in changing of our district and
13 the culture. So Dr. McGee has came in. He has
14 grabbed the -- the bull by the horns, to say, and he
15 started digging up old foundations so that the new
16 foundation can be poured down. So you came to the
17 school, the grades dropped. It's because you came
18 right in the middle of the mess. You came right in
19 the middle of the -- things are changed. But if you
20 looked at the blueprint, you'll see where we're
21 going. You'll see the picture, you'll see the plan,
22 and you'll see that it -- it will be accomplished.
23 And that's what he presented to you today, was the
24 plan. He showed you the blueprint. So now that you
25 can see where we're going -- and I promise you, we

1 won't come back here with an F. The next time we get
2 graded, you'll see an increase because the
3 foundations are being dug up and high-quality people
4 are being put in.

5 We're tired of just getting by. We're looking
6 to get people that want to work the plan. You know,
7 if you -- if you went into James 1 -- I'm a pastor,
8 preacher. So you -- you got to have people that are
9 doers of the word. There's a lot of people that's
10 got knowledge of the word. There's a lot of people
11 that read the word every day. But how many people do
12 we have doing the word? That's what we're doing
13 here. We're looking for people that are not just
14 qualified, that have the knowledge, have the diploma,
15 or getting by to get to the license. We're looking
16 for people that have got it, that are going to get it
17 and that are exceeding and to be a doer of that word,
18 of the plan.

19 So what was your question? I led up to that.
20 I'm sorry. The bonus. Okay. So that being said, we
21 have not given a bonus in a long time. I -- I'm for
22 merit-based bonuses, but this time was a -- a time to
23 kind of -- it's kind of like to get a shot of -- of
24 vitamin B into the -- into the culture of what we
25 have. Is there some that, without saying too much,

1 that all of them there belong there? No. Are -- are
2 some there that will belong and stay? Yeah. And
3 those -- those we do want to keep. So it was kind of
4 like a shot of vitamin B to kind of get things going
5 because we're -- we're hitting this thing wide open,
6 and there's going to be a lot more change coming, and
7 there's going to be a lot more expectations to be a
8 doer of this plan.

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. Fair enough. Let me ask you
10 this. What -- what percentage of your 3rd graders of
11 Watson Chapel scored a three or four on the ATLAS
12 test?

13 MR. MILNER: We just went over the percentage,
14 but I don't know --

15 MR. WOOD: Okay.

16 MR. MILNER: -- those percentages.

17 MR. WOOD: Yep. Do you know what percentage
18 scored a one or a two?

19 MR. MILNER: No, I do not.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay. I -- I'm not trying to
21 embarrass you. I encourage you to memorize that and
22 carry that in your heart every day as you leave the
23 school district; okay? It has to be in the DNA of
24 how you evaluate Dr. McGee, is how are students
25 achieving? I appreciate that you got to manage a

1 budget. I appreciate that you got to dig up an old
2 foundation and lay a new one and two-story building
3 and more offerings for kids. I get all that. I -- I
4 get all that. But -- but the -- the fundamental, the
5 core of everything has to be what are students
6 achieving and what -- how many of our students are
7 growing. Two most important questions that you could
8 ask him every single month that y'all meet together.

9 MR. MILNER: Okay.

10 MR. WOOD: So in fact, that's my next question.
11 What are you doing to constantly hold the
12 administrators you've hired accountable for higher
13 achievement and higher growth?

14 MR. MILNER: Well, we do leave that up to the
15 superintendent, and --

16 MR. WOOD: I would encourage you not to do that.

17 MR. MILNER: Yeah.

18 MR. WOOD: I'm not telling you to get in his
19 business and be in his office every day; okay?
20 That's not your job. Your job is your job, and his
21 job is his job. But as the community, I believe you
22 deserve a report every month or every quarter. I
23 mean, Watson Chapel for a year or two was coming up
24 here, doing a quarterly report. I would think the
25 minimum they could give you, a quarterly report.

1 MR. MILNER: He does. He gives us a --

2 MR. WOOD: But I -- but I would encourage a
3 monthly report in -- in the foundations of all of
4 these goals and all the strategies, what is being
5 done every month. I mean, y'all -- y'all are on life
6 support; okay? This is -- this is critical. As a
7 school district, you need -- you can't just hire him
8 and, like a clock, set it over on the shelf and come
9 back and check it in a year and make sure it's still
10 working. I hope that y'all will constantly be asking
11 for a report on how you are implementing every
12 strategy to achieve these goals.

13 MR. MILNER: Okay.

14 DR. ARNOLD: Earlier, Dr. Oliva said that this
15 wasn't to be a three- to a five-year plan. To that
16 point, there's immediacy. And so I think the clock
17 is ticking. We heard you promise great things. And
18 so let's see what happens.

19 MS. HUNTER: So this is just more of a comment,
20 I think. So you meant -- so -- and I -- I think more
21 of a message back to your board because you said that
22 you were -- you've been on the school board for 12
23 years, and that the change to Dr. McGee was not a
24 active decision by your school board. So what that
25 suggests to me is that had the former administration

1 continued to want to work, that your board would have
2 been okay with that. You also said that y'all were
3 tired of, quote, "just getting by." And I would
4 submit to you that you haven't been getting by. I
5 mean, you have really been doing a disservice to the
6 students in your district.

7 So you're not here because your grades went
8 down. You're here because your grade was an F,
9 failure. And frankly, the entire grading scale of
10 the A through F for the schools and the districts
11 across the state are low. I mean, generally our bar
12 is low. But we -- it is a comparative grading scale,
13 and I think that -- I mean, we -- it is what we -- it
14 is. But there is. I want you to remember that that
15 grading scale for A through F has a accelerator in it
16 so that the bar will continue to be raised. It's not
17 just an effort to get to a D or a C, because one day
18 that D will be an F again, as we raise the tide in
19 the State of Arkansas.

20 So you haven't been just getting by, and I would
21 encourage you and your entire board to really take an
22 active role, as Mr. Wood has suggested, in that
23 making sure you are actively engaged and not
24 accepting mediocrity.

25 CHAIR WOODS: In the essence of time, go ahead,

1 and then I will follow up the cooperative.

2 MS. KEENER: No, that's good.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Go ahead, sir.

4 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah, I've got a -- a couple of
5 comments. I went first. And so some of these are
6 directed to you, Dr. McGee. First off, I have a
7 little bit different view on the bonus structure. It
8 absolutely needs to be merit-based. But what I'm
9 hearing, and what I took from your comments, is you
10 would try to stabilize the environment.

11 SUPT. MCGEE: Right.

12 MR. PEACOCK: I'm okay with that as long as
13 that's -- it was a one-time event, and then you move
14 into a merit-based, I mean, because good people will
15 leave if they see bad people getting treated the same
16 way they're getting treated. So you will lose good
17 -- good teachers if you're -- if you're rewarding
18 poor teachers in the same fashion that you do the
19 stronger teachers; okay? One of the comments that
20 you made was about a bad teacher is better than no
21 teacher. I would disagree with that. You -- I think
22 you said that you have to -- if somebody does not
23 follow the instructions and use the material that you
24 will terminate them, but you also have to factor in
25 that you might not have somebody to take their place.

1 That's -- the way I heard that was you're willing to
2 accept poor performance in the -- rather than have no
3 teacher at all. And that's a -- that's a very bad
4 trap to fall into because again, you're going to lose
5 good people if they -- good teachers if you see -- if
6 they see that other teachers are getting away with
7 things. And so go ahead.

8 SUPT. MCGEE: If -- if I may, let me clarify.
9 No, we're not accepting mediocrity. We're not. What
10 we're doing is being strategic.

11 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah.

12 SUPT. MCGEE: So we want to -- I -- I have no
13 problem replacing a bad -- a teacher at all and
14 putting a long-term sub that may qualify.

15 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah. Well, I would encourage you
16 --

17 SUPT. MCGEE: Yes.

18 MR. PEACOCK: -- to back up that -- that
19 decision point for -- for the strategic decision.
20 Don't find yourself in a position where you have to
21 continue to employ a bad teacher because you don't
22 have any other option.

23 SUPT. MCGEE: Yeah.

24 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. Speed, we were talking
25 about two or three years. We don't have two or three

1 years. This year, how many students do -- how many
2 seniors do you have?

3 SUPT. MCGEE: We have 166 seniors.

4 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. And first off, I appreciate
5 the number. That's a -- a comment I'm going to come
6 to in a second. In -- in two or three years, you're
7 going to have two or three more classes of seniors
8 that will graduate that you will not be able to
9 impact. You'll have 3rd graders in 5th and 6th grade
10 that you will have lost an opportunity. You have to
11 approach this, that your students are dying if you
12 don't fix it right now. And so that's the sense of
13 urgency that has to be created.

14 I like the comment about doers. You come across
15 very well. I -- I wished I knew you better than I
16 do. I -- I hope to get to know you in a different
17 environment than this environment; okay? I'm -- I'm
18 encouraged, and I think that that's going to happen.
19 You present very well. I'm -- I'm hopeful that the
20 intensity and the passion you brought to the
21 presentation today is the same intensity and passion
22 you've taken to your teachers, to your principals,
23 and to your students so that they can see that you
24 care about them and you can move the needle. But
25 again, speed is of the utmost importance; okay?

1 And the last one is y'all knew y'all were
2 coming. For you not to know certain pieces of data,
3 like how many threes and fours you have, I -- I think
4 is -- does not set well with me, and it probably
5 doesn't set well with the rest of the board that, you
6 know, it's -- this is not about preparing for
7 presentation. This is about knowing that if -- if my
8 folks don't know their data, then I -- I lose
9 confidence in them. And the fact that y'all didn't
10 know that when we were asked is a concern to me;
11 right?

12 CHAIR WOODS: Can we have the representative
13 from the co-op?

14 SUPT. MCGEE: Ms. Cathi Swan.

15 MS. KEENER: Good morning. Good morning. How
16 are you?

17 MS. SWAN: I'm good.

18 MS. KEENER: Good. So you are here today with
19 two schools that --

20 MS. SWAN: Yes.

21 MS. KEENER: -- that -- that you support. So
22 this could kind of be for both, but -- and -- and
23 following up over here with, they were talking about
24 essentially addition by subtraction, removing a
25 teacher that doesn't want to be there, that's

1 insubordinate, that's ineffective. What happens -- I
2 think the fear is, "Well, we need a warm body." You
3 know, I've heard that a million times over the years.
4 "We just need a warm body. We need somebody in the
5 room." What happens when there isn't an adult? Is
6 that where -- does the co-op send somebody to fill
7 in, or what support can you give in that addition by
8 subtraction?

9 MS. SWAN: So we don't have the resources to
10 send teachers into classrooms when the -- there's not
11 one at the district. But I will say that sometimes
12 when we talk about a teacher who's not able, maybe
13 not doing the job, a lot of times it's that they
14 haven't had the time to learn the curriculum and
15 learn how to implement it. And so we try to model
16 and coach them along. So our specialists will come
17 in and co-teach, model and coach in the classroom
18 before we get to that point.

19 MS. KEENER: Uh-huh. And those are the 20
20 teachers I think that talked about on the -- not an
21 improvement plan, a licensure path; right? So, which
22 would produce that greatly?

23 MS. SWAN: We can do that for any teacher that
24 needs support, but we do focus on those 20 by
25 providing practice support, additional coaching, and

1 novice teacher mentoring for them.

2 MS. KEENER: One of the things that have not
3 been quiet about is early childhood and understanding
4 that 90 percent of brain development happens before
5 they ever enter the school district ever.

6 MS. SWAN: Yes.

7 MS. KEENER: And understanding that in order for
8 kindergarten teachers, 1st grade, 2nd grade, to get
9 to those 3rd grade reading levels, the kids have to
10 come with a certain amount of knowledge, with
11 vocabulary, with language, receptive and expressive
12 language, with all those -- emotional regulation, all
13 those wonderful things. We know that early childhood
14 is, if not one of, but the very best way to get these
15 kids prepared so kindergarten teachers can do what
16 they're trained to do. In looking at Arkansas Better
17 Chance program, the co-op has been funded for 733
18 slots but currently is only filling 535, meaning
19 you're receiving an overpayment of over a million
20 dollars that will be reduced. I want to talk about
21 or hear from you on what you've done to fill those
22 slots.

23 MS. SWAN: So what -- when that -- that -- was
24 that data pulled?

25 MS. KEENER: October and November.

1 MS. SWAN: Okay. So we had shortages, and I
2 will say that we don't just serve the Arkansas River
3 area in home visiting. We serve 14 counties. So
4 when you look at that, those 700 slots, that's not
5 necessarily for that one county. It's for all 14.
6 And so we are staffing in those situations. So we
7 are fully staffed now. And so we're continually
8 enrolling parents. And most of those slots are our
9 home-visiting programs. You mentioned that early
10 childhood piece. We have three home-visiting
11 programs. One is from prenatal to two, and one is
12 from three to five. And then we also have SafeCare,
13 which is when we go into the homes of families that
14 have been identified in the court system by families
15 in needs of services to keep them from getting to
16 that foster care piece. So those are home-visiting
17 opportunities we provide in Jefferson County to
18 support the kindergarten-ready initiative and
19 supporting families and communities, which you
20 mentioned.

21 MS. KEENER: Uh-huh. That's the -- and the
22 HIPPY program is where --

23 MS. SWAN: The three to five. Yeah.

24 MS. KEENER: And that's the majority of those
25 slots, the 107 slots.

1 MS. SWAN: Yes. And that's the program where we
2 are multi-county and multi-region.

3 MS. KEENER: So do you feel like those slots
4 should be turned back in and maybe even converted to
5 center-based, you know, combining them and converting
6 them?

7 MS. SWAN: We have done that somewhat in
8 transitioning, but we -- I -- I don't feel like we
9 should rob Peter to pay Paul because the home and our
10 educators that are in those homes providing services
11 and helping that family be stronger only makes our
12 students stronger. And so without that support, we
13 can have them all day in a -- in a facility, but if
14 the family is not stronger, then those hours they're
15 not with us in the school classroom facility are not
16 being as impacted as they could be with home
17 visiting. I wish we had enough to have home visiting
18 for every parent and every family in the state and
19 preschool classrooms, infant, toddler, all the way
20 through to kindergarten.

21 MS. KEENER: Yeah. And I -- there's absolutely
22 value in both the HIPPY program and the Parents as
23 Teachers program. My concern right now is you're not
24 robbing Peter to pay Paul. You're robbing from the
25 state at this point, it feels like. If you're being

1 paid for 107, you know, excuse me. I guess it's more
2 like -- you know, what is it? 198 vacant slots.
3 That is, given the lengthy wait list for the federal
4 program, I think we could go in and support more of
5 them. If they qualify for the federal program, they
6 absolutely qualify for ABC. So going into that
7 waitlist, finding kids living in those 14 counties
8 and saying, "Hey, you're on the waitlist for this,
9 but we can offer you this right now," and being --
10 taking a more active role in filling those slots.
11 And if that cannot be done, if all of your methods
12 have been exhausted, turning them back in because
13 there are 75 counties in Arkansas, and we know there
14 are over, probably close to, 2,000 kids in need of a
15 space.

16 MS. SWAN: And that is our process.

17 MS. KEENER: Uh-huh. So those will be turned
18 back, I imagine, in December; is that right? Or
19 right now. So --

20 MS. SWAN: Well, when I go back, I'm going to
21 look to make sure what the enrollment is today, and
22 we'll see where we are with that.

23 MS. KEENER: Okay.

24 MS. SWAN: Because it changes, it fluctuates
25 from month to month. With families coming in and

1 out, moving.

2 MS. KEENER: Well, and that's why we under --
3 you know, I definitely understand that and understand
4 that you have to keep the lights on and the teachers
5 in, which is why contracted slots are so much better
6 for programs than paying based on attendance; right?
7 Like, paying based on enrollment for sure. And we
8 looked to the previous year's October number to fund.
9 So at this point, if the October enrollment was, you
10 know, what? 198 slots, fewer than you're enrolled
11 for now, you know next year you're going to get 198
12 fewer. You're going to get a million-less dollars.
13 So yes, that is something that, given all of the
14 schools that you support, Pine Bluff, Watson Chapel,
15 getting in those schools and on registration day,
16 having a table for ABC enrollment. When Dr. McGee
17 talked about a parent night, or excuse me, a parent
18 lunch, having a representative there and saying, "Let
19 me sign up your kids for ABC."

20 MS. SWAN: Yeah. We do that. We have booths at
21 each -- each of those events, and we also sit down
22 with the kindergarten teachers from preschool
23 teachers and have those transition conferences and
24 have parents in. So there's a lot of coordination
25 between home visiting, our early childhood special

1 services and getting them ready for kindergarten at
2 the district level.

3 MS. KEENER: And we still have 107, or excuse
4 me, whatever. 198 --

5 MS. SWAN: Yes.

6 MS. KEENER: -- vacant slots. So you know, it
7 might be time to just turn them back in.

8 MS. SWAN: I'd love to sit down with you
9 sometime. I'd invite you to come --

10 MS. KEENER: I would love to.

11 MS. SWAN: -- to Arkansas River --

12 MS. KEENER: I would love to.

13 MS. SWAN: -- and look at all of our data and
14 see what suggestions you may have, and let us -- let
15 you -- let us know. We can tell you what all we've
16 been doing, and maybe there's something we're
17 missing.

18 MS. KEENER: Yeah.

19 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. I want to go ahead because
20 we're over time, and I was --

21 MS. KEENER: Sorry.

22 CHAIR WOODS: -- responsible for keeping us on
23 time.

24 MS. KEENER: I'm so sorry.

25 CHAIR WOODS: No, you're good. If there's no

1 other questions of either the board chair or the co-
2 op as it relates to Watson Chapel specifically in
3 their improvement plan, then I would like to see if
4 the board would go ahead and entertain either a
5 motion to accept or to reject. You can have a seat.
6 Sorry.

7 MS. SWAN: It's okay.

8 DR. ARNOLD: One -- one clarification, and it
9 goes back to my line. Let's see what happens. I
10 don't want that to be read as cavalier. I wanted it
11 to be a bridge into the word "consequence." So my
12 understanding is achievement scores go up, growth
13 scores go up or can there be clarification on
14 consequences --

15 CHAIR WOODS: Ms. Smith?

16 DR. ARNOLD: -- in the immediate?

17 MS. SMITH: So, yes. So the -- the State Board,
18 we -- we have in legislation levels of support. We
19 have level 4 and level 5. Level 5 is when we
20 classify a district. And when that occurs, is the
21 Department actually making a recommendation to this
22 Board to classify a district in level 5 support? And
23 when that happens, it opens up a list of actions that
24 this Board can take, everything from removing a
25 superintendent, dissolving a board, just giving

1 directions on changing their curriculum. And so at
2 this point today, we're not making any
3 recommendations to place any of these districts in
4 level 5. What we're saying today is, this was our
5 open hearing today. Let's see. Let you -- you're
6 telling us what changes you're making. We're
7 basically saying, okay, we've heard you today.
8 You've given feedback. We're going to accept the
9 assurances of things that you're telling us you're
10 doing. If that doesn't happen and we continue to
11 have concerns, then we could definitely come back and
12 do a classification, which then would come with more
13 actions.

14 DR. ARNOLD: Wonderful context. Thank you.

15 MS. SMITH: Yeah.

16 SECT. OLIVA: And -- and I -- I think I could
17 add to that also, Dr. Arnold. These plans, and --
18 and that's why I think it's important to hear from
19 the schools and the superintendents because most of
20 these plans that they're implementing, they realized
21 over the summer that they knew they -- they -- they
22 had their scores, they had their data, they knew the
23 outcomes weren't going to be positive, so that
24 they're implementing these plans. And -- and we're
25 going to monitor to -- to see how well they're being

1 implemented. That -- that's kind of, I think, our
2 role in supporting them at -- at this point in time.
3 We will have our state progress monitoring data. The
4 next window closes, I want to say in January; right?
5 So we're going to have current year real-time
6 information from this past -- I don't know if it's
7 the fall assessment to the winter assessment. And
8 our agency will go through that -- that data and
9 scores, and we can provide an update to the Board
10 specifically because these are high-priority
11 districts for us. Probably by the February meeting,
12 we'll be able to do that, and we -- we'll be happy to
13 share that data. And then the Board may say, "Time
14 to call some of these districts back in."

15 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

16 SECT. OLIVA: You know? So I -- I -- I want to
17 use real-time current information. We've put
18 districts on notice. We have expectations of these
19 districts. We have a statewide unified, coordinated
20 progress monitor system in place now to lead and
21 guide these conversations which we did not have
22 before -- prior to LEARNS. And this is how we can
23 use that data. And that -- that window, I want to
24 say, closes in January because there's some folks
25 that are in the testing parts now that the districts

1 have decisions that they wanted to do their testing
2 at the end of this month or the beginning of next
3 month. But by February, we'll be able to provide an
4 update with real current-year data.

5 MS. KEENER: Can I make a correction very
6 quickly before we accept a motion?

7 CHAIR WOODS: Uh-huh.

8 MS. KEENER: Ms. Swan, I wanted to check
9 something. Oh, I checked. I double-checked, and you
10 are correct. I neglected to include or to remove the
11 dually enrolled children, so children that are
12 receiving both center-based care and receiving home
13 visiting. That being 112 kids, that reduces your
14 vacancies down to 86, and the overpayment is at
15 439,000. So that's a smaller number. Still an
16 opportunity. So thank you.

17 MS. SWAN: Thank you for the clarification.

18 MS. KEENER: Oh, no, of course. Well, I want to
19 get it right. Yeah. Thanks.

20 MS. SMITH: I wanted to clarify something too
21 real quick. So when you vote today to accept the
22 statement of assurance, you're not necessarily
23 endorsing their district strategic plan as is; okay?
24 You're accepting the statement of assurance which are
25 actions that we've put together that basically say

1 you're collaborating with your school teams, you're
2 implementing grade-level standards in your classrooms
3 and you're monitoring it. You have clear
4 instructional expectations for your classrooms, and
5 you're monitoring it. You're evaluating the lowest
6 quartile data regularly. Like, that's what this
7 document is saying; okay? And so they're presenting
8 their plan on how they're going to improve. They're
9 signing this with their board today; right? And we
10 will continue to have conversations on that to them
11 with, have you collected the data? We'll have
12 conversations with boards about what should they be
13 looking for when it is a monthly board meeting and
14 they've signed that these things are occurring, how
15 is their board monitoring that these things are
16 occurring? Okay.

17 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Ready for a motion, anyone?

18 MR. WOOD: I'll move to accept the statement of
19 assurance from Watson Chapel.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. I have a motion on the
21 table by Mr. Wood. Do I have a second?

22 MS. HUNTER: Second.

23 CHAIR WOODS: Second by Ms. Hunter. All in
24 favor, say aye?

25 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

1 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

2 (NO RESPONSE)

3 CHAIR WOODS: Hearing none. Your motion passes.
4 Okay. Thank you. All right. We'll move on to the
5 next school.

6 Thank you, Watson Chapel.

7 MR. WOOD: I -- I appreciate this. Is this
8 something, though, that in the future that we could
9 ask the districts to have ready, you know, ahead of
10 the meeting? That -- that we could review before we
11 come in here?

12 MS. SMITH: Most definitely.

13 MR. WOOD: Okay.

14 **1.b. NORTH LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT**

15 MS. SMITH: All right. Next district that is
16 going to be presenting to you today is North Little
17 Rock School District. North Little Rock School
18 District is one point away -- 1.7 points away from a
19 D; okay? So one point. The co-op that they're with
20 is Arch Ford. They're recently a newer member of the
21 Arch Ford Consortium. They probably don't -- have
22 probably not been as actively involved with the co-op
23 in terms of providing all -- all sorts of
24 professional development of -- of those things. So
25 today, you might want to ask, how is the co-op

1 actually directly supporting a district that large
2 and how do they use them?

3 The enrollment in North Little Rock is over
4 7,000 students. Superintendent is Dr. Greg Pilewski.
5 He's in his 6th year as -- as a superintendent of the
6 district. One of the things I want to kind of make a
7 note about North Little Rock is that they actually
8 have 13 schools. The thing that kind of jumps out to
9 me when I look at their 13 schools is four of the 13
10 schools actually serve their -- their secondary
11 students; okay? Grades 7-12. And of those, all four
12 of their -- those schools are Fs. So it's when you
13 use the accountability system in which we have in our
14 -- in our state, and it pulls all of your kids
15 together. The older student grades, those -- those
16 grade levels are the areas in which this is really
17 pulling the data down for the district.

18 When you look at growth, overall growth this
19 last year and the year before in the district, you
20 kind of see a mixed bag within the different schools.
21 You know, one year, you know, one elementary made
22 growth. The next year they didn't make growth, and
23 it almost flips. The -- the -- the one year that the
24 school that didn't make growth, they went to another
25 school, and then -- then they did make growth. So

1 kind of the -- a consistency piece there that jumps
2 out. But as a whole, of their 13 schools, they do
3 have two B elementary schools, two C elementary
4 schools, two D elementary schools, and one of their
5 middle schools then is at that grade level. And then
6 of the F, district -- there's six in the district.
7 Three of those again are secondary students.
8 So again, those are kind of just things that kind of
9 jumped out today. Poverty rate in comparison to
10 Watson Chapel, who we just had in here, like they
11 were 68 percent poverty rate. When you go to North
12 Little Rock, you're looking at 99 percent poverty
13 rate. So just in -- in context of that. Again, I'm
14 going to turn it over to Dr. Pilewski.

15 DR. PILEWSKI: Good morning. Madam Chair,
16 Secretary Oliva, and distinguished Members of the
17 State School Board. For the record, my name is Greg
18 Pilewski, the proud superintendent of the North
19 Little Rock School District. Joining me today, Dr.
20 Rochelle Redus, our school board president; Colonel
21 Scott Stanger, Chief of Staff and oversees all of
22 school operations; Dr. Thomas Rogers, our assistant
23 superintendent of school improvement network A; Mr.
24 Jacob Smith, assistant superintendent of school
25 improvement network B; Dr. LeAnn Stoll, who's in

1 charge of our assistant superintendent of network
2 support services; and our two coordinators that are
3 here supporting us today, Ms. Shanda Macon, our
4 coordinator of school innovation, and Dr. Carmical is
5 our coordinator of science. I also want to recognize
6 I did bring one principal with me. That is Ms.
7 Harrison, who's the proud principal of NLR 6 Academy
8 of Agricultural and Veterinary Sciences. And I'm
9 also here supported by Arch Ford, which is Dr. Mark
10 Taylor and Dr. Julie Workman.

11 We appreciate the opportunity to come before you
12 today. However, the newly released letter grade for
13 our school district as an F rating is totally
14 unacceptable, period. Every child in NLRSD deserves
15 a high-quality teacher in a learning and a safe and
16 supportive learning environment with a highly
17 effective teacher and leader, period. We recognize
18 and hold ourselves accountable for immediate
19 improvements and our commitment to our proactive and
20 intentional approach to academic and student outcomes
21 to reverse any negative trends with urgency.
22 Because we anticipate a need for change direction,
23 we've already implemented significant changes to
24 improve academic outcomes, improve our overall
25 quality workforce. In fact, in 2024, we began a

1 proactive approach in planning for the '25-'26 school
2 year, based upon a variety of data. As such, this
3 required a new organizational leadership structure
4 that will better meet the needs of our students, our
5 families, as well as our classroom teachers.

6 On March 20th, 2025, the majority of our school
7 board supported the plan. The restructuring began
8 implementation July 1 of 2025 and has three
9 significant areas or shifts in transformation:
10 instructional leadership pipeline and coaching,
11 network-based teacher support and structure for our
12 Tier 3 priority schools, and integrated support and
13 wraparound services for our families within a 24-hour
14 time response period.

15 School networks are groups of schools in a
16 geographic location that share resources, they share
17 support, and they share expertise to improve teaching
18 and learning to meet the individual needs of the
19 whole child. In this model, the school district is
20 divided into two networks, A and B, each led by an
21 assistant superintendent of improvement with the --
22 that actually supervises seven school principals.
23 The challenge we're tackling is that 100 percent of
24 our principals and our assistant principals require
25 intense instructional leadership training. As such,

the assistant superintendent's primary role is to focus on building the principal's instructional leadership through capacity, side-by-side coaching, and daily monitoring of classroom instruction and targeted feedback to teachers. Already this school year, our assistant superintendents have spent nearly 1,000 hours providing coaching and support to the principals they lead, resulting in a systemic approach to classroom monitoring, coaching cycles, and feedback to teachers. Uniquely, this model is also framed with creating learning-focused partnerships between school principals and curriculum instruction coordinators. Previously, this coordination model between school principals and curriculum coordination was simply ineffective. Furthermore, the model moves away from a level principal supervision to a vertical model. As such, the model provides a tiered support with a priority being placed on Tier 3 schools, those receiving letter grades of a D and an F. Equally important, the model also includes an assistant superintendent of network support services, coordinating all the subordinate from curriculum instruction, data assessment, dyslexia, English language learners, special education, student-centered services, virtual

1 learning, and wraparound services, to name a few.
2 Finally, the model also moves away from any
3 supervision of operational functions by senior
4 leaders, which -- which now fall into the chief of
5 staff to the superintendent. Hence, having a
6 two-sided organizational streamlined structure to
7 include an instructional side and an operation side.
8 In some cases, instructional supervision and
9 operational supervision were intertwined, and leaders
10 now are able to focus their efforts supporting
11 quality instruction and learning.

12 The network support model also provides for a
13 network instructional specialist at each campus,
14 supervised by a school principal that works directly
15 in conjunction, collaboration with school
16 coordinators. Our network instructional specialists
17 provide with intense monthly professional training in
18 order to transfer their knowledge and their learning
19 back to the teachers that they work with.

20 The challenge we're tackling is that NLRSD has
21 163 unlicensed teachers, and of those, 124 are in D
22 and F campuses. Building teacher capacity is
23 paramount to scaling up their instructional content,
24 technology, analytical, interpersonal and adaptive
25 capacity. With a focus on D and F campuses, network

1 instructional specialists are also working closely
2 with classroom teachers identified as Tier 3, those
3 teachers needing the most support. Based on the
4 implementation of this model, we've already seen an
5 increase in the use of high-quality instructional
6 materials, with nearly 300 instructional walks
7 conducted during the first quarter. Also, the school
8 network-based instructional specialists work in
9 collaboration with our state-assigned coaches,
10 therefore furthering the intentional alignment and
11 coordination of services. This model moves away from
12 an outdated and an uncoordinated model of different
13 instructional support positions and titles with
14 limited direction and focus.

15 Finally, the network model also includes direct
16 support for more intense wraparound services to meet
17 the needs of the whole child. There are a multitude
18 of adversities that our families face in our school
19 district today, from mental health, addiction,
20 physical, domestic violence, poverty, trauma,
21 housing, relationship breakdowns and unemployment, to
22 name a few. As such, there's so many factors outside
23 of school that we know that directly impact what
24 happens inside of school.

25 The challenge we're tackling is that in 2024 and

1 '25, one in four of our students were chronically
2 absent due to the following barriers, whether that be
3 housing, evictions, homelessness, routines, mornings
4 stretched by jobs, time constraints, health, mental
5 health issues, transportation, limited to a car or
6 gas, and perceptions that daily attendance not always
7 seems to be an essential -- an essential component by
8 some parents or caregivers. Top requests from
9 families this year include transportation, school
10 supplies, clothing, and food.

11 In this model, there are five network wraparound
12 service specialists assigned to each campus. Their
13 primary role is to support schools and chronically
14 absent students as a barrier to some families and
15 meet those non-academic barriers within 24 hours. As
16 a result of their work, already this school year,
17 we've seen a decrease in chronic absenteeism in '24
18 and '25. An average rate of absence per school was
19 8.3 days, compared to 2025 and '26 average rate of
20 absence per school is 6.9. Our current average
21 attendance rate as of this week is 93 percent,
22 compared to last year at this time was 91. By
23 working to improve key indicators linked to student
24 success, we're trying to address the issues of the
25 root cause to support our students and our academic

1 supports.

2 In our collaboration with our school board,
3 we've created a new vision, a mission, moral purpose,
4 organizational core values and our strategic plan
5 five-year goals. The focus of this presentation will
6 be specific on goal 1, rigorous, relevant, and
7 innovative learning, and goal 4, high-quality
8 teachers, leaders, and employees to improve quality
9 education workforce.

10 In April 2025, our immediate action was to
11 redesign our strategic plan performance targets to
12 ensure alignment to the new accountability and to be
13 able to hold ourselves accountable that are
14 calculated by each grade. As such, we have 20
15 district performance indicators directly aligned to
16 how each school's letter grade, elementary, middle,
17 and high school, is measured based upon the new exam
18 -- based upon the accountability system.

19 Here are some examples. By 2030, 88 percent of
20 our students in grades 3-5 will be proficient in ELA.
21 By 2030, 96 in grades 3-5 will meet their growth
22 target and 100 percent of the lower quartile will
23 meet their growth. Hence, we build performance
24 targets daily from metrics that are used for our
25 straight letter grades. Therefore, as a work in

1 progress, district goals are aligned to performance
2 targets. They're aligned to school targets that are
3 aligned to PPGs, which are aligned to professional
4 learning targets, and which are aligned to teacher
5 PPGs. Although a work in progress, this is the first
6 time the system's been aligned this tightly.

7 School improvement model. Another significant
8 change we made is taken to completely redesign our
9 school improvement plans, our structure, our process,
10 and how schools report on their data quarterly.
11 Although another work in progress, our school
12 improvement plan process is broken down into 11
13 sections. As you can see from this example of an
14 elementary school improvement plan, the plan focuses
15 on data-driven diagnosis of quantitative data that is
16 analyzed through time and data available to schools,
17 strengths, areas of challenging chronic performance
18 gaps, which include a variety of data, screener data,
19 interim data, absentee data, for examples.

20 The plan also focuses on data-driven diagnosis
21 of qualitative data which is meaning weekly and
22 monthly walkthrough data analysis in order to
23 identify those areas of teacher practice. The
24 comprehensive needs assessment is essential component
25 to our root cause and identifying improvement needed.

1 Our strategically aligning our school improvement
2 plan with the school improvement targets aligns the
3 district performance plans, aligns for deep alignment
4 of action plans, specifically in literacy, ELA, math
5 and in science.

6 Here's the page. Finally, each of our school
7 improvement plans outline the accountability process
8 for reporting out on data, which is known as our
9 collaborative observation backed by the
10 responsibility and accountability of statistics, or
11 known to us locally as COBRA stat. All models report
12 on their COBRA stat quarterly data to our executive
13 leadership. School principals in a D and F campus
14 also report out -- at a D and F campus also report
15 out the data to a school board meeting during our
16 monthly meeting -- during our school board monthly
17 meeting.

18 Finally, any principal of a D and F campus will
19 also sign, along with their assistant superintendent,
20 obviously if approved today, the NLRSD School
21 Improvement Statement of Assurance form, similar to
22 what a superintendent and school board president will
23 sign as a part of this process. This form certifies
24 that the school will adhere also to the school
25 improvement statement of assurance.

1 Another immediate change we made in September of
2 this school year was to immediately change our '25-
3 '26 calendar from early release Wednesdays, and a
4 reform initiative aimed to increase weekly time for
5 professional development and teacher planning in
6 order to gain back 90 minutes of instruction on
7 Wednesdays for high-quality teaching. The purpose of
8 the reform initiative is to implement the approach to
9 further support leaders with additional time and
10 professional learning and to support collaborative
11 planning and individual teacher planning.

12 Within the teaching and learning process, we
13 know that there should be a direct correlation
14 between high-quality planning and high-quality
15 delivery of instruction. Due to inclement weather
16 over the last few years, we've needed to eliminate
17 early release in the second part in order to make up
18 instructional time. Given the results of the '24-'25
19 ATLAS data and concerns of student chronic
20 absenteeism, especially with attendance by students
21 on early release Wednesdays and shortened
22 instructional time -- the quality of that time. As a
23 result of this change, we've already delivered an
24 additional ten hours of instruction to students this
25 year, and they will gain an additional 12 hours of

1 instruction by May of 2026.

2 Goal 1, key actions for academic improvement,
3 and I'll summarize these, which go into high
4 expectations for curriculum planning, implementing
5 clear expectations, what we'd refer to, as you know,
6 as Tier 1 instruction, which is the day-to-day
7 delivery. The assessment of the curriculum to
8 student learning, the implementation and
9 expectations, which go to the monitoring of the
10 curriculum by not only our instructional leaders, but
11 our central office staff as well. The implementation
12 of high-quality instructional materials in ELA, math
13 and science with fidelity.

14 We are exploring an option of a new elementary
15 science reading curriculum for both the top and the
16 bottom rope through a rigorous adoption process that
17 would be aligned to the state-approved HQIM
18 publishers. Professional development for teachers on
19 HQIM, implement targeted development for teachers
20 based on classroom walkthrough data using key levers
21 of instructional -- for instructional leaders.
22 Teachers also aligning instruction with the ATLAS
23 achievement level descriptors, known as the ALDs, in
24 ELA, math and science. Implement the ATLAS summative
25 testing blueprint to support the monitoring of

1 student learning and pacing so our teachers
2 understand the standards that are covered, and
3 they're going to be tested.

4 Also, in '26 and '27, we're predicting that our
5 district calendar will provide for two weeks of
6 professional development prior to the start of school
7 and monthly during the school year. Professional
8 development sessions will be determined based on the
9 needs as seen in walkthrough data observations and
10 ATLAS data.

11 Our principals, at a minimum, are required to do
12 20 classroom visits per week, report on their
13 findings to their assistant superintendents for
14 ongoing instruction support and those results
15 compiled to be reported to me as a superintendent of
16 schools. Also, each principal's professional growth
17 plan will include their school performance targets
18 aligned directly to their performance targets and the
19 new accountability system.

20 We've also revised our response to intervention
21 with our RTI process of Tier 2 and Tier 2 at each
22 campus, including the menu of reading and math
23 interventions aligned to the right skill with the
24 right intervention, guidelines for scheduling that
25 intervention for up to 12 weeks, and guidelines to

1 progress monitor that intervention and make
2 adjustments as needed. Each school leader team will
3 progress monitor all schools receiving reading and
4 math interventions, individual reading plan,
5 reading-at-home plans, high-impact tutoring, and
6 we've also added a family-support plan. Each
7 principal in a D and F campus, as I reported on their
8 Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 data, will report on that to our
9 school board at -- at the conclusion of each
10 quarter.

11 We've redesigned our ALE program and created
12 initiatives like the Fusion program, where we're
13 targeting students that have dropped out to bring
14 them back to get them back on track. We've
15 eliminated several external support providers that
16 simply were not demonstrating improvement. We've
17 also -- the expertise of the key external partners,
18 such as Arch Ford, the Bailey Group, KidsFirst, and
19 Pulaski County -- Pulaski Tech, to mention a few.

20 And finally, as I'll go into -- I apologize.
21 And finally, I'll go into Goal 4, and that is the
22 actions that we'll take for a quality education
23 workforce. Our plan is to raise our minimum teacher
24 salary to 55,000 to attract high-quality teachers,
25 provide principals with teacher growth score data, to

1 develop staff development for D and F schools to
2 attract and demonstrate growth. We've established
3 the NLRSD Best of the Best Award, recognizing those
4 teachers that have shown tremendous growth. Teacher
5 recruitment and incentive programs for our high-needs
6 schools. We really need to look at and analyze our
7 teacher attendance data based upon our attendance
8 policy and look for those findings to make
9 adjustments.

10 We have a high need for language interpreter
11 services. We're also looking at affordable housing
12 and loan forgiveness for our high-quality teachers,
13 compensation for additional time outside of school
14 hours if you're a D and F campus. Distributed
15 leadership model, so partnering with such
16 institutions as a National Institute of Excellence
17 and teaching to develop our Grow Your Own model.
18 Recruitment in the early spring, teacher preparation
19 programs, using online platforms, and also creating
20 the NLRSD Dogtown Foundation to be able to full-time
21 fundraise to be able to provide additional support
22 for non-academic barriers, as well as supporting
23 after-school and extended day programs.

24 Without a doubt, and to overemphasize, our
25 biggest lever to reverse an F rating is the quality

1 of the teacher in the classroom, period. By far,
2 they have the most direct impact on improving student
3 outcomes, second only to the quality of the principal
4 and the assistant principal as the instructional
5 leader.

6 And finally, in the fall of 2022, we began to
7 restructure Seventh Street Elementary School, a
8 historically low-performing school with high leader
9 and teacher turnover, after meeting with ADE
10 accountability staff on available options. In March
11 of 2023, the school board unanimously approved the
12 Seventh Street Elementary School restructuring plan,
13 which included zero-basing all staff, including the
14 school leadership team and seven stipends over three
15 years, targeted intervention and wraparound support,
16 increased teacher support with literacy and math and
17 additional time for professional development,
18 reconfiguring the school from a pre-K-5 to a pre-K-8
19 and the implementation of a theme school model,
20 integrating project-based learning, to name a few.
21 Implementation began in the '23-'24 school year. It
22 was a complete disaster. A disaster. The principal
23 quit in the first week. The literacy and the math
24 coach quit within the -- within the next month.
25 Central office staff responded rapidly with

1 additional assistance and support, including a dean
2 of students to support a large number of student
3 discipline cases that year. In fact, in '23 and '24,
4 Seventh Street Elementary School had 350 disciplinary
5 incidents. Ms. Larissa Harrison, who is here with us
6 today, was appointed as a new principal in '24, and
7 then 24-25 school year was her very first year as a
8 building leader. In her first year as the
9 instructional leader, she decreased school discipline
10 from 350 to 160 in 24-25. At the request of the
11 principal, there's no longer a need for a dean of
12 students. Also, in her first year, she improved her
13 campus letter grade total score by nearly four
14 points, showing another positive trend. We also made
15 a leadership change this year at the assistant
16 principal level.

17 Finally, the school's Community Advisory Board
18 helped to select the theme of agricultural and
19 veterinary science, supporting early exposure to
20 careers in the areas while making learning relevant
21 and meaningful through high levels of student
22 engagement linked to real-world experiences. To
23 date, NLR 6 Academy of Agricultural and Veterinary
24 Sciences has the largest number of external partners
25 in our school district that even rival our career

1 academies at our high school. Some key partnerships
2 include the University of Arkansas Monticello College
3 of Forestry, Agricultural and Natural Resources;
4 Arkansas State University College of Veterinary
5 Medicine; Lyon College of Veterinary Medicine; USDA;
6 Arkansas Game and Fish; and the Arkansas Department
7 of Agriculture, to name a few.

8 In short, under Ms. Harrison's leadership, the
9 school has come a long way in a short period of time
10 in this context, but there is still a lot more work
11 to do. In addition, we were honored last week to
12 host Secretary Oliva, Deputy Commissioner Smith, and
13 their efforts on a site visit and a one-on-one
14 discussion with Ms. Harrison. The changes at NLR 6
15 since Ms. Harrison's induction and her ability to
16 make -- and our ability to make needed changes
17 quickly, which result in higher levels of learning
18 for students -- I'm sure I'm probably over my time.

19 CHAIR WOODS: You are, and I was going to say,
20 if you could, do your closing comments.

21 DR. PILEWSKI: I will. And my conclusion, we
22 remain committed to hold ourselves accountable for
23 the results and look forward to sharing our progress
24 with our stakeholders and our success of every
25 student entrusted in us to be future-ready, to

1 enlist, employ -- enlist, enroll and employ.

2 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

3 Ms. Hunter?

4 DR. PILEWSKI: May I have some water?

5 CHAIR WOODS: Oh, whoa.

6 DR. PILEWSKI: My mouth is completely dry.

7 CHAIR WOODS: What I'll do is I'll start this
8 side and go down, and then we'll come back. I'm
9 going to start with Ms. Hunter, and then we'll --
10 we'll work --

11 MS. HUNTER: Okay.

12 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, Ms. Hunter.

13 MS. HUNTER: I don't know where to begin. So
14 wow, that's a lot of information. Thank you for all
15 of that.

16 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

17 MS. HUNTER: So let's talk about unlicensed
18 teachers just a little bit.

19 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

20 MS. HUNTER: So you have a concentration of
21 unlicensed teachers in your D and F schools?

22 DR. PILEWSKI: 124.

23 MS. HUNTER: Can you talk a little bit about
24 their licensure plans and what you're doing to help
25 them move into a licensed status?

1 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure. So all of those
2 individuals meet with our HR staff and look at those
3 pathways and make sure that they're on a -- a -- a --
4 a plan in order to make their certification. When I
5 arrived in North Little Rock in 2020, we had so many
6 teachers that, I think, was on the Act 1240 waiver,
7 if that was right. And they had been on Act 1240
8 waivers for a long time.

9 MS. HUNTER: Right.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: In some cases, eight to nine
11 years. And so we stopped that and said, "You have to
12 be on a three-year plan, and you have to show
13 progress. If you don't show progress and you do not
14 meet that indicator, I'll revert your payback to
15 substitute pay." And I've done that if you're not
16 making progress. That's one area. Certainly,
17 working with Arch Ford. Our cooperative does a great
18 job with our novice and new teachers in supporting
19 them. So that's another level of support. But
20 there's a lot with them to make sure that we want to
21 monitor that you're on track to make that
22 certification in a timely manner. And if not,
23 there's a consequence for it.

24 MS. HUNTER: Okay. All right. Fair enough.
25 Okay. So -- and I'm going to just ask one other

1 question --

2 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

3 MS. HUNTER: -- so we can move on through here.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am, Ms. Hunter.

5 MS. HUNTER: But with respect to the Dogtown
6 Foundation --

7 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

8 MS. HUNTER: -- I think that that -- I mean, at
9 least in my experience, that's a somewhat
10 unconventional approach, is unless it's popular, and
11 I don't know about it. I mean, can you just give me
12 a little bit of background on that? And -- and then
13 the -- I find it very interesting that you say in
14 your presentation that you expect to -- that
15 foundation to relieve some of the budgetary --

16 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

17 MS. HUNTER: -- pressures on the district.

18 DR. PILEWSKI: 100 percent.

19 MS. HUNTER: You would use those to -- for
20 teacher pay.

21 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

22 MS. HUNTER: Can you just explain on that --

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Yep. So we have -- we already
24 have two foundations in our school district. One is
25 the Wildcat Foundation. They only focus on

1 fundraising for high school, and it's predominantly
2 in the area of athletics. We also have the NLRSD
3 Public Education Foundation. They support, not --
4 not necessarily students, but they -- they sponsor a
5 signing day for our students going to college. But
6 they also support our teachers with teacher grants.
7 You can get a \$500 grant or a \$1,000 block grant for
8 a group of teachers. That's all they do.

9 MS. HUNTER: Okay.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: And so the idea or the notion of
11 the NLRSD Dogtown Foundation is to have a full-time
12 person fundraising for the district with a focus on
13 not only those academic areas and supporting them to
14 be future ready, but we want to target -- when we
15 have family needs that are out there, we want to be
16 able to make sure that we've got resources that we
17 can put out into those families that are in need, so
18 there's non-academic -- non-academic barriers that I
19 was talking about to be able to fundraise for that.
20 Also, our extended day programs as well as our
21 after-school programs. Right now, we only have one
22 school, which is Crestwood Elementary School, which
23 has their own, which is funded. We're kind of the
24 pastor agency for that, which is a -- a full-time
25 aftercare program. We do have a lot of community

1 support for aftercare programs. However, since I've
2 been there, we funded summer school out of ESSER
3 funds. When ESSER funds went away, we had to go to
4 operational funds. So we're trying to think
5 differently through the Dogtown Foundation, how can
6 we raise money in the district and not use
7 operational costs and redirect those operational
8 costs towards increasing teacher salaries?

9 MS. HUNTER: Okay. Thank -- thank you. I mean,
10 I just want now to know that there are three now
11 foundations. I wonder if there's going to --

12 DR. PILEWSKI: Well, we --

13 MS. HUNTER: You know, you only get the --

14 DR. PILEWSKI: Well, we tried to -- we tried to
15 align ourselves.

16 MS. HUNTER: Yeah.

17 DR. PILEWSKI: And right now, the other two just
18 wanted to kind of wait and see. But we've had that
19 conversation with them because we think there should
20 only be one. But there are different focuses. So we
21 hope that by leading the way, that they'll come and
22 join us. And we've asked them to join us, "Let's --
23 let's do this together. We don't have to be
24 separated." But they serve a different -- they were
25 serving a different need and not the needs that I

1 felt that we needed to address immediately.

2 MS. HUNTER: Understood. Yeah. I'm just
3 worried about how often you dip from the well. So
4 anyway, I'll -- I'll move on.

5 MS. KEENER: I --

6 DR. PILEWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Hunter.

7 MS. KEENER: Are these --

8 DR. PILEWSKI: Ms. Keener.

9 MS. KEENER: Each of these foundations, are they
10 501(c)(3)s?

11 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, they're all 501(c)(3)s.
12 That's correct.

13 MS. KEENER: Yeah. So you have three different
14 boards, three different meeting requirements --

15 DR. PILEWSKI: Correct.

16 MS. KEENER: -- that I cannot even imagine. It
17 certainly would benefit everyone.

18 DR. PILEWSKI: Absolutely. And -- and we're
19 going to be the only one that has a dedicated person
20 that is a full-time fundraiser. That's all they do,
21 is fundraise.

22 MS. KEENER: Uh-huh.

23 DR. PILEWSKI: While the other ones are, their
24 budgets might be maybe 20, \$25,000 a year. Our
25 target is a million dollars a year to raise.

1 MS. KEENER: That's great, and that's --

2 DR. PILEWSKI: And redistribute that back within
3 our district.

4 MS. KEENER: Certainly, common practice in
5 independent schools --

6 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

7 MS. KEENER: -- and private schools. And so I
8 think it's a great approach, especially as large as
9 -- as your district is.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am, Ms. Keener.

11 MS. KEENER: I had a question about the tiered
12 levels of support.

13 DR. PILEWSKI: Uh-huh.

14 MS. KEENER: I noticed that Pike View wasn't on
15 there. Can you tell me more about that?

16 DR. PILEWSKI: I may have -- I may apologize
17 that I didn't put that on there. Pike View is our
18 early childhood center. I -- I may have forgotten to
19 put that on there. I -- as I was transferring some.
20 If I go back to that, is it not listed? Is Pike View
21 not listed?

22 MS. KEENER: It is not listed on the tiered
23 support model.

24 DR. PILEWSKI: Okay.

25 MS. KEENER: It is a A. It's a Network A. My

1 fear is --

2 DR. PILEWSKI: Let me see.

3 MS. KEENER: -- it's not there because they
4 don't take the same assessments --

5 DR. PILEWSKI: No, ma'am. That's -- that's --

6 MS. KEENER: -- and they're not getting any
7 support.

8 DR. PILEWSKI: That is literally my mistake. As
9 I was transferring from one slide as our leadership
10 institute to this slide, I inadvertently left that
11 out. So I do apologize.

12 MS. KEENER: Do you know which tier they're in?

13 DR. PILEWSKI: They would be in Tier 2.

14 MS. KEENER: Okay. And how is that decided,
15 seeing as their assessments are so very different
16 than everyone else's?

17 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure. So when we look at -- you
18 know, and we all know the -- the importance of early
19 childhood education, we're all -- we know that's the
20 foundation. In fact, when I look at pre-K numbers,
21 there are about 435, if I remember correctly. And of
22 that, 378 of those come from single-family homes. So
23 my question is, what are we doing for those
24 single-family parents to be able to support them with
25 their child's education? And so we've done a pretty

1 good job, relatively speaking, over the last couple
2 years of improving that pipeline from pre-K to -- to
3 1 to 2. Matter of fact, one of our metrics is
4 looking at -- and it's been my stance since I've been
5 there. Every child, by the time they leave grade 2,
6 should be able to read and compute proficiently. So
7 we're still inching our way there, but it's -- it's
8 an essential component. That is our only site that
9 is the early childhood center. And then we have -- I
10 believe it's seven other sites that have pre-Ks.

11 MS. KEENER: Let's see. One, two, three, four.
12 Yeah, five other --

13 DR. PILEWSKI: Sites.

14 MS. KEENER: One, two, three, four, five. Yeah.
15 So six total. Well, and what assessment -- you know,
16 understanding these are ABC slots and that an
17 assessment is required and child development surveys
18 as well, do you know what --

19 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

20 MS. KEENER: -- assessment Pike View uses for
21 kindergarten readiness?

22 DR. PILEWSKI: I just drew a blank to that, and
23 I should have the answer to that. And I apologize.

24 MS. KEENER: Perhaps your Network A principal,
25 or excuse me, superintendent --

1 DR. PILEWSKI: So obviously with our screener --
2 that would be Dr. Rogers that would be here, but --

3 CHAIR WOODS: You can come back to it. It's
4 okay.

5 MS. KEENER: Because I would love to see --

6 DR. PILEWSKI: I got a lot of numbers in my
7 head.

8 MS. KEENER: I was --

9 DR. PILEWSKI: I'm trying to think about the
10 assessment. Obviously, our screener data that we
11 just looked at that, and we are seeing an improvement
12 in -- in children being ready. So that's a positive
13 thing at that area. You know, as we continue to look
14 at -- at grade 3, and -- and I know Mr. Wood has
15 already been asking that question, which is going to
16 be about 18 to 20 percent of our students in grade 3
17 that are proficient. So that's still a large number
18 of students. We have 275 today out of 568 3rd
19 graders that right now would look like they would not
20 qualify to move on, although we got 141 that are in
21 high-impact tutoring grants. So we all know that
22 that early childhood piece is going to feed right
23 into that first year in which they take that
24 assessment.

25 MS. KEENER: Well, now I love -- I think it just

1 worked out this way, but that the seats belong to
2 you. The funding belongs to you. So the support is
3 also in your purview.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

5 MS. KEENER: And I think that's because of your
6 most -- because you only recently joined the co-op,
7 because often the co-ops are the ones. They're
8 located at your individual site.

9 DR. PILEWSKI: Absolutely.

10 MS. KEENER: But they often feel very separated.
11 And so the building leadership does -- isn't
12 involved.

13 DR. PILEWSKI: They -- they -- you know, I --

14 MS. KEENER: So I appreciate that yours are.

15 DR. PILEWSKI: I -- I would say to -- to your
16 point, one of the first things I heard when I
17 interviewed 180 teachers, the pre-K teachers always
18 felt left out.

19 MS. KEENER: Uh-huh. Yeah.

20 DR. PILEWSKI: And they're like, "Well, it's
21 always K-12, but they never talk about us."

22 MS. KEENER: They're not included in the support
23 plan.

24 DR. PILEWSKI: Right. So I've --

25 MS. KEENER: Right.

1 DR. PILEWSKI: I have two that sit on my teacher
2 advisory, two pre-K teachers.

3 MS. KEENER: That's great. And I also very much
4 appreciated the sort of the -- I mean, I identified
5 the SMART goals, but the tangible, attainable
6 improvement plan of ten percent per year --

7 DR. PILEWSKI: Absolutely.

8 MS. KEENER: -- up to a certain level, it chunks
9 it off in a way that feels like you're not eating an
10 elephant, I suppose.

11 DR. PILEWSKI: Like it's manageable.

12 MS. KEENER: Right.

13 DR. PILEWSKI: Right?

14 MS. KEENER: And 110 percent, you know, growth.
15 Obviously, 100 percent would be that you've -- you've
16 met your yearly growth --

17 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

18 MS. KEENER: -- from one to the next. And 110%
19 feels very -- very attainable. So I appreciate that.
20 And I --

21 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

22 MS. KEENER: -- hope that those 14 kind of key
23 tasks in both workforce development and in academic
24 are also being applied to the early childhood
25 workforce as well. So --

1 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, ma'am.

2 MS. KEENER: -- thanks. I appreciate it.

3 DR. PILEWSKI: Ms. Keener.

4 Yes, sir.

5 DR. ARNOLD: Well, we're here based on numbers,
6 but to go off script there, let's go qualitative just
7 for a moment. Could you reintroduce your staff to us
8 and have them stand when their name is called?

9 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah. Yes, sir. Dr. Arnold, I'd
10 be -- it'd be my pleasure. The first would be Dr.
11 Redus. She is our school board president. I'd also
12 introduce to you Colonel Scott Stanger. He's chief
13 of staff and heads all of school district operations.
14 Next would be Dr. LeAnn Stoll, assistant
15 superintendent of network -- school network support
16 services. Dr. Thomas Rogers is our assistant
17 superintendent of school improvement network A. Mr.
18 Jacob Smith, assistant superintendent of network B;
19 Ms. Shanda Macon, who is the coordinator of school
20 innovation, and also Ms. -- Dr. Carmical is here from
21 our coordinator of science. I think our literacy
22 folks are doing training today, or they would've been
23 here too. And also, Ms. Larissa Harrison is the
24 principal of NLR 6. She's in her second year as the
25 principal in a Tier 3 school. And I don't think I

1 left anybody out. And certainly, our friends from
2 Arch Ford.

3 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you. And congratulations on
4 Seventh Street.

5 Would it -- would it be appropriate, or may I
6 have a couple of minutes just to have Dr. Rogers and
7 Mr. Smith come to the podium just for a word or two?

8 DR. PILEWSKI: Absolutely, Dr. -- Dr. Arnold.

9 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

11 DR. ARNOLD: Knowing it's a public forum, and
12 you know, we're not in the back room somewhere, I'm
13 just going to ask questions and -- and look for, you
14 know, your heart. You know, Dr. Rogers, the team
15 structure looks powerful on paper. In your mind, is
16 it the right one, and how is it working?

17 DR. ROGERS: Thomas Rogers, assistant
18 superintendent, network A, North Little Rock School
19 District. I want to refer back to the question about
20 the pre-K assessment.

21 MS. KEENER: Yes. Thank you.

22 DR. ROGERS: Let me grab that first, and then
23 I'll jump to you.

24 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

25 MS. KEENER: I appreciate it.

1 DR. ROGERS: It is gains.

2 MS. KEENER: Oh, great. Okay.

3 DR. ROGERS: That's what we use --

4 MS. KEENER: That's like a --

5 DR. ROGERS: -- and Frog Street is the
6 curriculum.

7 MS. KEENER: Perfect. I appreciate that.

8 DR. ROGERS: Is that good?

9 MS. KEENER: Yes.

10 DR. ROGERS: Okay.

11 MS. KEENER: Thank you. I love that you knew
12 that.

13 DR. ROGERS: Now I'll go to you, sir. You would
14 repeat your question for me so I can make sure I
15 answer.

16 DR. ARNOLD: Yes. And I'm -- I'm going
17 qualitative just to get a sense of the -- the team,
18 the team structure, its effectiveness, because it's a
19 -- it's a powerful model. It's -- it's not your
20 typical model. But in this instance, I see it has a
21 lot of potential. So how is that potential
22 materializing in your mind?

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Dr. Arnold, may I ask, are you
24 talking about the network, the concept of the network
25 team?

1 DR. ARNOLD: Yes, yes. Yes.

2 DR. ROGERS: I'm sorry?

3 DR. ARNOLD: He's asking about --

4 DR. ROGERS: Just the way we deal with schools.

5 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. This
6 org chart, your presence, your team.

7 DR. ROGERS: Absolutely. Certainly, I think it
8 is a powerful model. Having been experienced from a
9 large urban school district in Tennessee, where I've
10 had a large number of schools in my network, and
11 specifically turnaround work, this is the smallest
12 number I've ever seen. So it is a joy to work
13 closely with principals inside of schools every day,
14 building capacity, strengthening instructional
15 leadership and side by side in coaching
16 conversations. One of the things that I think Dr.
17 Pilewski was -- had great foresight in is the way
18 that the redesign has worked. And this is part of
19 the redesign model to get seven schools on the A
20 side, seven on the B side. It gives us more
21 intensive support time to work with our D and F
22 campuses, which I see every week. And if my
23 principals were here, they certainly would attest to
24 that. And when we meet, we're always looking at all
25 data points that align to ATLAS outcomes, and we're

1 in classroom side by side, looking at instruction,
2 aligning it to the ALDs, looking at high-quality
3 instructional materials, Tier 1 instruction, and
4 matching assessments from a backward design.

5 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you.

6 DR. ROGERS: Absolutely.

7 DR. ARNOLD: Mr. Smith, in your mind and in your
8 experience, how's the chemistry of this team?

9 MR. SMITH: Fantastic, sir. Mr. Smith, Jacob
10 Smith.

11 CHAIR WOODS: You can adjust the mic to your
12 mouth.

13 MR. SMITH: Apologize. 6'5".

14 CHAIR WOODS: You're tall.

15 MS. HUNTER: We're comfortable.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Yes.

17 MR. SMITH: Jacob Smith, assistant
18 superintendent, school improvement for network B.
19 And so the way it's working is -- is great. We're
20 hand and foot, if that makes sense, moving together
21 as one group, Dr. Stoll, myself, and Dr. Rogers. I
22 believe, you know, being in North Little Rock under
23 the previous model and now moving to this model, I
24 think the biggest distinction is, is we were
25 elementary and secondary split. And that was

1 overwhelming because it was ten on one individual and
2 four on another. And there was a great deal of need
3 at the elementary level. And so this kind of
4 equalize that process and allow more experience to
5 kind of be dumped into both, if that makes sense.
6 And so as Dr. Rogers alluded to, we have more time to
7 focus on those schools that are in that tier that
8 need support.

9 DR. ARNOLD: Qualitatively then, are you sensing
10 gain progress?

11 MR. SMITH: Absolutely. Yes, sir. The -- the
12 whole culture has shifted, and everybody is buying
13 into the process. And -- and any old coach, anybody
14 will -- will -- will absolutely tell you that the
15 buy-in is most important. You can't do it by
16 yourself. And so you have to elicit that buy-in and
17 allow individuals to push forward with you. And
18 that's what we're attempting to do as a whole group.

19 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you.

20 MR. SMITH: You're welcome.

21 DR. ABBOTT: Yeah. So -- so similar to that
22 question. I know a lot of these initiatives are
23 planned for, I guess, the next school year, and just
24 knowing the immediacy of -- of all of this.

25 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir, Dr. Abbott.

1 DR. ABBOTT: How much of this do you feel like
2 has been implemented, I guess, so far this school
3 year? And then kind of as a follow-up to that, and
4 this is kind of related to Dr. Arnold's question just
5 a second ago --

6 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

7 DR. ABBOTT: -- how -- what have you seen, I
8 guess, in the classrooms and -- and how things have
9 changed so far, not just with the teachers, but as
10 far as like -- like students just getting it, like
11 students understanding the curriculum?

12 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah. I -- I tell you the -- the
13 three biggest themes that came out of 300
14 walkthroughs are the following. Number one, student
15 engagement. And so there's too much teacher talk and
16 not enough student talk. That's a big one. Number
17 two would be formative assessment, making sure that
18 we're using those cognitive formative assessments
19 designed from our curriculum team that are used
20 consistently to continue to understand where are my
21 kids, where are my kids, where are my kids, and what
22 am I going to do about it? The last is teaching at a
23 low level, which is the DOK 1. We know that's --
24 that's a low level of instruction. Kids are not
25 going to be tested at a low level of instruction, so

1 we've got to be able to raise those gains. So we've
2 taken that data, and we're spiraling it back into our
3 individual schools to reduce professional
4 development. And then we're going to go back in and
5 look at instruction, and we should start to see some
6 -- some changes based upon those three areas. But I
7 will tell you that, you know, we continue to, you
8 know, implement with -- with fidelity to the best of
9 the ability. And -- and if somebody's not meeting
10 that expectation, then the expectation is that that
11 individual teacher is going to be written on paper on
12 notice if they're not following the directions that
13 they've been given.

14 DR. ABBOTT: Here. I had noticed as a district,
15 I think it's a -- 78 percent students graduated on
16 time, and obviously it's a big part of the score.

17 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah.

18 DR. ABBOTT: You mentioned a initiative called
19 Fusion program.

20 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes.

21 DR. ABBOTT: And you're, I guess, redesigning
22 that. Can you speak more to that?

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah, sure. So the Fusion
24 program, we have 20 -- I believe it's 25 students
25 today. We implemented that last year knowing, going

1 into the -- or looking at our graduation rate and how
2 we're going to be able to improve that. And we've
3 reengaged kids that have dropped out. And I'll tell
4 you this story because it's real and it's
5 heartbreaking. But when I talked to one of the
6 students that graduated this past year out of the
7 Fusion program, and when I went to visit him before
8 he graduated, I wanted to know his story because
9 everyone has a story. And I say, I asked, "Why did
10 you drop out in the first place?" He had half a
11 credit, or I mean, one credit shy of graduating. And
12 he talked about his family life. He talked about, "I
13 had to provide for my family." At that time, there
14 was no other reason or no other avenue. He felt in
15 his mind to take care of his family first. Before
16 that, we got him to be able to graduate. It amazes
17 me what challenges these kids face outside of school
18 but still come to school every single day. You know,
19 wanting to learn, they know it's a safe place.
20 That's just one little success story.

21 The other thing is completely redesigning ALE. I'm
22 not happy overall with our ALE program. I think we
23 need to do a better job. We have 215 students in
24 ALE. When I arrived, this is another thing on my
25 list. But when I arrived and I talked to students,

1 and they would say, "Dr. P, nobody gets out of ALE.
2 Once you're in, you're always in." What is that
3 saying? When students are saying that once you're in
4 ALE, you're always in ALE. Now, for some kids, a
5 smaller learning environment, they need that.
6 Predominantly, when you look at our data, it's
7 African American males, and we've got to reverse that
8 completely, period. Thank you, Dr. Abbott.

9 MR. PEACOCK: I've got a few.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, Mr. Peacock.

11 MR. PEACOCK: The -- you talked about 300 days
12 of -- or 300 walkthroughs.

13 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

14 MR. PEACOCK: Was -- was that you personally, or
15 was that your staff?

16 DR. PILEWSKI: Well, my staff as well.

17 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. So how many of those 300
18 were you?

19 DR. PILEWSKI: I was on 15.

20 MR. PEACOCK: All right. You think that's an
21 appropriate split?

22 DR. PILEWSKI: No, sir.

23 MR. PEACOCK: All right. How many people do you
24 have that work in the district's office that aren't
25 in the schools?

1 DR. PILEWSKI: In the district office that are
2 not in schools?

3 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah. Your staff.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: So that would be all operations
5 staff, all of that, sir?

6 MR. PEACOCK: Well, the -- there seems to be --
7 and -- and with all due respect to the -- the
8 structure, and I'll talk about that in a second.
9 There just seems to be a lot of assistant
10 superintendents and a lot of people that aren't
11 directly involved with in -- in the schools. And I'm
12 just trying to understand.

13 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

14 MR. PEACOCK: I understand the 7,000 students,
15 but --

16 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure. So we actually had more in
17 central office before the reorganization.

18 MR. PEACOCK: Okay.

19 DR. PILEWSKI: And so one of the -- one of the
20 avenues that we were faced with, a \$5.1 million
21 deficit, that was a huge factor. So based upon a
22 variety of factors from the school board, let alone
23 to our employees and our budget survey, and the first
24 thing that the board, as well as our staff, said,
25 "You need to look at central office." And we had

1 more central office staff in -- in central office
2 prior to this school year. So what the model was in
3 the past is you had people that had instruction, but
4 they also had operational functions as well. So you
5 might be over top of student support, but you have
6 food nutrition, and you have transportation as well.
7 Now what we've done is divided all that really into
8 two sides of the house. So an operational side,
9 which is what Colonel Stanger oversees. So that's
10 budget, finance, human resources, everything that
11 makes school run, and then allows for the assistant
12 superintendents to just zero in on the principals
13 that they're supervising. As Mr. Smith mentioned in
14 our previous model, we were leveled. So the
15 elementary supervisor had ten schools. And so that's
16 a lot when four or five of those are in -- you know,
17 in high needs. On the other side of that, the
18 secondary supervisor had five. And as I reflect on
19 it, the secondary principals have had five
20 supervisors in five years. And so when you have
21 five, and then you had -- so it just seemed that if I
22 could get a smaller number of a leader to work with a
23 smaller number of leaders and have intentional time
24 with them, that would be better, and to focus their
25 work and to support that principal in their work.

1 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. And that reorganization
2 just -- is just in?

3 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, it just went into effect
4 July 1st, Mr. Peacock.

5 MR. PEACOCK: All right. I don't mean this to
6 be a negative -- well, how -- help me feel
7 comfortable that it's not rearranging deck chairs and
8 it's actually making the process better. And I know
9 part of that is your presentation, but --

10 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

11 MR. PEACOCK: -- oftentimes we see when an
12 organization is failing, the first thing they go to
13 is reorganizing, and that buys them time. We don't
14 have time. So --

15 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

16 MR. PEACOCK: -- how can I be more comfortable
17 that that's not what we're doing here?

18 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah, I mean, the whole
19 thing is those -- each of those -- those assistant
20 superintendents, their entire job is living in
21 schools.

22 MR. PEACOCK: Right.

23 DR. PILEWSKI: That is their entire job. And
24 they're reporting back each Tuesday when we meet
25 about what's working, what's not working. And

1 they're -- they're highly visible. They're working
2 with every single -- and sometimes they have to shift
3 the focus, for an example, to spend a little bit more
4 intentional time. For an example, Mr. Smith's
5 direction was to spend more time for a period of time
6 at the seventh and eighth campus, because that's
7 where I needed him the most. But there are other
8 principals that need support as well. But they're --
9 they're in schools every day. And I think the
10 opposite side is in a leveled model where you had
11 maybe more principals that had more need and other
12 duties as well. So we're trying to streamline that
13 focus. And then where Dr. Stoll comes in is now I've
14 got one person that's completely over all of the
15 services that support schools. That was in a variety
16 of -- of different shops, so to speak, as well. So
17 that is now streamlined, and now there's more
18 collaboration and consistency. And that was a big
19 problem. And principals would tell us there's a
20 disconnect between central office and schools, and we
21 can't have it. Central office is there to be a
22 direct support, not a hindrance. And I'm -- yes,
23 sir.

24 MR. PEACOCK: You -- you touched on teacher
25 absenteeism.

1 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes.

2 MR. PEACOCK: Do you -- do you track that?

3 DR. PILEWSKI: We do.

4 MR. PEACOCK: What's the -- what's the absentee
5 rate?

6 DR. PILEWSKI: Well, I've had it by a couple
7 schools. I'm just going to say it's horrible. The
8 -- what we're finding, and specifically, it's on
9 Fridays and Mondays where we find the most teacher
10 absences. And then if you compound that with
11 absences due to pregnancy, you know, FMLA, those
12 kinds of things, and I'll give you an example that
13 our instructional -- one of our schools has a -- in
14 4th grade has a teacher that's out on maternity
15 leave. So we couldn't find a long-term sub. So they
16 took the network instructional specialist that's to
17 work with all teachers and put them in the classroom
18 to directly work with those teachers.

19 So we've got to look at our attendance policy
20 and couple that with daily attendance at our schools,
21 and we've got to do something different. Whether
22 that's, you know, teachers are allotted -- I think
23 it's 14 days of -- of sick leave and so forth. And
24 I've asked our administrators and assistant
25 superintendents, if you're finding that pattern with

1 the teacher where there's chronic absenteeism of the
2 teacher, then I expect that to be addressed
3 immediately. We -- we -- we can't -- one, we got to
4 get the kids there, but I've got to get teachers
5 there as well. And -- and that's something -- matter
6 of fact, we also include that. One of the things we
7 do on Fridays, we have our weekly school board
8 report. So our weekly school board report goes out
9 to all of our school board members. That's kind of a
10 "what's happening this week within each of the
11 offices." Also included that is our teacher daily
12 attendance rate that goes out to our school board
13 members as well. And that's another conversation
14 we're getting ready to have on potentially changing
15 the policy as we look at that data.

16 MR. PEACOCK: When do you plan on doing that?

17 DR. PILEWSKI: As soon as possible.

18 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. The -- you had two schools,
19 Crestwood and Lakewood, who scored Bs. Do you track
20 those students when they -- when they move on to
21 middle school and their performance? And does their
22 performance decrease, or does this -- just the
23 requirements continue to grow and they stagnate?

24 DR. PILEWSKI: It -- it -- it does. It continues to
25 grow in our school district. One of the things that

1 I've noticed, that coming out of elementary school,
2 is that we lose a lot of kids. We lose a lot of kids
3 from 5th to 6th. Part of that is because we have the
4 second-largest middle school in the State of
5 Arkansas. Our 6th-grade campus has 550 students, and
6 our 7th and 8th has 1,100 students. It's too big.
7 Matter of fact, it's -- it's on a high school campus.
8 We're fortunate we just passed the millage to build a
9 brand-new middle school. And so I think that will
10 help reverse that enrollment issue. But you made me
11 think of something else that, when I've looked at the
12 data in the last couple years, we lost over 100
13 students that were identified as gifted and talented.
14 And we -- we were working on this. We had to -- a
15 different configuration. We've -- we've got some
16 support with gifted and talented. But that's another
17 area that needs immediate attention as well, is re-
18 looking at our former coordinator who was doing work
19 in that area. Now we have a person that teaches GT,
20 but the other side of our job is looking in gifted
21 and talented across the district. So she's not a
22 full-time individual that's on that. But I have
23 concerns about gifted and talented education, and are
24 we meeting those kids as well? We certainly got to
25 focus on our lower quartile students and making sure

1 they grow up, but we also got to make sure that our
2 kids that are three or fours that -- that they grow
3 as well.

4 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. All right. This is just
5 editorial. There's -- there's a lot of goals.

6 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

7 MR. PEACOCK: But it just feels light on how
8 you're going to go. And I understand you got 15
9 minutes, and you got an awful lot of material to
10 cover. The --

11 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

12 MR. PEACOCK: The fact that there's a lot of
13 goals without a lot of meat behind them being
14 presented is just a little bit of a concern for me.

15 DR. PILEWSKI: Okay.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Bragg?

17 MR. BRAGG: In your opening statement, you
18 mentioned that the majority of the board supported
19 this plan. Does that imply that some did not?

20 DR. PILEWSKI: It passed 4-3. Mr. Bragg.

21 MR. BRAGG: Is that --

22 DR. PILEWSKI: So not all school board members
23 supported it. That's correct.

24 MR. BRAGG: Is that a concern that there were
25 some that -- I mean, why would they not support this?

1 DR. PILEWSKI: I -- I don't know those
2 individual -- oh, yep. I'll let Dr. Redus address
3 that.

4 DR. REDUS: Hi, I'm Dr. Redus.

5 MR. BRAGG: Good -- good decision.

6 DR. REDUS: Proud president -- proud president
7 of the North Little Rock School District. It was --
8 reorganization was hard. It was hard for me. I
9 voted for it because I knew -- I just saw the vision,
10 and I knew it would work. But there was personal
11 ties to positions that would be eliminated. And so
12 we're human. And so if your -- your daughter-in-law
13 or niece or whatever is going to be affected, it
14 played a part.

15 MR. BRAGG: Yeah. So do you think that's going
16 to be an issue with accomplishing your goals?

17 DR. REDUS: No.

18 MR. BRAGG: Okay. All right.

19 DR. REDUS: We -- we believe in -- we are
20 working towards agreeing to disagree.

21 MR. BRAGG: Okay. Good.

22 Dr. Pilewski?

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

24 MR. BRAGG: You mentioned the reducing the
25 absentee rate in -- in children. I think there's a

1 -- in their ten-day limit on unexcused. What happens
2 to those kids that exceed that limit?

3 DR. PILEWSKI: That exceed that limit? There's
4 certainly consequences for that as it relates to our
5 student discipline policy that we'll follow up on
6 with those individual students and those individual
7 parents. But I'm very proud of the work of the
8 wraparound service specialist. I mean, if -- if I
9 can wave a magic wand, I would add, have a wraparound
10 service specialist at every single one of our
11 campuses. I mean, they're doing amazing work to
12 eliminate barriers that are non-academic before they
13 happen. I'll give you a very good example. This
14 happened yesterday. We had a parent at Boone Park
15 Elementary School that had an \$800 light bill,
16 heating bill, electric bill that was way overdue.
17 They were getting ready to shut off their services.
18 They have four children that are in our school
19 district. Our wraparound service found out about it,
20 put it on Facebook. In five minutes, a good patron
21 of North Little Rock paid that bill.

22 So what that tells me is there's not only
23 community support, but we just maybe eliminated a
24 barrier of somebody being displaced that we know
25 would have an impact on that child coming to school

1 and -- and being effective. And so to me, the -- you
2 could see that with that attendance rate and that
3 those -- those metrics, but we -- we need to do more
4 because the -- the need is great. For an example,
5 Ms. Harrison, I was just at her school the other day.
6 There's two students that come every day, and they're
7 on time. And their parent doesn't dress them,
8 doesn't get them. They're -- they're actually in bed
9 and actually call the school and say, "Is --" I'm
10 making this up as a name. "Is Jamal at school
11 today?"

12 And -- and so, you know, when I think about the
13 resilience of a child to take that on themselves to
14 make sure their sibling is getting to school, that's
15 just the reality of -- of what we're working with.
16 It's not an excuse. But how do we help that parent
17 and support that parent with whatever needs that they
18 have? That's why we've taken it even further upon
19 ourselves to have an individual support plan for a
20 family, just like you'd have an individual support
21 plan for a student. What are those families' needs,
22 and how do we prioritize with that family and be able
23 to meet that within 24 hours? Matter of fact, what
24 our coordinator said, "Dr. Pilewski, really 24 hours?
25 How about a sense of urgency?" And I said, "Well,

1 that's the expectation. And we just had our weekly,
2 our board report, and I'll be darned if we're not
3 doing it within 24 hours." And -- and that's pretty
4 amazing to me.

5 MR. BRAGG: We talked about a sense of urgency
6 earlier. I noticed you had a timeline of 2030 to
7 accomplish a lot of these. How did -- how did you
8 arrive at that?

9 DR. PILEWSKI: Just looking at -- looking at the
10 -- looking at a five-year process and looking at --
11 and I think Ms. Keener brought that up as a good
12 point, is looking at where we are in trying to chunk
13 it for everybody so it doesn't look overwhelming to
14 try to get there. Now my goal would be to exceed
15 those targets, but we had to start somewhere. And --
16 and I'm hopeful, or not hopeful, I'm optimistic that
17 the more intentionality we have in the alignment --
18 like this is the first time we've got district
19 performance targets, map superintendent targets,
20 assistant superintendent targets, school targets.
21 The next move is going to be teacher targets and then
22 PLC targets. We're not quite there yet. As I said,
23 a work in progress. But all of our principals know.
24 We've sat down. We've done their PPGs. They know my
25 expectations. "This is where you have to be. It's

1 just, period. This is where we are. We're in a high
2 sense of urgency, and this is where I expect your
3 school to be at the end of the school year."

4 MR. BRAGG: This might be a question for Ms.
5 Harrison, but she talked about reducing the
6 discipline. What exactly did you do? Because I know
7 that's an issue with every school we see.

8 MS. HARRISON: Good morning, Board. For my
9 building, I came in as a 3rd grade teacher. I was
10 recruited from a previous administrator, and it was
11 just instability from teacher turnover as a teacher
12 in that building. I went through nine administrators
13 before I got to this place in the seven-year time
14 frame. And so with that, the inconsistency.
15 Students not having a relationship with the teachers
16 in the building, having coming in and like, if I
17 missed a day when I first arrived, they would say,
18 "We thought you weren't coming back." So the
19 relationships are key, just to know that there is
20 someone there because sometimes they don't have
21 someone there outside of, you know, the school. And
22 so being there, building relationships, letting them
23 know that you care for them, but also holding them
24 accountable for their behaviors, because things that
25 they could get away with in the past, when they know

1 that someone is going to hold them accountable, it
2 just makes a difference for them.

3 MR. BRAGG: All right. Thank you.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Bragg.

5 MR. WOOD: Dr. Pilewski, do you agree that a
6 lack of growth is almost always an adult issue and
7 not a student issue?

8 DR. PILEWSKI: Mr. Wood, I would agree with that
9 100 percent.

10 MR. WOOD: You agree that lack of achievement is
11 almost always an adult issue and not a student issue?

12 DR. PILEWSKI: 100 percent, Mr. Wood.

13 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that poor students
14 can learn if adults do their job correctly?

15 DR. PILEWSKI: 100 percent.

16 MR. WOOD: Okay, good. This is a lot. It's a
17 lot. It's impressive. And -- and --

18 DR. PILEWSKI: Try to be intentional.

19 MR. WOOD: Yeah. It's like drinking out of a
20 fire hydrant to absorb all this. And I know -- I
21 know you only had 15 minutes, and I mean, I was like
22 hard listening to catch most of what you were saying.

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

24 MR. WOOD: When -- when did North Little Rock
25 agree to these goals and these key actions?

1 DR. PILEWSKI: They -- the school board, as
2 we've been kind of updating this along the way, that
3 we've presented, which our back-to-school report that
4 we always do, we presented our Tier 3 support there.
5 I will say to that there also are additional actions
6 in here based upon this presentation. So I'll be
7 doing the same presentation to our school board next
8 week at the request of --

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. Are -- are the goals -- when
10 were the goals adopted?

11 DR. PILEWSKI: So the original goals had been a
12 -- had been a process as the state had -- we always
13 -- we were working towards our performance targets,
14 and then we knew once the state was going to change
15 its accountability structure, we had to redesign
16 those again.

17 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

18 DR. PILEWSKI: So in -- in my goals, they're in
19 Goal 1. They're all stretched out for our school
20 board. And I told them our next move is for once we
21 get -- you know, we only got our data back in the --
22 in the summer. And so working on that was then to be
23 able to finite that into very specific, as you saw,
24 performance targets that would last over the next
25 five years.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. So I feel
2 relatively recently --

3 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

4 MR. WOOD: -- that we -- we --

5 DR. PILEWSKI: Because the --

6 MR. WOOD: Well, what -- what's written here is
7 relatively new?

8 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir. Based upon the new --
9 I mean, in April of 2025, I believe, is when the
10 state came out with the new accountability measures.
11 So we were all trying to learn how elementary,
12 middle, and high school is different on the
13 accountability, and then roll that into going into
14 the summer, looking at our data now, and to be able
15 to start putting those metrics and aligning those to
16 now how the letter grades are calculated.

17 MR. WOOD: All right. So let's talk about you
18 for just a second. You -- you've been here for six
19 years.

20 DR. PILEWSKI: November 1st of 2020. Right. In
21 the pandemic.

22 MR. WOOD: Yeah. So -- so just over five years?

23 DR. PILEWSKI: Yeah, just literally --

24 MR. WOOD: Okay.

25 DR. PILEWSKI: -- over five, five and one month,

1 and then a couple weeks.

2 MR. WOOD: What -- where were you before North
3 Little Rock?

4 DR. PILEWSKI: I was in the State of Maryland.
5 Most of my career had been in the State of Maryland.
6 I was there for 21 years. I did one stint in Shaker
7 Heights City Schools in Cleveland, Ohio. And then
8 taught overseas at -- and did part of my student
9 teaching in London, England, at Pimlico Secondary
10 School.

11 MR. WOOD: Okay, cool. You ever -- were you a
12 superintendent before North Little Rock?

13 DR. PILEWSKI: I was a deputy and a one-year
14 interim superintendent before coming to North Little
15 Rock.

16 MR. WOOD: Will any of your prior higher
17 leadership experience involve a turnaround like this?

18 SUPT. PILEWSKI: Well, this is my first
19 experience, I mean, as a superintendent, but I've
20 worked in some large school districts like Anne
21 Arundel County Public Schools, about 80,000 students,
22 as an example. I've been in Baltimore County Public
23 Schools, 150,000 students. Hartford County Public
24 Schools, 40,000 students. I've been in large
25 districts. Certainly, Baltimore County would have

1 been the largest. I was a coordinator at a time
2 doing turnaround work in smaller learning
3 communities, so taking our largest high schools,
4 improving graduation rates. That was at the time we
5 were coming out of the Columbine shooting in the
6 '90s, and we were looking towards re-engaging kids,
7 so that's where the ninth-grade academy came from,
8 the career academies that we're implementing here.
9 But at this level, as assistant superintendent of
10 curriculum instruction, oversaw, at that time, moving
11 to the Common Core, so some serious, you know,
12 curriculum instruction changes that we needed. But as
13 far as being a superintendent, this would be the
14 first time, sir.

15 MR. WOOD: Okay. First impression is pretty
16 good. I like what I hear from you. I like you
17 coming in with such a strong plan. I do wonder,
18 though, and I want to talk about it publicly --

19 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

20 MR. WOOD: -- this -- you're five years into the
21 job, and the district's rated an F. So how do you
22 grade your first four years on the job?

23 DR. PILEWSKI: That's a great question. Well,
24 I'll first explain my first week here. My first week
25 here, I was given a stack of papers in a folder. And

1 I started going through them, and they're name after
2 name after name after name; and I said, "What am I
3 looking at?" And there were 350 people in this stack
4 of papers that were either terminated, they were --
5 they went to seek other -- you know, whatever the
6 case was, but they no longer worked for us. Here's
7 the kicker, their badge was still active. Now think
8 about if I had a school shooting and when the FBI
9 comes in and asks, how did the person get in your
10 school? And I said, you've got to be kidding me.
11 All these -- we've never deactivated their ID badges.
12 And so safety -- this is the way Mr. Wood, I would
13 describe North Little School District when I got
14 there was loose. As an example, we've had a near
15 school shooting. We've had many things we've
16 revamped. That was one of our first priorities. One
17 was getting me some help at this level. The second
18 thing was restructuring safety and security. We've
19 completely redesigned that. How would I rate myself?
20 I'm pretty hard on myself. Probably a C. I don't --
21 you know, I don't think I'm the greatest
22 superintendent that's -- that's ever lived, but I
23 know I also am intentional about my leadership and
24 about improving outcomes for students. We've had
25 lots of change, especially at the central office

1 level. But if I would say one thing, you know,
2 coming from Maryland to come here, it would be
3 instructional leadership. And that has to be
4 intentional. And we've worked on this since I've
5 been there. We've worked with some outside agencies;
6 we got some funding cut and so forth. I'm probably
7 hard on myself, probably give myself a C. If you
8 were to tell me how would I grade myself?

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah, it's fair enough. And I don't
10 want to get into the college football culture of, you
11 know, two years and, you know, we're firing a guy.
12 I'm not -- I'm not suggesting that. I just -- what
13 is going to be different in the next two years that
14 you've identified didn't work in the previous four?

15 DR. PILEWSKI: The intentionality of the
16 structure as it relates to working with principals is
17 completely different from what we've done before.
18 And I believe in it, the one that created the model,
19 because there has to be intentionality between that
20 assistant superintendent on a regular basis in that
21 school with that principal, side by side, asking
22 questions, digging into their data, all those things
23 that we know that will improve outcomes for students.
24 I would say it probably wasn't as tight as it should
25 have been.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. You bring up
2 principals. You know I asked Watson Chapel about the
3 principals and their poor performing schools.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir.

5 MR. WOOD: There's nine -- nine schools of
6 yours, but I'll go -- let's just talk about the Fs.
7 Boone Park Elementary, how long has that principal?

8 DR. PILEWSKI: She's in her second year.

9 MR. WOOD: Second.

10 DR. PILEWSKI: I removed the principal based on
11 performance -- based on -- I'm not going to go into
12 personal --

13 MR. WOOD: Sure.

14 DR. PILEWSKI: The school was going in a
15 different direction, we needed to move in a different
16 direction. She's in her second year. Ms. Harrison
17 is in her second year. Mr. Kelly, that would be,
18 Glenview Elementary School, believes he's going into
19 his third year. Meadow Park Elementary School, Ms.
20 McKinley has been there at least five years that I
21 have been there. Let's see, now we go to the
22 secondary campus, 6th grade campus, Mr. Clark has
23 been there at least as long as I've been here, which
24 is five years. Ms. Hampton, she's in her third or
25 fourth year at 7th and 8th grade campus. Dr.

1 Saint-Louis is the principal of the high school and
2 the COE, I want to say three, four years. I'm trying
3 to think anybody else that's on that list. I don't
4 think I missed anybody. Ms. Harrison certainly is in
5 her second year.

6 MR. WOOD: Yeah. So, you know, a few in there,
7 year four, year five. When -- when do you start to
8 feel like we have a leadership problem in the
9 building? How long should a principal continue to
10 supervise a poor performing school?

11 DR. PILEWSKI: Well, when you asked me that
12 first question, I would say the first thing I needed
13 to do was to get the right structure in place. And I
14 believe that in this -- in this structure. The
15 second thing to that is -- here's the bottom line, is
16 if they're not moving schools, then we need to look
17 at something different. That's why I put on there
18 about -- and I just had a principals' meeting the
19 other day, I said, I don't want you to be surprised
20 when you hear -- continue to look at leadership
21 assignments whether that's the principal or the
22 assistant principal, as well as our teachers and we
23 need to be doing something different. And that's an
24 ongoing conversation that we have with our assistant
25 superintendents as I'm asking questions, I'm looking

1 at data. I'm like what about this and what about
2 that? So as we go into that process into this school
3 year, I think without a doubt, I'm sure, everybody
4 can anticipate that I will make some changes as we go
5 into the next school year.

6 MR. WOOD: Yeah. I hope that your -- similar to
7 what I said about Watson Chapel, this is a, you know,
8 life support kind of situation. This is critical,
9 okay? You know -- and I feel the urgency from you,
10 and sometimes that's my criticism with folks that
11 come in here is you get colorful language and maybe
12 AI-generated responses, and it just didn't feel
13 authentic --

14 DR. PILEWSKI: No, sir.

15 MR. WOOD: -- or urgent. I feel urgency from
16 you, and so I really appreciate that. But, you know,
17 three years of a principal leading a building and
18 growth isn't where it needs to be says a lot. Growth
19 shouldn't take three years to implement.

20 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

21 MR. WOOD: Achievement, maybe.

22 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

23 MR. WOOD: That's a little harder thing. Middle
24 school has to deal with what --

25 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

1 MR. WOOD: -- foundations were in elementary
2 school. I get that. But growth -- growth tells a
3 lot.

4 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

5 MR. WOOD: And -- so I hope that -- that there's
6 a culture in North Little Rock going forward that
7 we're not going to tolerate low performance for very
8 long. We expect leaders to get in, lead people. It
9 can happen. It's happened in Little Rock, your
10 neighbor to the south. I know stories --

11 DR. PILEWSKI: Sure.

12 MR. WOOD: -- of poor performing schools in
13 challenging neighborhoods that when leadership
14 changed in a building, schools went from Ds to As.
15 It can happen. It --

16 DR. PILEWSKI: Absolutely.

17 MR. WOOD: -- If the adults change the culture
18 of the building.

19 DR. PILEWSKI: Yes, sir. I couldn't agree with
20 you more, Mr. Wood.

21 MR. WOOD: It --

22 DR. PILEWSKI: I could not agree with you more.

23 MR. WOOD: Performance changes.

24 DR. ARNOLD: That's a key point, Mr. Wood. And
25 so to that point, I think we should ask Mr. Smith and

1 Dr. Thomas to return just to see how they would field
2 your question because they're one level closer.

3 DR. PILEWSKI: And if I may, Dr. Arnold?

4 The other thing I wanted to say to that, Mr.
5 Wood, is -- as Secretary Oliva said, is the state has
6 changed the system. So the system has changed from
7 when I started to where I am here. That's not an
8 excuse, but we went from ACT Aspire to a whole new, a
9 different assessment system. So as the state
10 continues to change and put those systems into place,
11 we're going to go right along with it.

12 So I'll let my colleagues answer that --

13 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah.

14 DR. PILEWSKI: -- Dr. Arnold.

15 DR. ARNOLD: Just briefly, Dr. Arnold, please
16 respond to Mr. Wood's concern as you see it closer in
17 the field.

18 DR. ROGERS: Certainly, Mr. Wood, I agree with
19 you coming from a turnaround situation that I oversaw
20 in Tennessee. Three years was the absolute limit,
21 and we had to see incremental changes in year one and
22 year two for the person to remain in year three.
23 Certainly, we're in constant communication with our
24 superintendent regarding what we see in the field as
25 we meet in cabinet meetings every Tuesday. At this

1 point, I don't have a principle in Network A that I
2 don't see growth. Achievement is going to be a
3 little longer for us to get there. This is our growth
4 target year, where we're trying to maximize all of
5 our growth opportunities. And next year, we're going
6 to be moving into growth and then adding some of that
7 achievement pieces with it as well. But at this
8 point, I don't have any principals that I'm
9 considerably concerned about because I see the
10 growth. Now, it's going to be certainly coming up on
11 whether they continue to grow and whether they want
12 to continue in the work with us because next year it
13 will be even more rigorous than this school year that
14 we're in. Because every year, as you've seen from
15 our superintendent, we have different targets. So we
16 have to start out the gate hitting those targets, and
17 we are sitting on the edge of our seats, just like
18 you all are, to look at that interim data to know how
19 we're going to structure ourselves moving forward.
20 We have a keen, tight lens on the bottom 25 percent
21 sale of students. I mean, to the point we're looking
22 at the supports that they're getting; we're looking
23 at their report card grades; we're looking at their
24 attendance; we're looking at any suspensions. We are
25 very serious about this work, and all of these things

1 become topics of conversations when we enter the
2 building to work with principals.

3 MR. SMITH: Mr. Wood, I'd just like to echo what
4 Dr. Rogers said. I'll take it a little further from
5 my perspective, but we're in a brand-new system. We
6 realigned everything. With those expectations comes
7 an adjustment period, but there is no doubt that
8 there is a sense of urgency. Dr. Pilewski teaches
9 everybody John Cotter. The first thing you have to
10 do in any institution that's going through a change
11 is create a sense of urgency. I would echo what Dr.
12 Rogers says, is that there's not a principal in
13 Network B that doesn't want to get better, and that
14 we are not working every day to get better. Those
15 tough conversations might come. But right now we are
16 in the process of making sure that we are aligned,
17 we're systematic, we're all marching hand and step.
18 That's the biggest thing I can echo is that the whole
19 system is aligned to making sure that we are
20 promoting and improving a systematic change. And
21 that's where we are.

22 MR. WOOD: Okay. Well, thank you. My only
23 response to that is want to is not good enough, and I
24 don't mean that disrespectfully at all. I just think
25 that we have to be tough enough in our conversations

1 with the people that we entrust these young lives to
2 every day to say that it's not about want to, it's
3 about effectiveness. It is about actually moving the
4 needle. We have to move the needle a long ways, and
5 we can't just want to move it. We have to actually
6 move it.

7 MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

8 MR. WOOD: And there are people that are
9 accomplishing that. And there are people that know
10 how to accomplish that. And then there are people
11 who are not accomplishing that. And we have to help
12 those people find other things to do.

13 MR. SMITH: Address the individuals that are not
14 meeting the expectation. Yes, sir.

15 MR. WOOD: So I do want to ask about just the
16 culture of the classroom. Do we require every
17 teacher to have a plan for every student?

18 MR. SMITH: Yes. Yes. sir, we do. We have, I
19 mean, push in by LEARNS; we have individual reading
20 plans; we have individual math plans; we have RTI
21 that we push-out and those individual education
22 goals. We use products such as SuccessMaker and
23 things like that that develop individualized
24 processes for where those struggles are with
25 individual students. And so, yes, sir, even from the

1 perspective of Dr. Pilewski speaking about our GT and
2 enrichment, those individuals that are on level, we
3 want to make sure that those children are challenged
4 and they have individual plans to make sure that they
5 are still growing under the auspice of the new
6 system.

7 MR. WOOD: Okay. Well, I don't know where you
8 are, but I appreciate where you're trying to go and
9 the plan you have to get there. I do echo what Mr.
10 Peacock said. He did bring up a good point, that
11 while there are a lot of good goals in here, there's
12 not a lot of how to accomplish the goals. I
13 understand. This probably would be ten times larger,
14 and I couldn't read it right now anyway if you had
15 printed all that out. But I do encourage you to have
16 real meat, how to accomplish every one of the goals
17 that you have in here. I'm impressed by all the
18 goals. Make sure you got the meat. Thank you all.

19 MR. PILEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Wood.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Does anyone have a motion or
21 is there someone else they need to speak to before we
22 -- before you can render a decision?

23 MS. KEENER: I'll make a motion. but I do want
24 to, one quick note. I made my point, I think,
25 earlier on the early childhood piece, just so you're

1 aware, in case you're not, North Little Rock School
2 District has 81 vacant slots. I triple checked my
3 numbers this time. To the tune of 400, excuse me,
4 \$413,000. And so that reduction is probably coming
5 shortly.

6 And I'll make a motion to accept the -- what's
7 the name of the form? Sorry, the --

8 CHAIR WOODS: Just the statement of assurance.

9 MS. KEENER: The statement of assurance from
10 the North Rock School District.

11 CHAIR WOODS: All right. I have a motion by Ms.
12 Keener. Do I have a second?

13 DR. ABBOTT: I'll second.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Dr. Abbott. All in
15 favor say aye.

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

18 Hearing none, motion passes.

19 Thank you.

20 DR. PILEWSKI: Thank you.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Congratulations.

22 DR. PILEWSKI: Thank you. Thank you.

23 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. At this time, I think we're
24 going to take probably a 33-minute break. We'll plan
25 to be back here about 12:40. and then we will

1 continue on with the next on our agenda.

2 (WHEREUPON, after a break was taken, the
3 proceedings were resumed as follows, to-wit:)

4 CHAIR WOODS: All right. We're going to call
5 the meeting back to order.

6 **1.c. PINE BLUFF SCHOOL DISTRICT**

7 CHAIR WOODS: And I think next up we have Pine
8 Bluff.

9 Stacy.

10 MS. SMITH: Okay. Pine Bluff School District,
11 background for Pine Bluff. Pine Bluff was under
12 state authority a few years ago. We returned them --
13 are we guys on? Is that better? Or am I echoing
14 again? Okay.

15 They are 23 points away from a D in comparison
16 to some of the other districts. Their enrollment is
17 2,692 students. Their superintendent is Dr. Jennifer
18 Barbaree. This is her third year to be
19 superintendent in the Pine Bluff School District. Of
20 their schools, four of them are elementary schools.
21 This last year for -- all four showed that they made
22 growth over the previous year. Their junior high and
23 high school did not. So similar to kind of what
24 we've seen with some of our other districts earlier
25 this morning is we were seeing some growth in the

1 elementary school movements. But again, that high
2 school seems to be kind of getting stuck there.
3 Their poverty rate as reported for free and reduced
4 lunch is 100 percent. And I will let them highlight
5 their licensing as teachers and things like that.

6 CHAIR WOODS: What was their point? I missed
7 that.

8 MS. SMITH: It was 23 points.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Twenty-three points. Okay.

10 MS. SMITH: Uh-huh.

11 Okay. Dr. Jennifer Barbaree.

12 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, good afternoon, Board.
13 Good afternoon, Secretary Oliva. Thank you so much
14 for this opportunity for me to come and share with
15 you about the progress for our district. And thank
16 you so much.

17 I'm Jennifer Barbaree, superintendent at Pine
18 Bluff School District.

19 And I'd like to start just by saying, as being
20 the superintendent at Pine Bluff School District,
21 we've worked really hard to make our school districts
22 focus student-centered. We worked with a strategic
23 planning committee before I was named superintendent
24 of Pine Bluff School District, and through that
25 committee and the community process, we've created a

1 vision for Pine Bluff School District. And our
2 vision is that we will have a safe, supportive and
3 student-centered community for every child, and that
4 every child is challenged, that they're empowered to
5 overcome the barriers, achieve at high levels and
6 pursue college and career readiness. And so from
7 that mission and vision shift into what we're doing
8 to make this happen, we continue to ask ourselves,
9 are we making the decisions that's best for our
10 students?

11 So when I looked at the assurances from the
12 Department that was sent to us, it said, you know,
13 identify the comprehensive needs assessment. Well,
14 we have a comprehensive needs assessment. It is
15 large, but we know the root cause problem is the
16 quality of instruction in the classrooms. This is
17 something that we've seen over several years about
18 the quality instruction in the classroom. So our
19 goal is that all students will receive high-quality
20 instruction in the classroom. In order to get to
21 that goal, we are going to have to really focus on
22 those incremental movements and the systems to get
23 there. The goal is that students are going to
24 achieve, and so everyone thinks, you know, as part of
25 that, it's through academics, and it is. Achievement

1 is defined by academics. However, we cannot get to
2 that academic goal without focusing on the systems to
3 get us there. Academics being one, student support
4 being two and human capital being three. So as the
5 superintendent over the last two years, those have
6 been my focuses. We've worked very hard to make sure
7 that if we improve one percent a day in every one of
8 our systems, then we'll have over 100 percent
9 improvement throughout the school year. But one
10 percent a day in academics will get us to 37 percent
11 achievement at the end of the school year. One
12 percent in student support, and one percent in human
13 capital. So every single day when we walk to the
14 school and I go to work, we think about what are we
15 doing every single day to improve that one percent,
16 and what is my job in getting that done?

17 So I'll start with academics. So as part of the
18 strategic plan, these are the three -- there are
19 several things that we've identified that are going
20 to take place moving forward. Many of those things
21 are things that we have -- already have in place.
22 And so I just want to give you an overview as far as
23 how I can say that we're supporting this. So number
24 one, district's going to ensure that we provide
25 high-quality tier one instruction in every classroom.

1 We're going to do that by supporting lesson
2 internalization, providing walkthrough feedback,
3 using TESS and LEADS, and continuing to reinforce our
4 high-quality instructional material, and that they're
5 using it with fidelity. We're going to develop SMART
6 goals. SMARTE goals, by the way, was introduced to
7 me this school year from the State Department with
8 the evidence-based piece added there. And so I
9 realized that in our district strategic plan, we to
10 go back and look deeper into our goals for that so
11 that they have all those measures with the actual
12 overall goal. Again, we have an overarching goal in
13 our strategic plan, but I want to make sure we have
14 very specific goals. And we're doing that though
15 from a district level, but I can't do it from a
16 district level without every single grade level
17 having a SMARTE goal per subject, per grade, and the
18 building principals are working through that right
19 now. And so that'll be -- you'll see evidence of
20 those goals in place before Christmas. We are going
21 to evaluate block scheduling this school year. We
22 have been evaluating it, but this school year, this
23 is some big, strong data we're taking. So when I
24 took the superintendent role at Pine Bluff, we moved
25 the high school and secondary schools to a block

1 scheduling. This was done before my superintendency,
2 but it was for safety and security. We were trying
3 to reduce transitions. We were trying to keep kids
4 in class. Since then, now that we can prove that we
5 have kids in class and we're safe and secure, we're
6 realizing that the block schedule's not the best
7 benefit for our students as far as academics. And so
8 we're looking to move that -- shift from block
9 scheduling back to a seven-to- eight period
10 day. As far as the year-round calendar, that was
11 something that we implemented my first year as
12 superintendent. We have data on that as far as
13 attendance. We have proof that our attendance data
14 for students has gone up. Our teacher attendance is
15 still pretty stagnant. It hasn't shown to make any
16 progress in that yet. It did the first year of the
17 first semester, but since then, in comparison, we
18 can't show that there's any growth in teachers there
19 -- teacher attendance. We also are working with our
20 -- we have adjusted our year-round calendar, but
21 that's something that we're going to continue to
22 monitor.

23 But when we speak about academics, where we
24 were, we were meeting in collaborative teams. We --
25 we ensured that -- those were taking place every day.

1 However, the actual models and data that was done in
2 those collaborative team meetings weren't documented.
3 And so that's something that we began, as far as
4 where we came from. At the beginning, we had several
5 human capital adjustments that helped with our
6 academics. We purchased and began implementation of
7 high-quality instructional materials. We have 95
8 Percent Group for the bottom of the rope, Benchmark
9 Workshop, and MyPerspectives for top of the rope, all
10 on the state test -- I mean, all on the state list.
11 Benchmark Workshop, we're not utilizing any of the
12 phonics pieces of that, so we know that it's still
13 feasible. We've got specific training in all those
14 curriculums, and we continue to work on lesson
15 internalization with that. We have pacing guides for
16 all of our subjects and grades, that's including
17 music and PE at the elementary level. So that's
18 something that our director of curriculum instruction
19 works with our teachers in collaborative team
20 meetings. We have certified dyslexia
21 interventionists at every campus. We do weekly
22 district focus walks for consistent practice. We
23 increase -- we increased the district observation
24 tool by utilizing support staff from TNTP and NIET
25 throughout the last two years. We strengthened --

1 I'm sorry, we have a strong pre-K, and we've added
2 instructional facilitators to support our teaching.
3 Right now, we -- so this school year, we ensured that
4 we put a certified teacher -- we tried to move our
5 strong certified teachers to our foundational
6 literacy classrooms for sure. So K-2, we have
7 certified teachers in the classroom, not all, but
8 almost all. We moved our pre-K -- our pre-K campus
9 had the most tenured principal, and she also had the
10 best rapport with parents. It was a strong campus
11 everyone loved our pre-k; we had a strong pre-k
12 number. And so this year we've transitioned all of
13 our kindergarten out of our elementary schools and
14 moved that to the pre-k campus, so we have a
15 kindergarten academy. And we expected ten classes of
16 pre-k because of our -- I'm sorry. We expected ten
17 classes of kindergarten because of our pre-K numbers
18 and a lot of times we would lose our pre-K students.
19 They would go to other districts or possibly charter.
20 And so our prediction was that we would have 200
21 kindergartners because we had 180 pre-K students. We
22 currently have 13 classrooms, and we have 265
23 kindergartners at our pre-K academy right now with
24 our kindergarten.

25 This school year we implemented, it was a

1 non-negotiable about what every classroom has to have
2 in Pine Bluff School District, and we called it our
3 classroom recipe. So we did specific training on
4 everything that would be in the classroom, starting
5 with just the basics of every -- performance-based
6 objective needed to be posted, our I Can statements
7 are posted, standards are posted. Then we had --
8 social contracts are in place. We have a calming
9 corner. We have use of anchor charts, just
10 everything that needed to take place for a positive
11 classroom environment so that students were -- that
12 we had a conducive place for students to learn.

13 What we know we have to do is continue to
14 strengthen the fidelity of our high-quality
15 instructional material. We have to continue to
16 strengthen the training of our teachers in lesson
17 internalization. We have five teachers currently in
18 the Master Teacher program through Harding
19 University. It's a partnership with our co-op as
20 well. And then we're looking to expand that next
21 school year. Again, to be in the Master Teachers
22 program, you have to be a certified teacher in that
23 subject area for three years. And so we have a lot
24 of novice teachers.

25 As far as a human capital adjustment, that's on

1 the next slide, let's go to that. So in student
2 support, I will say, one of the things that we are
3 going to ensure that we're doing a better job of is
4 tracking our level-one students so that we're
5 providing those intensive interventions. We know who
6 they are, and they are in interventions, but making
7 sure we're looking at that progress monitoring. The
8 concerns we have is the comprehension piece at the
9 upper level, 3rd through 12th grade with
10 comprehension, progress monitoring is a little bit
11 harder as far as the curriculum that we utilize. And
12 so we're looking for progress monitoring through
13 students' writing and through i-Ready and Lexia and
14 PowerUp, but those are things that we know we need to
15 do a better job at looking at how we're progress
16 monitoring. We are looking to create a comprehensive
17 student tutoring plan to support all students. We
18 currently have two 21 CCLC after school programs, but
19 we need to be more intentional about how we're
20 placing those students in there and what the data
21 shows, so like a pre-test and a post-test, more
22 academic rather than experiences. We want to make it
23 more academic for actually intervention.

24 We need to monitor the implementation of our
25 inclusion practices. That was something that was a

1 large shift. When we started, we had over 30
2 students with IEPs that were off-site. They weren't
3 even in -- they weren't being served in the district.
4 And so as part of our corrective action plan, we were
5 bringing students back to campus. As we're bringing
6 students back to campus, we were trying to do our
7 very best to place them in their least restrictive
8 environment. And so we have much larger inclusion
9 practice. And so more of our students now are in
10 regular education classes rather than pull out
11 resource classes. And there's proof in our data for
12 that. So our lowest 25 percent of students have
13 above state average growth in several of our
14 elementary schools because we've put them -- and we
15 believe it's because we've put them back in tier-one
16 instruction and we have required all our special
17 education teachers to go through the same
18 high-quality instructional material training that
19 everyone has. They have the same materials as
20 everyone. We just need to do a better job at
21 modifying those -- those assignments for students.
22 We require data conversations between students and
23 teachers to set academic goals with all students. It
24 is spotty across the district. It has been part of
25 our requirement. We were actually able to witness it

1 in a walkthrough yesterday of a third-grade teacher.
2 I'm sorry, yes, a fourth-grade teacher meeting with
3 his student about his academic growth. We are
4 working harder to plan intentional parent meetings to
5 share student performance data. When we have overall
6 parent nights, we have less parent involvement coming
7 to the school. So our principals are working to
8 ensure that we do that, maybe, virtually, offer it
9 where they're Zooming in, and so parents can come in
10 that way. But it's also just made us be more
11 intentional about more individual parent meetings
12 rather than just big parent nights.

13 We have a strong PTO at two of our -- well, we
14 have a PTO at every elementary, but we have a strong
15 one at two of our -- two elementaries have pretty
16 good, strong PTOs. Our junior high, actually, has a
17 very active PTO and so does our high school.

18 For human capital, we want to ensure that every
19 student's achieving by utilizing our fiscal -- our,
20 you know, our fiscal plan and our budget to hire
21 additional instructional facilitators and assign them
22 to our most struggling schools. Currently, we have
23 instructional facilitators across the district, but
24 they're not assigned to a specific school. They're
25 working with grade levels to support teachers in

1 lesson internalization at those grade levels. But we
2 feel like it's not getting the biggest bang for our
3 buck because they're spread thin. And so we need to
4 figure out how to make sure we're budgeting so that
5 we can move to hire strong instructional facilitators
6 so that they are actually at every campus. The
7 barriers with that are that, you know, our really
8 strong teachers would make good, strong instructional
9 facilitators, but we don't want to pull them out of
10 the classroom because we need them in the classroom
11 to affect more of those students as well. So we're
12 working for a plan to do something like that,
13 especially the leadership pipeline and Grow Your Own.
14 We have lead teachers; we have lead principals; we
15 have people going through that types of training.
16 But we do want to hire, retain and train master
17 teachers, again, appropriating funding for that, for
18 training and incentives. We want to intentionally
19 use our peer observations to provide targeted,
20 constructive feedback to teachers that are
21 demonstrating low-quality instruction. And what I
22 mean by that is that we have a building principal
23 that has really piloted this, where she has her
24 district lead teachers -- or, I mean, sorry, her
25 building lead teachers that are strong and have

1 growth. Their, you know, their VAM scores are higher
2 than anyone else in the campus, and so they're
3 actually bringing in those peer teachers to watch
4 those teachers teach as far as a way to help grow our
5 own in that pipeline as well.

6 But when we get to student support, I talked to
7 you guys about student support as far as academic and
8 how we're doing interventions. I also want to share
9 that we have been -- because of our district support
10 plan, one of our main goals is a safe and orderly
11 environment, a safe and secure school. And so where
12 we were -- and I alluded to it just a little bit, but
13 I will share again, the safety of our students was
14 utmost important for us in Pine Bluff School
15 District. When we began as a team -- and I say a
16 team because that's what we are -- when the board and
17 I came on together with our district leadership team,
18 you know, we had just suffered nine students'
19 homicides in one year. They were all enrolled in our
20 district. None of that happened within the school,
21 but it happened, and so it was trying to build a
22 culture to support our staff and to create a pathway
23 for our students so that they're not going out and
24 involving themselves and things like that. So as far
25 as a strong community of awareness, we partnered with

1 the Juvenile Justice Center and Judge Brown, and we
2 have a very strong GVI program, Group Violence
3 Intervention Program. We're happy to say that our
4 students are safe. They're a part of this program.
5 We have data showing. We have a 25 percent reduction
6 in our office discipline referrals. Our students are
7 actually coming to class. Our attendance rate is up
8 as well. We are in the -- well, when we compared
9 last October to this October -- and again, last
10 October was year-round school, and so we had a pretty
11 good percentage. It was right at 92 percent. And
12 this year we were at 96 percent in our October 1 data
13 for our attendance for students. So knowing that
14 they're in school, it's a big part for us. We're in
15 year two implementation of Capturing Kids' Hearts. I
16 believe in this program. A lot of people laugh at me
17 about it because it seems sometimes that people think
18 it's elementary. But you should -- if you get a
19 chance, make sure you follow Pine Bluff School
20 District's Facebook page and watch our students at
21 the high school talk about their good things when
22 they're really thinking about what they like about
23 their school. And so that's something that they like
24 to share as far as Capturing Kids' Hearts. It's
25 implemented a culture of belonging. Many of them are

1 trying to make themselves something, and yet we
2 weren't holding them to the expectation that they
3 were holding themselves to. And so now, when
4 teachers can hold our students to that high
5 expectation, we feel like we're getting somewhere.

6 CHAIR WOODS: Get to your closing comments.

7 SUPT. BARBAREE: Okay.

8 Our next steps for safety and security is
9 continuing to keep our schools safe. We have a
10 strong monetary budget for safety and security plan,
11 and also to make sure that our schools are safe.

12 But I'm ready for any kind of questions.

13 CHAIR WOODS: I told Jeff what -- he could go
14 first.

15 SUPT. BARBAREE: All right. I like it. No
16 stranger to Mr. Wood, so that's good.

17 MR. WOOD: I did not ask for that.

18 CHAIR WOODS: He did not, let's be very clear.
19 I just -- post-lunch, we're changing it up a little
20 bit.

21 MR. WOOD: Do you agree that lack of growth is
22 almost always an adult issue and not a student issue?

23 SUPT. BARBAREE: Almost always, yes.

24 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that lack of
25 achievement is almost always an adult issue and not a

1 student issue?

2 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes.

3 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that poor students
4 can learn if adults do their job correctly?

5 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes.

6 MR. WOOD: Okay. So you've been the
7 superintendent at Pine Bluff for, is it two years
8 now?

9 SUPT. BARBAREE: Two and a half. I'm right at
10 my half, aren't we?

11 MR. WOOD: Yes, you're in your third year?

12 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes, I am.

13 MR. WOOD: All right. And one thing that struck
14 me in the strategic plan is that it feels like we're
15 just now developing these SMART goals; is that right?

16 SUPT. BARBAREE: To what the state defines as a
17 SMART goal, yes. We've had goals.

18 MR. WOOD: You've had goals?

19 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay. What -- tell me about those
21 goals. What were those goals?

22 SUPT. BARBAREE: Originally, you know, the focus
23 was getting high-quality certified teachers in the
24 classroom, ensuring that the district had
25 high-quality instructional materials, and then

1 keeping students safe.

2 MR. WOOD: Okay. Where are you on those
3 previous goals that you had?

4 SUPT. BARBAREE: So high-quality instruction
5 teachers in the classroom, I would say we do have --
6 we went from -- we went from a 42 percent
7 certified-teacher population to an 80 percent
8 certified-teacher population. As far as high
9 quality, we're still working to grow that. Now we
10 have certified teachers in the classroom, but we
11 don't have all of them making that value-added growth
12 and considered master teachers or high quality or
13 highly effective. So that's the part that's still
14 developing. We're doing that. As far as the human
15 capital role, we began by non-renewing 75 teachers
16 that were not licensed. We opened up every principal
17 position and rehired for every principal position in
18 the district, as well as assistant principal, to work
19 on that part of the human capital to ensure that we
20 had instructional leaders in the classrooms and the
21 buildings as well. There have been a shift in
22 district personnel as well. We've not filled some
23 district leadership roles because we wanted to
24 utilize that funding for other things like
25 instructional facilitators that would be more

1 hands-on building level. So there's where we're at
2 with our human capital. As far as developing, we've
3 -- we're still not strong enough in the classroom.
4 High-quality instructional materials, we didn't have
5 any that teachers were trained on at the very
6 beginning. We had just purchased the materials, and
7 so we continued that training of the HQIM. So last
8 school year, of course, when -- we call it a
9 non-negotiable, but one of the things that every
10 focus walk looked for was -- was the teacher
11 utilizing the HQIM? If they were not, what feedback
12 was provided? And so that's where, as district
13 leadership, we had conversations with building
14 principals. And so even then, that's why it was --
15 showed a need for the turnover of building leadership
16 because we set the expectation and leadership wasn't
17 holding our teachers to that expectation either. So
18 we're --I mean, I can say we're using HQIM in every
19 classroom now. And then as far as keeping students
20 safe, the data shows that our discipline rate is
21 down. Our -- I'm in the buildings every week. And
22 so the fact that students are in class -- and I know
23 to some people that is, you know, something that
24 they're not familiar with because you just expect
25 students to go to class, but unless they're held to

1 that accountability and making sure that they're
2 sitting in the classroom, then they're not going to
3 get any instruction if they're not. So right now our
4 campuses are safe. We have a security team at every
5 campus to keep physical safe, but now we also have
6 wraparound services, support services, social
7 workers, calming rooms, behavior management systems,
8 restorative modules for our in-school suspension.
9 We're working to get those with fidelity across the
10 district as well, just so that kids feel emotionally
11 safe as well, so that they want to be there.

12 MR. WOOD: Okay. So what about -- I appreciate
13 that you said there's been a number of principal --
14 they were all, they all had to reapply.

15 DR. BARBAREE: That's right.

16 MR. WOOD: That's how we'll say that. So at
17 Broadmoor Elementary School --

18 DR. BARBAREE: That's -- go ahead.

19 MR. WOOD: How long has that principal been
20 there?

21 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, this is the start of his
22 second year, so I gave everybody one and a half
23 because we're in the middle of the year, but one and
24 a half years, last year and half of this year.

25 MR. WOOD: Okay. So -- all right. And Pine

1 Bluff Junior High School?

2 SUPT. BARBAREE: One and a half years.

3 MR. WOOD: And when you say that -- so there was
4 someone at the junior high before the current
5 principal?

6 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes, sir.

7 MR. WOOD: Two years ago, there was someone else
8 leaving that building?

9 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes, sir.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay. I'm not talking about just a
11 year and a half ago, you rehired these people. I
12 want to know, you know --

13 SUPT. BARBAREE: Two years ago --

14 MR. WOOD: -- how long have they been behind the
15 desk at that building?

16 SUPT. BARBAREE: This is the beginning of their
17 second year, or they're in the middle of their second
18 year.

19 MR. WOOD: And Pine Bluff High School?

20 SUPT. BARBAREE: Middle of his second year.

21 MR. WOOD: All right. And 34th Street
22 Elementary?

23 SUPT. BARBAREE: Middle of her second year.

24 MR. WOOD: Is it the same for all of them?

25 SUPT. BARBAREE: No.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay.

2 SUPT. BARBAREE: Look at South --

3 MR. WOOD: Matthews Elementary?

4 SUPT. BARBAREE: So Matthews -- she's actually
5 -- she's in the middle of her third year.

6 MR. WOOD: Okay.

7 SUPT. BARBAREE: No. She's -- yeah. She's been
8 there two years. Two full years as the building
9 principal.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay.

11 SUPT. BARBAREE: So this is -- yeah, she's in
12 her third. She's starting her third year.

13 MR. WOOD: All right. And Southwood Elementary?

14 SUPT. BARBAREE: She's in -- now, she's been
15 there for four years and she's now starting her fifth
16 year.

17 MR. WOOD: So there you're starting to talk
18 about a tenure of leadership in a building.

19 SUPT. BARBAREE: That's right.

20 MR. WOOD: Going -- four years going on, five
21 years, it's a D school. What -- what changes are
22 being implemented right now at Southwood Elementary
23 School that give you confidence that -- that growth
24 and/or achievement will improve at that school?

25 SUPT. BARBAREE: So that building, again, with

1 the new accountability system with the grades, our
2 whole district, every school has always been an F.
3 And so at Southwood -- Southwood has shown the most
4 growth, has the most tenured principal. They're
5 three points away from a C. And so she has -- she's
6 had some teacher turnover as well. And so that
7 building principal works very hard, has a strong lead
8 teacher pool. And so some of our best math scores
9 are actually coming from Southwood in sixth grade.
10 So in fact, those sixth graders that performed well
11 last year are now our seventh graders that still are
12 performing well on their interims in math. At
13 Southwood, she has -- they have solid collaborative
14 team meetings. They reach out for support. So how
15 are we continuing to push that forward? The things
16 that we talked about, the novice teachers that are
17 there are going to have to continue with that
18 instructional leader development. That's one. Two
19 is making sure that -- that -- well, the high-quality
20 instructional material is there, but just really
21 working with our novice teachers because we still
22 have teacher turnover. At Matthews, they're very
23 close to a D as well. I think they're -- very close
24 to a C?

25 SUPT. BARBAREE: I'm sorry, a C. They're 14

1 points away from a C, forgive me. And that is our
2 second most tenured principal that we have in the
3 district. And she is driven as well on really -- her
4 -- their focus right now are just to set success
5 targets. So the requirement for the district was to
6 have objectives posted in every classroom,
7 performance-based objectives or I can statements for
8 the lower elementary students. And she has gone
9 through some training and took -- through the
10 district -- and took a hold of actually posting those
11 success targets. So teachers have success targets in
12 every classroom based on the cycle of improvement
13 that they're in with that -- with their lessons. And
14 so she's pushing the needle as well. So continuing
15 to grow her teacher population. So we have -- we
16 have three teachers, I'm sorry, we have two teachers
17 in the district that have the value-added growth
18 score over the last three years, and she's placed
19 them in vital areas. So one of them was teaching
20 fifth grade, but we've moved that teacher to third
21 grade because of our third-grade population of
22 students that scored poorly last year. And so we
23 have also a teacher residency model that we're
24 partnering with UAPB, so we -- we're piloting in this
25 program. It is part of LEARN's Act that every

1 teacher has a residency. So this school year, what
2 we did is we re-looked at how we utilize our
3 paraprofessionals and we made them all also reapply
4 for the position. But in the midst of that, we had
5 15 teacher -- well, UAPB had 21 teacher residents.
6 By the way, when I took the position at Pine Bluff,
7 UAPB had three, three teachers graduating. And now
8 they have 21, 15 of them are in Pine Bluff School
9 District and we're using them, we're paying them as
10 paraprofessionals while they're working with their
11 classroom lead -- their classroom mentor. And so we
12 have two of them placed in third grade because there
13 weren't that many elementary. So we have two in
14 third grade, and we have five in kindergarten. And
15 then the rest are placed based on their
16 certification. So we have one also in our geometry
17 class at the high school. So we're trying to build
18 that population. So hopefully -- and most of them
19 have actually passed all of their assessments to be
20 able to be day one, you know, licensed as soon as
21 they graduate. Just have one more semester left of
22 their residency. And so the goal would be to hire
23 all 15 of them as certified teachers in Pine Blue
24 School District.

25 MR. WOOD: Are you evaluating those individuals

1 independent of just, you know, getting a piece of
2 paper?

3 SUPT. BARBAREE: You're talking about the
4 paraprofessionals?

5 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

6 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes.

7 MR. WOOD: The up-and-comers we'll call them.

8 SUPT. BARBAREE: Actually, yes. And I -- I mean
9 -- have an example of what we had for one of them was
10 not performing as we would expect. And so we had a
11 very tough conversation with the building principal
12 because they're still an employee of the district.
13 So there's an expectation that you have to do as far
14 as a paraprofessional as a district employee. But
15 then they still have that safehold of they're still a
16 teacher resident. And so they're supposed to be
17 growing and learning. And so if we just get rid of
18 them right then, which is the moment we kind of
19 thought, you know, they're getting paid to do this
20 and they don't need to be here doing this. We said,
21 no, this is also the whole point of this. We've got
22 to teach them that that's not the caliber of a person
23 we want in Pine Bluff School District. So we had a
24 hard conversation with UAPB and their teacher person.
25 And so that was a meeting that was held between UAPB,

1 the building principal and that paraprofessional.
2 And so we've actually seen results of different
3 things with that. And in fact, in that
4 paraprofessional worked on both campuses, so they had
5 to meet with the high school and the junior high
6 leadership on that. And so per se, they're not being
7 evaluated in TESS or anything like that, but holding
8 them to -- accountable to what we expect as an
9 employee of Pine Bluff School District, yes.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay.

11 SUPT. BARBAREE: They're being evaluated on
12 their teaching lessons right now, mostly through --
13 through UAPB and that program, but the building
14 principal is in the classroom. In fact, we've had
15 one that's in 3rd grade at Southwood because we had a
16 teacher that sadly passed during the school year.
17 And the actual -- her -- her mentee, which is the
18 teacher resident, right now is really teaching that
19 classroom. Now, we, of course, have to supplement
20 with a substitute, but she's the -- she's the lead
21 teacher at this moment.

22 MR. WOOD: Are you compliant with all of your
23 dyslexia screening requirements?

24 SUPT. BARBAREE: We are. We have -- you said
25 the numbers. So 273. 273 students are receiving

1 interventions for characteristics of dyslexia. We're
2 using the BUILD program at K-1 all over -- and our
3 special ed teachers are also trained in BUILD, but we
4 utilize take flights, two through higher.

5 MR. WOOD: Okay.

6 SUPT. BARBAREE: We also offer academic reading
7 at the secondary level as a course. So we have a
8 high school teacher teaching academic reading for our
9 students with dyslexia at the high school.

10 MR. WOOD: Can you drill in on your third-grade
11 literacy strategy? What -- what's your focus on that
12 other than just, you know --

13 SUPT. BARBAREE: Sure.

14 MR. WOOD: -- this more colorful language on
15 strategic plan? How are you going to improve third
16 grade reading?

17 SUPT. BARBAREE: We've placed -- right now we've
18 placed an additional body in the classroom to support
19 those learners, as far as small group instruction.
20 We have instructional facilitator that is just for
21 3rd grade. Now she is our building -- she's a
22 district testing coordinator as well, but her role is
23 to pay attention and work with and support our
24 students that are just in 3rd grade. And so with
25 that, she has conversations with those building

1 principals about what's taking place in those
2 3rd-grade classrooms. We've placed the most -- we've
3 moved teachers to the 3rd grade that we feel like are
4 stronger to support that learning as well. And so
5 those are the big focuses, but as far as the actual
6 curriculum that we're utilizing, we have -- we use
7 PSI data through 95 Percent Group as far as an
8 intervention, and we have What I Need Time for every
9 student in the district. We have that scheduled at
10 every campus where students have What I Need Time,
11 which is that intervention time. But at the 3rd-grade
12 level, that's where we're using more of those bodies
13 to make those groups smaller so that we're making
14 sure we're supporting them.

15 MR. WOOD: What about prior to third grade?

16 SUPT. BARBAREE: Oh, yeah.

17 MR. WOOD: Because that's -- I mean, that's even
18 more critical than 3rd grade itself.

19 SUPT. BARBAREE: That's right. So our K-1-2
20 foundation -- I'm going to be honest, our K-1
21 foundation is strong. Our 2nd-grade foundation,
22 we're struggling there with certified teachers in the
23 2nd-grade classroom. We moved most of them to
24 kindergarten. So out of the 13 kindergarten
25 teachers, 12 of them are fully certified. We just

1 had to hire another one. So that was where we pulled
2 that 3rd -- we just opened up a 3rd-grade classroom
3 -- I mean a 13th kindergarten classroom. So yes, our
4 K-1 foundation. And at the pre-K level we use
5 Launchpad, Frog Press (sic), of course, and then we
6 took the ATLAS pre-K assessment this year, and last
7 year, sorry, last May, we took that as a measure to
8 see where those kindergartners would be. And so they
9 start on interventions. Our kindergarten -- like
10 that was another big positive of putting all the
11 kindergarten in one campus. That principal knew that
12 data. She -- those were her students, and we just
13 started with interventions with our kindergarten
14 group. First grade is probably one of our strongest.
15 Besides kindergarten, 1st grade is our next strongest
16 group of teachers, where -- that's where you're going
17 to see our students really growing. Intentionality
18 would be putting paraprofessionals in those
19 classrooms and making sure that they have the HQIM.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay. Thank you.

21 SUPT. BARBAREE: You're welcome. Thank you.

22 MR. BRAGG: I think you kind of just touched on
23 it, but in a lot of these reports I've seen where
24 there's more growth in elementary grades than others,
25 can you pinpoint why that is?

1 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, in all honesty, data will
2 show it's because they're still learners, you know,
3 not that secondary's not learners, but if they've
4 missed that gap where they've actually gotten that
5 foundational learning, the foundational reading, then
6 they're always going to be behind. And so we're
7 starting the race behind in 3rd grade. Now the goal
8 is what we're doing now is going to make sure that
9 we're not starting behind any further, but there are
10 a lot of other distractions that we can't control.
11 So we're going to control what we can in the
12 classroom. And so as far as the secondary level, It
13 was just holding them accountable for being at
14 school. And so earlier we talked about -- I heard
15 you talk about attendance. You know, we work very
16 closely with the truancy office to make sure that we
17 have FINS filed and students in class and parents are
18 before the judge. But that's so punitive. So we've
19 got to figure out a better way to make kids realize
20 that this is interesting. So we have -- we're really
21 focusing next year on our career-tech pathways. This
22 year, we do have -- and I didn't mention it earlier -
23 - it's the first time in two years that we have two
24 students at our community college taking concurrent
25 credit. We have two students in cybersecurity

1 awareness, and we have two students in welding. But
2 when our new high school is open, we'll have our own
3 welding program, auto mechanics and different things
4 like that. We also are partnering with UAPB, where
5 we have a 9th-grade student that's actually taking
6 concurrent credit agriculture classes, because that
7 was an interest, and the student was able to score 22
8 on the ACT. And so we made that work for that
9 student's schedule. So I think we've got to do a
10 better job at making sure that we're placing students
11 in the interest that they need so that they can
12 continue to grow.

13 MR. BRAGG: Question about the high-quality
14 instruction material. I've seen this again in a lot
15 of reports of trying to move toward that. Is that
16 something new that you're having to cycle in or have
17 we always had that and just not used it or --

18 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes. And that goes back to, I
19 mean, it goes back to the big shift in literacy and
20 the science of reading. You know, we were a balanced
21 literacy state where teachers didn't always use the
22 curriculum. We weren't -- I mean, when I was
23 teaching, we didn't have a basal that they gave me to
24 teach literacy. We were supposed to go through that
25 training and learn how to teach the whole child and

1 some phonics. And so now that's where the big shift
2 went when we knew that that's not what was best for
3 students and that we needed to have a solid phonics
4 program and then a good comprehension program. The
5 state's been shifting since 2015, but it's just
6 making sure that teachers are, you know, are being
7 trained that way. So that's why it's been positive
8 that we partnered with the higher ed to make sure
9 that educators are understanding that HQIM is
10 important. So they're actually now being taught
11 different types of HQIM which is another big positive
12 with UAPB. All of their teachers that are going to
13 go into our program go to our Science of Reading
14 training through the co-op. They also go -- they have
15 our materials. UAPB purchases 95 Percent Group.
16 They purchase MyPerspectives. They're purchasing the
17 curriculum materials to train our teachers on in the
18 actual -- under ed prep program.

19 MR. BRAGG: And how do you designate a
20 high-quality teacher? What distinguishes that?

21 SUPT. BARBAREE: We look at the state list and
22 ed reports. And so whatever's on that list, that's
23 approved by the Department of Ed, we choose from
24 that. And so from there, we take those materials and
25 create opportunities for teachers and curriculum

1 teams to come in and say -- you know, and view the
2 different types of materials. We did that with math
3 last school year. We had a math adoption last year.
4 And so we look on ed reports and then we look, of
5 course, at the state list.

6 MR. BRAGG: And your master teacher program, is
7 that something in-house you do or is that an outside
8 certification?

9 SUPT. BARBAREE: It's outside. It's -- and
10 again, it's a partnership that our co-op was able to
11 grant or get and granted us five slots, and so
12 they're going to Harding University to take those
13 classes.

14 MR. BRAGG: And have you seen any correlation
15 between the -- our new -- our phone policy and the
16 academic?

17 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, academics, I'd like to
18 say yes because -- but we don't have a lot of data
19 about it, but I can tell you we've seen a true
20 positive. And I have, again, student data on this.
21 We've surveyed students. I have my student advisory
22 committee. Students themselves like it. They're
23 talking to each other more. Now, we still have those
24 same ones that are, you know, fear a way around the
25 system, bring their phones, but, you know, you can

1 walk through our buildings now, and I see students
2 actually looking at the teacher. I would like to say
3 that they're learning, but they're actually looking
4 at the teacher and not trying to sneak and be on a
5 phone. So that has been a positive.

6 MR. BRAGG: Okay. Thank you.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Dr. Arnold.

8 DR. ARNOLD. Still processing so much of this,
9 but thank you for your information. On a whole, how
10 would you describe teacher buy-in of this strategic
11 plan? What's the sense there?

12 SUPT. BARBAREE: So as a whole, I think our
13 buy-in is slow. I think many of our teachers, they
14 love our kids, but there's a culture of this is how
15 we are, this is us. And so we're -- the buy-in there
16 is just really adjusting that belief in our system
17 that we can hold everyone to higher expectations and
18 higher -- and higher standards. And so the culture
19 shift is difficult. There's a culture of
20 absenteeism. There's a culture of the -- the feeling
21 that they're not appreciated. But they -- but when
22 we survey teachers why they leave it, they feel like
23 they're overworked and underpaid. And so our work is
24 not just trying to grow those academic numbers. And
25 so our teachers are overworked. They're trying to

1 meet all needs of the students. And so we've got to
2 -- that's why I believe in Capturing Kids' Hearts,
3 that we empower everyone, including the teachers, and
4 bring the good things and really start looking at
5 that.

6 DR. ARNOLD: That's good. It's a major mountain
7 to climb. Were they involved in the creation of the
8 strategic plan, the teachers per se?

9 SUPT. BARBAREE: They are at their building
10 level, yes, absolutely. And so each building has --
11 they have lead teachers, but then they have their
12 guiding coalition. And their guiding coalition is
13 made-up of staff at the building level. And they
14 work with their building principal, instructional
15 support, district-level instructional support to
16 create their school improvement plans. And those
17 improvement plans mirror what we have as our district
18 improvement plan.

19 DR. ARNOLD: Thank you.

20 SUPT. BARBAREE: You're welcome.

21 DR. ABBOTT: I will just commend you noticing
22 that you had, I think, over the last two years, at
23 least -- I'm finding my numbers here -- two percent
24 growth for ELA, one for math, you went down one in
25 science. Your graduation rate did increase by four

1 percent, but you're at a very low level, so in
2 reality, there's only one way, right? Like, up. And
3 so what do you think is going to be so different
4 about this new plan that's going to increase these
5 percentage points by enough to get you out of this F
6 grade?

7 SUPT. BARBAREE: So when we started, our
8 teachers -- you know, when we have the assessment,
9 when we started, they were just learning what then
10 was called PL -- or performance learning targets, and
11 now they're ALDs. But the targets of what a three
12 looks like. So if I know that if I'm teaching this
13 standard, what does the student have to do to even
14 just to perform the three, that 1060? How can we get
15 to that three? Our teachers were still learning that
16 that first year themselves and working in
17 collaborative team meetings to actually create their
18 own exemplars of that. Could they perform that
19 target? Could they do it at that level? And so that
20 was year one. So now we're in year two after they've
21 had that year experience, and we saw growth then
22 where they were just hitting the surface of that.
23 And so building that teacher capacity on being able
24 to perform it themselves and then being able to get
25 kids to that level, that's where we're going to see

1 the growth. But I know that it's going to take where
2 they're going to have to really dig deeper into that,
3 so that's where the lesson internalization is
4 important. You know, we gave them this -- the script
5 is what I'm going to call it. We gave them the HQIM,
6 and the first year. We need them just to read the
7 script, just to get the vocabulary, the language, for
8 them to get that to the students because we had so
9 many novice teachers, or so many teachers that were
10 trained in a different type of teaching. And so
11 then, now, we have to make sure that you have the
12 script. So now let's internalize the script. What
13 does this really mean that students can do? So
14 that's the stage we're in this year. So the
15 expectation -- we're going to continue to grow, but
16 it's our achievement that's getting us, just because
17 our students are growing to the level two, but we're
18 not achieving yet. And so some of our biggest
19 barriers are in math, and it's because some of our
20 math certified teachers -- our math teachers are not
21 certified in all areas, and then those that are --
22 are still struggling some themselves. And so that's
23 making sure that we put a high-quality teacher in
24 front of them.

25 DR. ABBOTT: Yeah. I just feel confident that

1 even with not a complete teacher buy-in -- because of
2 what I just heard --

3 SUPT. BARBAREE: That's right.

4 DR. ABBOTT: -- but not yet anyway -- hopefully,
5 you get there -- that that's something you can get to
6 next year.

7 SUPT. BARBAREE: I believe so, yes. No, I mean,
8 the data is showing that we are -- we're trending
9 that way. And so that's the -- that's the goal. And
10 when I see complete teacher buy-in, I mean, just in
11 the system itself is difficult right now for
12 teachers.

13 MR. PEACOCK: First off, thank you. I mean,
14 it's -- you -- you took a position to go into a
15 school district that was really struggling and not
16 everybody will sign up and do that. And I think we
17 have to acknowledge that. I'm sure that we probably
18 have in the past, but it's my first opportunity to
19 acknowledge it. So congratulations on that.

20 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you.

21 Mr. PEACOCK: I will tell you that it feels --
22 this Q&A session feels a lot lighter than the two
23 that preceded you. And I don't think that's being
24 fair to you and to your school district. Yeah,
25 there's a history in Pine Bluff, but there will

1 always be a history if we don't expect Pine Bluff to
2 start to perform at a higher level. And so I think
3 we owe it to you to hold you to the same standards
4 that we hold everybody who's performing at the C
5 grade, the A grade, the B grade. And if we don't,
6 then we're not doing our job and we're not helping
7 you. So there's some work to do from that
8 perspective; right? The presentation is pretty light
9 in terms of details, but I had two specific
10 questions. Earlier, one of the presentations talked
11 about teacher absenteeism. Is that something that
12 you struggled with? You mentioned absenteeism. I
13 wasn't sure if you were talking about teachers or
14 students or both.

15 SUPT. BARBAREE: Teachers. I'm speaking to
16 teachers. Our student absenteeism is improving.

17 MR. PEACOCK: Okay.

18 SUPT. BARBAREE: So our teacher absenteeism is
19 staying about the same, which is not positive.

20 MR. PEACOCK: Do you have a percentage of, or a
21 day's average, or how do you -- what's the metric?

22 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, we do. We've done some
23 incentives across the district, and so one of the big
24 incentives was we wanted just all faculty, not just
25 teachers -- like, so for the month of September, we

1 asked at each campus -- we documented at each campus
2 who had all staff present the most; and it was on a
3 percentage wise. And so again, it speaks to some of
4 our numbers. Our teachers -- our faculty at James
5 Matthews Elementary had ten days total across -- that
6 someone missed 10 days total. And this was for sick,
7 we did not count professional development leave
8 against them. But it was for sick or personal or
9 whatever leave that was. And so we're trying to
10 continue to promote those incentives. So the
11 district was -- we got donated money to provide lunch
12 for that faculty. So that -- we're going to continue
13 to promote those things. Now, when you ask if --
14 it's hard to find a percentage of actually how many
15 missed or not because the different days that they
16 have, and you have some on leave that are just on
17 leave, and then we also still have some classrooms
18 that have long-term subs. We're still looking
19 specifically for special education teachers, and a
20 music teacher, an art teacher. We have long-term
21 subs in those places as well. And I think one
22 elementary that we have a sub in. So I could give
23 you a rough data, but no, I don't -- I couldn't
24 answer that right now.

25 MR. PEACOCK: All right. I'm going to call you

1 on something that you said. We all know the teachers
2 work really hard. I'm not -- I'm not suggesting
3 anything other than that. But -- well, how do your
4 teachers work harder than the teachers in school
5 districts at a school in C? I -- it -- I would think
6 that it's consistent; right? So you made a comment
7 that led me to believe that because they're in a
8 failing school, they have to work harder than
9 teachers that are in -- and principals -- that are in
10 schools that aren't failing. Is -- did I
11 misunderstand your statement?

12 SUPT. BARBAREE: No, I think you're accurate in
13 that statement, and I still agree to that.

14 MR. PEACOCK: You think that you have to work
15 harder?

16 SUPT. BARBAREE: For those that do not come with
17 all the things that other students come with? That's
18 right, my child's teacher does not have to work as
19 hard to educate my child as some of the teachers at
20 my school to educate some of the students that come
21 to our campus.

22 MR. PEACOCK: So where in your plan do you
23 address how do you try to level that field somewhat?

24 SUPT. BARBAREE: The teachers?

25 MR. PEACOCK: Yes. so that they so that your

1 students come in your in the district -- that the
2 teachers are able to close that gap between your
3 child and your students?

4 SUPT. BARBAREE: That's the goal. That is the
5 magic thing that we're trying to do. So we have to
6 -- so how are we doing that?

7 MR. PEACOCK: Yes.

8 SUPT. BARBAREE: We're trying to train the
9 teachers better. We're trying to educate them better
10 so that they can actually pass the Praxis with the
11 actual Praxis score. So that they can actually learn
12 and understand how to utilize that high-quality
13 instructional material instead of just reading the
14 script. We're, as a district, partnering with the
15 local college, but we're still very much -- not only
16 as a district -- trying to educate our students,
17 we're trying to educate our educators so they can be
18 better for our students.

19 MR. PEACOCK: Well, earlier today as well, they
20 were talking about mentorship programs for the
21 principals in another school district, partnering
22 with successful principals outside the district. Are
23 you following that same model, or how are you --
24 what's your effort in that area?

25 SUPT. BARBAREE: Yes. So for principals we have

1 -- so I have one, the one at 34th, who's just --
2 she's newer in the district, she's going to cognitive
3 coaching, which is sponsored through AAEEA and ADE;
4 and that actually they provide them mentor principals
5 and support. She also is part of the instructional
6 leading and learning cohort that's -- she's learning
7 that through, it's a partnership with TNTP, which is
8 an outsourcing, that have principals as part of that.
9 We have administrators that took it upon themselves
10 to take their leadership team over our fall break,
11 because we have a different calendar, and so they
12 actually went to other schools, not in the city, but
13 outside of the city. I'm sorry, not other schools,
14 one other school that was a performing school where
15 they took a group of teachers there during the --
16 their actual school day. They partnered with that.
17 And so that's a principal that they're leaning on to
18 get some support in how they grew their building.
19 And then, I was trying to think about the different
20 ones that we -- well, we always participate in what
21 they call Capturing Kids' Hearts huddles. And so
22 this is where our building principals are required to
23 meet once a month. It's virtual. But it's for
24 principals across the nation that are also part of
25 Capturing Kids Hearts. So that's a program where

1 they mentor with each other. We have job-alikes
2 through the co-op where our building principals get
3 to go to the co-op with the principals that are in
4 our co-op area, and region, that they can listen and
5 learn from and talk with as well. John Wink has also
6 been a program that our co-op offered, and so our
7 building principals participated in that mentorship
8 program through -- through that. So it's definitely
9 there. Finding that mentor that -- that they can
10 have across the state has been really positive
11 through -- most of our principals are novice, and so
12 through the novice teacher -- I'm sorry -- novice
13 principal program. The beginning administrator
14 program, they provide them with a mentor as well. So
15 we've had one that was mentored from this principal
16 from Alma. So there's been some very strong
17 connections that I don't necessarily make them make,
18 but my assistant superintendent as well is part of
19 that and make sure that we have these connections
20 too. But right now, I can say that I'm proud of the
21 principals for going -- for asking to do these things
22 themselves. Asking, hey, can I take the van and a
23 group of teachers to this building because they've
24 raised their letter grade? And so -- and asking, can
25 I be a part of this program? Will you sign this so

1 that I can get an IMPACT Arkansas? That's another
2 program that some of our teachers are taking place in
3 so that they can grow their leadership capacity.

4 MR. PEACOCK: All right. Thank you.

5 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you.

6 MR. PEACOCK: Again, it's admirable that you
7 stepped into the role. It's a lot of work, but it's
8 going to be one of those opportunities when you see
9 the progress on paper, it'll make it all worth it.

10 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you.

11 MR. WOOD: Can I ask a follow-up?

12 CHAIR WOODS: Yes.

13 MR. WOOD: And I may have missed it in a
14 previous answer, but what exactly in your goals and
15 strategic plan is objectionable that is preventing
16 full teacher buy-in to it?

17 SUPT. BARBAREE: Well, objective -- I mean, it's
18 there. So --

19 MR. WOOD: What do you mean? The resistance?

20 SUPT. BARBAREE: No, no.

21 MR. WOOD: Okay.

22 SUPT. BARBAREE: And I'm not saying -- and so I
23 guess maybe I was -- misunderstood the question. I'm
24 not saying that they're not bought in to improving
25 student learning. They're bought in to improving

1 student learning. That's not it. And they're bought
2 into the HQIM. And they're -- but I'm saying that
3 they're buy-in to feeling like they are actually
4 going to be able to accomplish these goals is
5 difficult --

6 MR. WOOD: Oh.

7 SUPT. BARBAREE: -- because there's so many
8 outside things that they are familiar with and used
9 to and it's the culture. And so it's that culture
10 change is what -- it's a culture change that is the
11 problem.

12 MR. WOOD: So I could make a lot of money
13 referring people to two specific principals from
14 Little Rock School District. I could start them a
15 business to do this, but your teachers need to talk
16 to Barbara Anderson and Sandra Register from the
17 Little Rock School District. They were principals in
18 challenging neighborhoods, neighborhoods that people
19 had written off, and they turned schools around; they
20 had high-performing schools. I just -- I would love
21 for them -- for your personnel to have the confidence
22 that every student, regardless of the home situation,
23 can achieve and can grow with the right materials and
24 the right instruction for the right amount of time.
25 It can happen; it can happen anywhere. It's

1 happening in Southeast Arkansas. It's happened right
2 here in Little Rock. It -- it can happen anywhere,
3 there are no excuses if people are bought in and
4 believe in themselves that they can do it. I firmly
5 believe that.

6 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you. I we'll certainly
7 reach out to them I'm very curious how long did it
8 take to turn it around?

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah. I -- I don't know the answer
10 to that. I --

11 SUPT. BARBAREE: Okay.

12 MR. WOOD: Short period of time two three years,
13 that -- that that type of time frame. We're not
14 talking generational.

15 SUPT. BARBAREE: Good. No that's what I'm
16 thinking.

17 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

18 SUPT. BARBAREE: And that's the -- that's the
19 goal for us.

20 MR. WOOD: I think two or three years, I think
21 we can get there.

22 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

23 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you.

24 MS. KEEN3ER: Well -- and to piggyback off that,
25 I'm sure you've heard of the 90/90/90 schools, where

1 it's the 90 percent -- I think what you're talking
2 about is 90 percent of the student population
3 qualifies for free and reduced lunch; 90 percent is
4 -- are students of color, minorities; and 90 percent
5 proficiency. And so looking into those models and
6 sort of the key characteristics and things they have
7 would be very helpful, I think.

8 SUPT. BARBAREE: Thank you.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Are there any questions for their
10 board or for the co-op?

11 MR. WOOD: I'll ask a question of the board.

12 SUPT. BARBAREE: Okay.

13 MR. WOOD: And it's something that I intended to
14 bring up with North Little Rock and failed to do so,
15 sorry about that. But I believe the boards should be
16 accountable for -- so you've hired a superintendent
17 -- well, we have a superintendent. I believe, it's
18 an odd situation because she was --

19 DR. RICE: State takeover.

20 MR. WOOD: -- hired under state control. But I
21 assume that she has been through a review process and
22 a contract renewal and that type of process since the
23 board was democratically --

24 DR. RICE: Yes.

25 MR. WOOD: -- elected; is that right?

1 DR. RICE: Yes.

2 MR. WOOD: Or I apologize, I shouldn't even say
3 that, since the board took autonomy in the community.
4 Okay. So she's your person.

5 DR. RICE: Yes.

6 MR. WOOD: What -- are you fully supporting her
7 in the decisions that she makes, and specifically in
8 personnel decisions in the buildings?

9 DR. RICE: Yes. I think that's what the overall
10 goal of the board is to do. We evaluate those
11 decisions, we look at the ins and outs. Of course,
12 we don't always agree 100 percent, but at the end of
13 the day, if those decisions are aligned to supporting
14 teaching and learning, that's what we're supporting.

15 MR. WOOD: Well, what we heard from North Little
16 Rock just a little while ago was that in a very split
17 decision, there was some dissension maybe based on
18 favoring this person over that person. It came down
19 to, you know, personnel decisions. They didn't want
20 this person to not be in that position anymore or
21 whatever. My encouragement is that you look past all
22 of that in the decisions you make and that you
23 support the superintendent as she makes personnel
24 decisions. If she wants to replace a principal, if
25 she believes that an ineffective teacher needs to be

1 relocated, you all have to look past the
2 personalities and the relationships and you have to
3 support the superintendent's decision. So I hope
4 that is the culture of the new Pine Bluff School
5 Board and that it will be that culture going forward.

6 DR. RICE: It is. Thank you.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Questions?

8 (NO RESPONSE)

9 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. If there are no questions,
10 I will look for a vote either to approve, accept or
11 reject. Thank you.

12 MR. PEACOCK: I'll make a motion to accept.

13 CHAIR WOODS: All right. I have a motion by Mr.
14 Peacock to accept. Do I have a second?

15 MR. BRAGG: Second.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Mr. Bragg. All in
17 favor say aye.

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

20 Hearing none, motion passes.

21 Congratulations.

22 **1.d. LAFAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

23 CHAIR WOODS: All right. Next up.

24 MS. SMITH: All right. Next up on the agenda
25 for the State Board today is Lafayette County. It is

1 currently one of our districts with a letter grade of
2 an F. It is 66 points from a D. It is the
3 lowest-performing district of the D districts. So 66
4 points. They are in the Southwest Co-op. They have
5 453 students. Jon Estes is a first-year
6 superintendent in the district. Their property
7 rating is reported at 86 percent. This has been a
8 district that is in declining enrollment, averaging
9 anywhere from 50, 60 students a year that they're
10 losing.

11 And so at this point, I will ask Mr. Estes to
12 come forward for his presentation.

13 SUPT. ESTES: Hey, how are y'all? I'm John
14 Estes.

15 CHAIR WOODS: Tired.

16 SECT. OLIVA: Hey, I'll wake you up there.

17 SUPT. ESTES: I'm superintendent of the
18 Lafayette County School District, where we -- like
19 Ms. Smith said, we have the lowest test scores in the
20 state. As a native of Lafayette County, I'm ashamed
21 and embarrassed to admit that, and I'm ashamed and
22 embarrassed to be here today. That's where I grew
23 up. That's where I just went back to. I'm ashamed
24 and embarrassed because our people, our kids, deserve
25 much better. Lafayette County is better than this.

1 I want the State Board to know that -- that we own
2 it. It's nobody's fault but our own, and we -- and
3 we will fix it because, again, our kids in our
4 community deserve better.

5 The solution started when the state -- when the
6 school board -- let me back up. I've got Mr. Harvey
7 Sellers from the school district, Ms. Phoebe Bailey
8 from the co-op, Mr. Johnny Brown, board president,
9 Ms. Christie Dunbar, board vice president, with me
10 today.

11 Solution started when the school board realized
12 that we needed -- needed to go in a different
13 direction, and they hired me. I got a phone call
14 about nine o'clock at night on April Fools. Mr.
15 Brown calling me, telling me that I got the job.
16 Before nine o'clock, the next morning, Ms. Sheila
17 Whitlow was calling me and telling me, John, what are
18 you doing taking that job? Telling me what kind --
19 it was in bad shape, not only academically, but
20 financially. I knew the district was struggling, but
21 I had no idea how bad.

22 One of the biggest concerns was a large number
23 of unlicensed teachers, many of which have been on
24 1240 waivers. I relayed this concern to the previous
25 superintendent, who immediately began working on it,

1 and today, all of our teachers are licensed. The
2 main problem at both the elementary and the high
3 schools was a lack of structure conducive to teachers
4 being able to teach and students being able to learn.
5 Before you worry about Tier 1 instruction, RTI, HQIM
6 or anything else, you have to have an environment
7 where teachers can and are teaching and students are
8 able to learn.

9 At the elementary -- at the elementary school,
10 at the -- my first board meeting, I recommended that
11 we close two campuses that have -- one house
12 kindergarten, one house 1st and 2nd grade. And the
13 school board agreed to do that, voted to do that, and
14 we consolidated kindergarten through 6th grade into
15 one building. This was huge because it allowed the
16 principal to monitor each classroom regularly and
17 hold teachers accountable as needed. No more
18 kindergarten starting at 8:35 when everybody got down
19 there and -- and got ready. Now classes start on
20 time every day with quality instruction --
21 instruction. Teachers teach better when they are
22 being monitored and observed on a consistent basis,
23 and giving feedback. And closing the two buildings
24 and consider -- and consolidating all the students
25 into one building was the structure that made this

1 possible.

2 Elementary, we talked about 3rd-grade test
3 scores.

4 I'm not even flipping through my things. But
5 y'all have got it.

6 We talked about 3rd-grade test scores. I think
7 last year we had one student who was level three.
8 Everybody else was level one or two. That's
9 terrible. We've utilized the services of Karen
10 Harris to support K-2 teachers and improve reading
11 ability of K-2 students. Test scores show that this
12 is working great. The co-op is providing assistance
13 with a math specialist, Ms. Wilson, who works with
14 our teachers, as well, in Tier 1 instruction and
15 ATLAS test prep for both the elementary and the high
16 school.

17 Speaking of testing, there's our -- that's much
18 better, much improved than what it was the previous
19 year. Speaking of needed structure, one mistake was
20 in the way that we administered the ATLAS test. I'm
21 still not sure why, but at the elementary school,
22 they gave their interim practice test during the
23 first week of school -- during the first weeks of
24 school this year. So obviously, there isn't much
25 growth. The problem has been identified, solved, but

-- and will not happen again. They're testing again towards the end of January and should show expected improvements. At the high school, when 9th -- 9th and 10th grades began their interim testing, their practice test, the internet went down. So we moved it back a day. Instead of -- instead of administering the interim test on two days as previously scheduled, they decided, since we moved it back a day, let's just do them all in one day. And so they -- again, this led to lower test scores on the interim test. Again, though, this problem has been identified and addressed and will not happen again. The 7th- and 8th-grade tests were properly administered and show growth.

The high school, the first thing we had to work on at the high school was again providing structure. You don't worry about mice when you have elephants running through your house. Last year at the high school, the needed structure was not there. Fifteen fights a day, 30 fights a week was not uncommon. Teachers not coming to work, can't -- can't find subs, kids going to the gym to spend the day was not uncommon. We did not provide an environment where students could learn. Expectations for teachers and students were clearly communicated at the beginning

1 of this school year; and when you expect more, you
2 get more. We have turned the negative learning
3 environment around this year. Our school is doing
4 good. Teachers are teaching. Students are in class
5 learning. Expectations are high. Excuses are not
6 allowed. We've only had two fights all school year.
7 Teacher absences are way down. Our interim test show
8 scores show -- taken over a month ago, show that we
9 are already scoring higher this year than we did at
10 the end of last year when we -- when the tests were
11 properly administered.

12 Our science teacher, who is responsible for all
13 tested science subjects, is being coached by the
14 Arkansas Teacher Corps, as well as being monitored
15 and observed by the principal and myself and the
16 co-op staff. Our two math teachers are being coached
17 by the math specialist from the co-op. We are
18 currently working -- we are currently working with
19 Brent Miller to reconfigure our class schedule for
20 the next semester to assure the best teacher for each
21 subject is teaching that particular subject. I
22 actually met with him this morning whenever I got
23 here. Danielle Faught with the Bailey Group is
24 working with our English Language -- ELA teachers.
25 Sarah Goodwin from the ADE is also working with both

1 teachers. Dr. Goodwin regularly Zooms with each
2 teacher individually to increase lessons -- lesson
3 internalization regarding HQIM.

4 We have ceased operation in our ALE program, and
5 we are finalizing steps with Hope School District to
6 purchase of slots if necessary. Our former ALE
7 teacher is serving as a second teacher in the ELA
8 classrooms, providing RTI small group interventions
9 and one-on-one tutoring and instruction. At both
10 elementary and the high school, we are focused on
11 protecting sacred class time. We do not disrupt
12 instruction time with class or club meetings, field
13 trips, free days or all calls over the intercom.
14 Russ Sherrill with ADE works with both principals to
15 ensure they're staying on track with observations,
16 quality Tier 1 instruction, and using HQIM. He and
17 his team are there to answer any questions and get us
18 any help we may need. I have personally met with all
19 10th through 12th-grade students, explaining the
20 benefits of earning concurrent credits through
21 University of Arkansas Community College Hope. I
22 expect to see the number of students graduating
23 Lafayette County High School with college credit
24 significantly -- significantly increase over the
25 coming years. We -- we just had 12 students take the

1 ACCUPLACER test on Tuesday. We have two new students
2 who are starting college. They're juniors. They're
3 starting college in January. We had to figure out
4 how to make the ACCUPLACER more accessible to our
5 students in the future.

6 Working with teachers on grade-level grades,
7 make sure that your grades reflect where the student
8 is. If everybody's making As and they're scoring 1s,
9 that's grade inflation. We don't want to do that.
10 If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. We had
11 to stop digging our hole deeper so we could start
12 climbing our way out. Many of the problems that
13 plagued us in the past have already been corrected.
14 We are nowhere near where we need to be, but our
15 truck is heading in the right direction.

16 That's all I got. Questions, comments,
17 concerns, cuss words?

18 CHAIR WOODS: I -- I have a quick question just
19 to start to make sure I understand the timeline.
20 When you say you started in April, are you talking
21 April 2025?

22 SUPT. ESTES: I -- I got hired in April. I
23 didn't start till July 1st.

24 CHAIR WOODS: So you're six months, seven months
25 into this job?

1 SUPT. ESTES: Yes, ma'am.

2 CHAIR WOODS: This feels more, in my opinion,
3 like a board question and answer because you haven't
4 had time to do anything.

5 CHAIR WOODS: Sure.

6 SECT. OLIVA: I've been trying to be relatively
7 quiet today and let -- let the board ask the
8 questions of the leadership and the superintendents.
9 But I -- I feel compelled, before we get into board
10 questions, to give some background, I think, on the
11 state of Lafayette who came on our radar last year;
12 and we had great concerns as a state about the status
13 of that district and the performance that we were
14 seeing out of students. And that's when we had our
15 school improvement team start going down there
16 regularly to have conversations with the previous
17 superintendent to start developing a plan because
18 this is by far one of the lowest-performing districts
19 in the state. And I'm not talking about just an
20 achievement, but I'm also talking about in learning
21 gains. And I've gotten to visit Lafayette with Dr.
22 Estes, walked through some classrooms; and how this
23 district got lucky to have somebody from the
24 community, that just recently retired, willing to
25 take on the dysfunctional mess that is called

1 Lafayette County. And I think it is appropriate to
2 have these conversations with the board because, for
3 the life of me, the decisions the elected officials
4 would make in this community were what's best for
5 adults in that system and not for students. And I
6 think we have a superintendent who we've had some
7 very serious conversations with that says we need to
8 change that mindset and that culture, and he's up for
9 that challenge. I commend him for taking on that
10 challenge because that's not an easy challenge.
11 But if -- if you're one of the lowest-performing
12 districts in the state, would you think it's a good
13 idea to have kids come to school less? Let -- let's
14 take 178 calendar and turn it into 136 because that's
15 going to help the lowest-performing district in the
16 state. That's the decisions that Lafayette County is
17 making on their own. That's why they're the
18 lowest-performing district in the state. You heard
19 from districts that are two, three points from a D,
20 and that's nothing to celebrate; right? But when we
21 talk about systemic failure -- and it's financially,
22 it's leadership quality, it's professional
23 development, it's teacher quality. I went -- we
24 walked through some classrooms, and I will tell you,
25 I was very encouraged by the very quick actions that

1 we have seen in place.

2 And now, when I tell you that there's been some
3 change in expectations, principals are in classrooms,
4 teachers are using their instructional materials,
5 that -- there is a momentum happening. And this is
6 why I worry about urgency because I have a feeling
7 that board members we're going to hear from are going
8 to say things that are going to hinder progress.
9 That's what I'm worried about. I've never talked to
10 these board members. I just look at their track
11 record of decisions. And when Mr. Woods talks to
12 other boards about are they supporting the
13 superintendent, I think we need to have that
14 conversation and ask these questions as well.
15 But when I sit there and talk to teachers in your
16 classrooms and ask them, "Why are your students'
17 level one?" And the teachers tell me it's the
18 parents. That's an embedded mindset and culture of
19 low expectations for a community that's not going to
20 be cured overnight. We're talking massive overhaul
21 needs to happen in this district. So I -- I love
22 that we're here to do this update. I -- I just want
23 you to understand my sense of urgency for the
24 students that are in a failing system, how we're
25 going to hear about these plans. But if there was

1 one district that I want to elevate that I have grave
2 concerns about the future of, it's Lafayette schools.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Can we talk to your board
4 president?

5 SUPT. ESTES: Yeah.

6 MR. BROWN: Good afternoon. How's everybody
7 here?

8 CHAIR WOODS: Good afternoon, Mr. Brown.

9 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

10 CHAIR WOODS: How long have you been on the
11 board?

12 MR. BROWN: About 29, 30 years.

13 CHAIR WOODS: 29, 30 years?

14 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

15 CHAIR WOODS: How many superintendents --

16 SECT. OLIVA: He sounds like the problem.

17 CHAIR WOODS: How many superintendents have you
18 had during your time?

19 MR. BROWN: We've had four.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Four? Okay. How long was the
21 last one here?

22 MR. BROWN: The last one was here about three
23 years.

24 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. And the one was --

25 MR. BROWN: -- going on -- going on a third

1 year.

2 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. What about the one before
3 that?

4 MR. BROWN: About four years.

5 CHAIR WOODS: Four years. So have these
6 superintendents left, or have -- has the board
7 decided to terminate them?

8 MR. BROWN: They left. Last year -- this year,
9 Ms. Anderson got sick.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

11 MR. BROWN: Cancer. And then her health
12 starting failing. She did a good job, but then she
13 had another fall one night at the courthouse and
14 began to have some leakage around the brain. So she
15 had to take a medical.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Medical leave.

17 MR. BROWN: And she left because of medical.

18 CHAIR WOODS: So let's also -- okay. So let's
19 talk then about the budget, that there's been budget
20 issues. That's your responsibility as a board.
21 Would you agree?

22 MR. BROWN: Agree.

23 CHAIR WOODS: So are y'all passing budgets?

24 MR. BROWN: Yes, we are.

25 CHAIR WOODS: You are. Okay. But the budgets

1 aren't working. So are you changing them, or are you
2 rubber-stamping them?

3 MR. BROWN: No, we just change that as needed.

4 CHAIR WOODS: As needed?

5 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

6 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Do you have --

7 MR. BROWN: Well, with the leave -- you know,
8 with student enrollment declining, we are having to
9 look at other -- other things that might be needed in
10 the future. And so right now we just -- with Mr.
11 Estes, we try to give him a chance to get us on a
12 different direction of where we was going.

13 CHAIR WOODS: What sort of vetting process did
14 you do for your last two superintendents? Did they
15 come out of your district, or did you pull them from
16 elsewhere?

17 MR. BROWN: Ms. Anderson was in our district for
18 years. Uh-huh. And --

19 CHAIR WOODS: Was she a teacher, or she -- was
20 she an administrator?

21 MR. BROWN: She was administrator, and then she
22 -- she took a financial position due to illness. And
23 then she got better. Then the position came up as
24 Mr. Edwards was getting ready to leave, and we
25 decided to -- to go ahead on and -- and give her a

1 chance as superintendent.

2 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. I'm going to open up the
3 floor to my colleagues, and then I may have some
4 other questions.

5 Anybody want to go first?

6 MR. WOOD: I'll go first.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Go for it.

8 MR. WOOD: So district overview page on the --
9 the presentation. This -- this is -- this is really
10 kind of boggling to me. A K-6 building with a -- a
11 student population of 200. You've got a second-year
12 principal, 88 percent low income, but that's lower
13 than some of the other districts. Average class size
14 of 15 students, 14 percent special education, average
15 teaching experience is nine years. These are --
16 there are -- there are schools and school districts
17 all across Arkansas that would complain about numbers
18 that are way worse than that. That -- that -- that
19 seems like an opportunity to -- to do better than
20 worst in Arkansas. What -- what have you -- what --
21 what has been identified as -- tell you what, give me
22 the three most fundamental root causes of the failure
23 at Lafayette County.

24 MR. BROWN: Well, one failure was like
25 superintendent just said. Last year, we had problems

1 with teachers teaching, coming to school, problems
2 with fighting. We got some kids from different
3 states that came back to Arkansas, and we was having
4 problems every week with a fight. Every -- every --
5 every week we was having fights, and we was having a
6 lot of disciplinary hearings. We had to get rid of
7 some kids that were just troublemakers that didn't
8 want an education. And that was causing problems
9 within our whole district. But when you get one bad
10 apple and -- he started turning the whole bunch into
11 bad apples, and then not really hungry for education,
12 that -- that's the problem for any district.

13 MR. WOOD: But, hey, Mr. Brown, let's -- I -- I
14 -- I appreciate that you probably can think of depth
15 to these examples, but we'll be here all day if we --

16 MR. BROWN: Okay.

17 MR. WOOD: -- go -- go that level. But -- so
18 you've identified teacher attendance and student
19 fighting. What else is a core problem at Lafayette
20 County that led to worst in Arkansas status? Well,
21 what else?

22 MR. BROWN: That's just participation.

23 MR. WOOD: That's it? Teacher attendance and
24 kids fighting?

25 MR. BROWN: No participation. Kids hungry for

1 education. Uh-huh. Maybe I'm not --

2 MR. WOOD: So -- so yeah, Mr. Brown. I -- I
3 can't accept that.

4 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

5 MR. WOOD: Because you're a -- you're a rural
6 southwest school district.

7 MR. BROWN: Right.

8 MR. WOOD: I think -- I don't think the kids in
9 Lafayette County are very different than the kids in
10 Sevier County or -- and -- and De Queen Schools are
11 doing pretty well. I -- I don't -- I don't think
12 that -- I don't think the kids in Southwest Arkansas
13 are less hungry for education than the kids in
14 Southeast Arkansas. But I can show you examples of
15 elementary schools that are As and Bs.

16 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

17 MR. WOOD: Sure. There are some that are not.
18 Don't get me wrong, they're not all. But it's
19 possible to take a group of elementary kids or high
20 school kids who would rather be playing Xbox and have
21 them achieve or have them grow in -- in learning in
22 one year's time. And -- and Lafayette County just
23 hasn't shown a commitment to doing that. So other
24 than blaming the kids, what -- what -- I mean, we've
25 got teacher attendance. What did you do as the board

1 chair to promote better teacher attendance?

2 MR. BROWN: Well, we tried to instill in our
3 principal to deal with the -- our superintendent to
4 deal with the principals in getting the teachers more
5 enthused in handling the classrooms and the
6 instructional of their classrooms.

7 MR. WOOD: How? What'd you? Do you just pass a
8 message, "Hey, y'all get better"?

9 MR. BROWN: No. We -- we changed our -- we
10 changed. We -- we went and changed our policies and
11 all this. We updated our other policies to put more
12 on the -- the teachers for their instructional
13 abilities. And as well as we brought in this
14 organization to work with the teachers on their
15 teaching abilities and -- and their classroom
16 structure. So that's that.

17 CHAIR WOODS: Here's my opinion on this. I
18 don't think you know.

19 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

20 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

21 CHAIR WOODS: I think you've been really
22 disconnected.

23 MR. WOOD: That's exactly what I was about to
24 say.

25 CHAIR WOODS: And so we're just getting these

1 like top-level answers here. And I'm frustrated
2 because we have to decide whether to accept this
3 assurance. And I'm sure Mr. Estes can probably
4 implement a plan, but I have no faith to know whether
5 the board is going to support him in doing that.

6 MR. BROWN: The board would support whatever Mr.
7 Estes put forward that we think that would bring us
8 back to where we need to be with the achieving of the
9 -- of the students.

10 CHAIR WOODS: But we have no -- we have no
11 assurance that you -- you have done that because we
12 have no history of that. You're a failing district.

13 MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

14 SECT. OLIVA: I -- I -- I go back to the luck
15 that Lafayette County has to have a citizen who
16 retired and saw a local need that says, "I want to
17 help." And he knows. He's a lifelong educator who's
18 had success in other districts that we've heralded.
19 He knows there's decisions that need to be made in
20 that district. I don't think this board is going to
21 stand behind him because those -- those decisions are
22 going to disrupt the status quo. And the reason this
23 district is failing is because the adults in charge
24 of running that district want to protect that status
25 quo. So I can tell you of all the boards that I do

1 not have a lot of confidence in, this is one. Now, I
2 -- as I stated at the beginning of today, today is
3 day one of letting a district know where they stand
4 with our board. And I want to go moving forward in
5 good faith that they've been put on notice that we're
6 going to monitor their performance and their actions
7 because we're going to have an update in front of
8 this board. So I -- I want to walk away from this in
9 good conscience to say, we -- we are here talking
10 about some assurances that need to happen, and we
11 have to do our part with the co-op and the
12 superintendent to make sure that's happening. And if
13 -- if we find out it's the board that's not letting
14 that happen, then I'm going to probably be making
15 future recommendations about that board. But I --
16 but I can tell you that I've been trying to be quiet
17 today and let -- let the districts present. But this
18 is one district. When I look at the abysmal
19 performance of a school district that's failing a
20 generation of students, this is by far one of the
21 worst districts in the state.

22 DR. ARNOLD: Well, I'm almost speechless, so
23 thank you for speaking up so strongly. Newer on the
24 board, my experience with Blytheville was very
25 informative, and I don't -- I -- recognizing that

1 there are processes and protocols for the level
2 designation of school districts. I mean, there's a
3 unique classification here of being lowest in the
4 state. And that might call for, I think it does call
5 for, a State Board visit to this district in 2026.
6 So we can hear from the community.

7 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

8 DR. ARNOLD: Get feedback direct from the people
9 that are entrusting their children to such a
10 dysfunctional, abysmal school district. And thank
11 you. Hats off to Dr. Estes. I mean, what you've
12 done in half a year or less is remarkable from your
13 testimony.

14 MS. KEENER: I was curious if I can ask about
15 the -- this may be a question for the superintendent.

16 DR. ABBOTT: Dr. Estes.

17 MS. KEENER: Mr. Estes? I noticed that only 64
18 percent of the students that took the summative
19 evaluation took the interim and the English Language
20 Arts in November. That is, of course, problematic
21 because then you don't know how they're doing. And I
22 know that the summative has a requirement attached to
23 it with accreditation. Maybe the interim doesn't.
24 So maybe we got a little relaxed there. Can you talk
25 about that? And --

1 SUPT. ESTES: Hey, would you ask me the question
2 again?

3 MS. KEENER: Sure.

4 SUPT. ESTES: Can I look at it?

5 MS. KEENER: Yes, of course. Okay. So ignore
6 my chicken scratch. But the English Language Arts,
7 the summative evaluation at the end of last school
8 year, 309 students took that. But during the
9 interim, in November, only 197 students took that,
10 which is 64 percent of what I imagine to be near
11 close to the total population. Do we know why so
12 few? Was that attendance? Was it just didn't get it
13 done, or --

14 SUPT. ESTES: (Away from microphone)

15 MR. WOOD: Can you come back to the microphone?

16 MS. KEENER: Oh, sorry. Yes.

17 CHAIR WOODS: People online can't hear you.

18 SUPT. ESTES: Dr. -- Dr. Smith, whenever she
19 told about our population being 450, we're down to
20 390 something now. We've lost that many kids.

21 MS. KEENER: I -- I think maybe taking a closer
22 look at the number of students taking the interim
23 assessments is going to be important as well because
24 in all of the situations, now ELA was the most
25 dramatic, where only 64 percent took it, but only 71

1 percent took the interim and mathematics only. Now
2 it was 95 percent in science, and I know those
3 numbers can kind of move around a little bit, but the
4 interim assessment is pointless if you don't have a
5 full picture for the kids; right?

6 SUPT. ESTES: Right, I agree.

7 MS. KEENER: On how the kids are doing.

8 SUPT. ESTES: I agree.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Other questions, comments?

10 DR. ABBOTT: What -- what do you attribute the
11 enrollment? Like, what -- what's going on there?

12 SUPT. ESTES: Well, I've -- I've tracked the
13 kids and the -- tracked the kids at the elementary
14 school and see who requested records for them. The
15 majority of the kids we've lost since the end of
16 school last year, to I think it was October of this
17 year, they had moved out of state.

18 DR. ABBOTT: And -- and you went from -- and
19 2022 -- and this -- this may be a question for Mr.
20 Brown. I know 91 percent graduation rate, 91 percent
21 in 2023, and then 78 in '24. What happened in
22 between those two years?

23 SUPT. ESTES: Between basically last --

24 DR. ABBOTT: '23 and '24.

25 SUPT. ESTES: Up until last year. You had a

1 smaller class. So the less kids that -- so if you
2 had four kids who didn't graduate last year, it made
3 a bigger percent -- it was a bigger percentage than
4 four kids who didn't graduate four or five years ago.
5 Mr. Sellers could speak on where those kids were,
6 about the -- the four or five kids that --

7 DR. ABBOTT: Yes, please.

8 SUPT. ESTES: -- did not graduate. He was
9 there.

10 MR. SELLERS: I believe there's about eight
11 students involved in the small school district.
12 Small numbers, just one student could be five
13 percent. But there was eight students, one went to
14 Job Corps, which you don't get any points for that.
15 Two received the GED, we didn't get any points for
16 that. There was a shooting in the -- the -- the
17 town, and two students ended up in the jail. They
18 couldn't make bail, so they weren't receiving any
19 services. So those students, if they would've went
20 to a juvenile facility, they could have kept getting
21 educational services. So those students did not
22 count for us. They counted against us. And I
23 believe there was one more student and -- and some --
24 there was a student that was special education, did
25 not take the DLM test. They was moving back with

1 Easter Seals in Little Rock, and somehow they didn't
2 get that DLM test on the graduation correction window
3 you have to do. So that was about eight students
4 that counted against us. And this year, when that
5 correction window came out, there was about five
6 students. Two we had proof that moved out of state.
7 We sent that in. So I anticipate that graduation
8 rate to go up next year as well.

9 DR. ABBOTT: Thank you.

10 MR. SELLERS: No -- no doubt about that. I -- I
11 will say, if I could, there's no doubt our high
12 school, this past year, we had several grades and
13 subject areas that was -- percentage-wise, was the
14 lowest in the state. And our school climate was not
15 good. We had two principals, the principal and
16 assistant principal the year before. And then the
17 last year at the high school, we eliminated the
18 assistant principal position. The school climate
19 really did get out of control. Mr. Estes brought
20 back a half-time assistant principal this year.
21 Climate and culture, I would say 75 percent better
22 this year.

23 Elementary climate culture was good. The -- the
24 test scores went down. Our -- our K-2 came out.
25 Kindergarten, we was only about two percent off

1 literacy of -- of the state average. I think it was
2 44 and 46 percent. First grade literacy, our
3 students had a higher scale-score average than the
4 state. So we -- we had some great results there.
5 Our literacy coach that we had provided by DESE, she
6 retired November 14th. So we're looking to get
7 another literacy coach back from DESE to -- to help
8 us this year. We -- I've participated with her in
9 those learning walks. It's been great.

10 I will say whenever we say a long time of
11 dysfunction, just to say not this school year, but
12 the year before report card, we was -- our elementary
13 was about nine points from a D. Now we're probably
14 about 40 points. So we did decline, but the year
15 before it was better. And the high school, we had a
16 C just two years ago. In 2024, we were recognized by
17 the University of Arkansas, having the second-highest
18 ELA growth in the Southwest region for our high
19 school. That's from Mena all the way down to El
20 Dorado. We got an award for that. We had high
21 growth. We had 2.5 FTE high school teachers for ELA
22 that did that. They're all gone. They didn't --
23 they weren't there last year. They left in the
24 middle of the year. We had to hire two
25 non-traditional teachers during that time. That was

1 some of the reasons why we really took a -- a
2 nosedive on some of the test scores.

3 MR. WOOD: I -- I'm -- I'm sorry. Could you
4 repeat that last thing? What'd you say? There's a
5 reason for the decrease in the test scores?

6 MR. SELLERS: That was, I think, a question
7 earlier about some of the -- what could be some other
8 reasons maybe that went down. And like I said, we --
9 you go back two years in 2024, we get recognized for
10 high school ELA scores, having some high growth,
11 second-highest growth in the region. But I'm just
12 saying all -- those 2.5 teachers, FTE, they all
13 retired or left the district. We didn't have them
14 last year. So we -- then we had to bring in two
15 non-traditional teachers. That -- that was one thing
16 that we've had a lot of non-traditional pathway
17 teachers that we have to work through. So now we
18 have to retrain. We had those veteran teachers. Now
19 we have to retrain. We're getting a lot of support
20 from DESE, a lot of support -- or from the Bailey
21 Group that we have coming in to help retrain them.
22 And hopefully, we'll get the scores back up again,
23 increase the learning.

24 MR. WOOD: Yeah. But we're -- I mean, we're not
25 talking like a couple points, man. I mean, we're

1 talking monumental. It -- it's -- it's more than two
2 teachers.

3 MR. SELLERS: I -- I was just talking about the
4 -- the -- the ELA at the high school. I was just
5 giving an example of --

6 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

7 MR. SELLERS: -- where it was before getting a
8 -- an award, high growth. The next year, all those
9 teachers left. We went down to two teachers instead
10 of 2.5, and --

11 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

12 MR. SELLERS: And the two teachers we have now,
13 they're -- they're working hard, but their bachelor's
14 degree background is in health, kinesiology. So --

15 MR. WOOD: What are they teaching?

16 MR. SELLERS: They're -- they're -- they are our
17 two English teachers. Now, the master's degree and
18 so forth, MAT, that type of thing, yes, they are
19 licensed. They passed the Praxis test, but their
20 background. So that's what happens a lot of times.
21 We get non-traditional teachers, and then you have to
22 teach them up. And then once you do that, then they
23 may leave to a neighboring district.

24 MR. WOOD: You know, I -- I don't want to --
25 there is -- there are school districts performing

1 significantly better than Lafayette County nearby in
2 the same kind of region. I -- I don't want to over
3 group people together, but when you look at De Queen
4 and when you look at Hope, when you look at Cossatot
5 River and Umpire alone, less than 100 kids in that
6 school, K-12, and it's an A school, I just -- like, I
7 have a really, really hard time reading what I read
8 on this paper here and -- and believing that there is
9 any kind of excuse. There's no excuse. There's no --
10 - I'm truly speechless. And I -- I hate to say it
11 takes a lot to make me speechless about this.

12 DR. ARNOLD: Madam Chair, does the cooperative
13 have any insight we should hear?

14 MR. PEACOCK: Well, can I make a couple of
15 comments before we --

16 CHAIR WOODS: Please.

17 MR. PEACOCK: The -- my observation is we don't
18 have a student problem. We got an adult problem.
19 There's from -- you don't -- you don't have 35 fights
20 a week that are spontaneous. They build up. And
21 this clearly, from my perspective -- and I've never
22 been to this school -- but teachers are -- are not
23 intervening in situations. They're setting back,
24 wait -- and things continue. There's -- and -- and I
25 think that accounts for why the test scores. You --

1 you don't drop from two to 40 because students
2 suddenly forget everything. You drop from two to 40
3 because they stop being involved, and it's like just
4 checking blocks or whatever. So it's a -- it's an
5 adult situation that's got to be -- that's -- that's
6 the problem. It's not the student population that's
7 the problem.

8 And somebody suggested we go visit. I -- I
9 think you said earlier, Mr. Estes, that you -- you're
10 doing your next round of testing in January? I would
11 like to come visit as soon as the test results come
12 out because I think that you're going to do a lot of
13 good things. If -- if you are holding your staff
14 accountable and reinstituting the -- the discipline
15 that you need in the school system, then those scores
16 are going to come back quickly. And I'd like to come
17 down and see if that's actually the case. So I -- I
18 -- I don't suggest that we come down in 2026. I
19 suggest we come down in January as soon as the test
20 results are down -- or are -- are released so that we
21 can see firsthand for ourselves that -- what's going
22 on.

23 The other thing, Mr. Brown, I -- I -- I'm sure
24 you're a fine gentleman. I have a lot of respect for
25 you having served for three decades on the school

1 board. But the school board is not helping Mr. Estes
2 and the school district. And they either need to
3 change their ways, or they need to get out of the
4 way. And I hate to be that blunt about it, but time
5 moves on. And then, Mr. Estes and the -- and those
6 students deserve the support from a -- a vibrant,
7 engaged school board that is looking to the future
8 for their students. And if the school board can't do
9 that, please don't ask the state to -- to -- to come
10 and fix the -- your problem.

11 MR. BROWN: It is not that we're not. We're
12 engaged. We are trying to --

13 MR. PEACOCK: But what you're doing, sir, is not
14 working.

15 MR. BROWN: Yep.

16 MR. PEACOCK: Right. And if it's not working,
17 we need to do something different; right? And I say
18 that with all the respect for all the work that you
19 did for -- that you poured into the school district
20 for 30 years; all right?

21 CHAIR WOODS: And I'm just going to say --

22 MR. PEACOCK: Thank you.

23 MR. WOOD: Could we -- could we possibly hear
24 from the other school board member that's here?

25 CHAIR WOODS: We -- we can, and I just want to

1 say we are firing teachers for not doing their job in
2 the district. And if you, as a elected school board,
3 are taking funds from the district, you're not doing
4 your job.

5 Yes. We would love to hear from the other one.

6 MS. DUNBAR: Go ahead.

7 MS. KEENER: I have a question.

8 MS. DUNBAR: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. KEENER: How much annually is the district
10 paying to the Bailey Group for support?

11 MS. DUNBAR: That number I can't tell you right
12 off the bat.

13 CHAIR WOODS: You can come up and answer that
14 question.

15 SECT. OLIVA: She's from the co-op.

16 CHAIR WOODS: Oh, she's from the co-op.

17 MS. KEENER: From --

18 CHAIR WOODS: Sorry. She's from the co-op?

19 MS. KEENER: Co-op. Okay. Thanks.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Can you introduce yourself?

21 MS. BAILEY: Sure. Phoebe Bailey, Director of
22 Southwest Co-op. And we -- the Bailey Group is
23 through the Communities of Practice grant that runs
24 from the co-op. So it's from -- it's grant funded
25 from the co-op. It's not costing the district

1 anything.

2 MS. KEENER: Okay. Interesting. Thank you.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Do you have questions
4 specifically?

5 MR. WOOD: Yeah, sure. I'll -- I'll ask you the
6 same question that I asked Mr. Brown a minute ago.
7 Could you maybe identify for me the top three issues
8 that have led to the poor performance of Lafayette
9 County Schools?

10 MS. DUNBAR: Sure. First of all, I'm Christie
11 Dunbar. I've been on this board probably two, almost
12 maybe three years. So -- and if I -- if I may, what
13 really prompted me to step up and run was because I
14 was not satisfied with what was going on in the
15 district, with the schools, with the students, the
16 performance, everything.

17 So you know, you can sit on the sideline and
18 complain, or you can try to get in the game and make
19 a difference. So that is why I ran. But what I
20 found getting on the board, because it's different
21 when you're on the outside looking in; and then when
22 you get in, I felt that there was a total lack of
23 accountability of being -- for the teachers. They --
24 they -- they just weren't held to what I thought
25 should have been a standard of accountability. I

1 felt that there definitely was a lack of discipline
2 going on in the school due to, in part, what some of
3 you all said, was just not getting involved, standing
4 by, because I'm not understanding how I can see these
5 fights being broadcast on social media, and all I'm
6 seeing are students. Where are the teachers?
7 Where's -- where -- where's staff? And I'm not
8 trying to bash. I'm not. But this is just from my
9 heart and what I feel. And then, it's -- sometimes I
10 felt, and -- and -- and granted, I -- I came on the
11 board when we had already gotten in this problem, so
12 I don't really know. But I think a lot of decisions
13 were made, in my opinion, and take it for what it's
14 worth, that shouldn't have been made. Hard decisions
15 that should have been made weren't made for whatever
16 reasons. I don't know.

17 MR. WOOD: Like what? Let's -- I mean --

18 MS. DUNBAR: Let's just --

19 MR. WOOD: You're -- you're -- you're an elected
20 official; right? You're elected?

21 MS. DUNBAR: Yes. Yeah.

22 MR. WOOD: Okay. And you go to public meetings?

23 MS. DUNBAR: Yes.

24 MR. WOOD: And y'all discuss public things about
25 the spending of public dollars. What do you disagree

1 with?

2 MS. DUNBAR: Well -- well, one thing, you know,
3 I -- I felt like maybe -- when I say the hard
4 decisions, let's just go to staff. We were keeping
5 people long, I think, just for the sake of keeping
6 them there. They weren't doing as we can see, so I'm
7 not seeing anything that can't be seen in -- in the
8 numbers, in the paperwork. But there -- there was
9 nothing that was -- I didn't really see the
10 improvement that I thought we ought to be seeing.
11 We're in -- we're -- we're contracting these groups
12 to come in and help, but at the same time, it's like
13 we're still getting the same result. So what are we
14 going to do different?

15 SECT. OLIVA: One thing y'all decided to do
16 different was have less school. Like, let -- let's
17 just be honest, that was a decision --

18 MS. DUNBAR: Well, okay.

19 SECT. OLIVA: -- that was made.

20 MS. DUNBAR: Well, we --

21 MR. WOOD: When was that decision made?

22 SECT. OLIVA: Last year.

23 MS. DUNBAR: We -- we did make that decision.

24 SECT. OLIVA: So that's the decision.

25 MS. DUNBAR: When it came time to vote on the

1 calendar, and the PPC came back and, in their group,
2 discussed --

3 MR. WOOD: The PPC. What's that?

4 MS. DUNBAR: The per -- the per --

5 CHAIR WOODS: Could you please say what it is?
6 Everybody answered.

7 MS. DUNBAR: The -- the Personnel Policy
8 Committee.

9 MR. WOOD: Yes.

10 MS. DUNBAR: I'm sorry. You know, that --

11 MR. WOOD: The teachers?

12 MS. DUNBAR: The teachers, staff, yes.

13 MR. WOOD: Came back, and they said, what?

14 MS. DUNBAR: Oh, you know, they -- when -- when
15 they were voting on the calendar and -- and one of
16 the suggestions was alternate calendar, either the
17 four-day or the year-round calendar. A 12-month. I
18 -- I'm sorry, 12-month. And so initially, we did not
19 want to do an alternate calendar, and -- but then
20 when we had the amount of absenteeism from the -- the
21 teachers, from the students, and then we were paying
22 way more to have subs. And I'm like, "We have
23 teachers. Why are we paying this much for subs?"
24 And so, also too, we thought that it would be a
25 better morale booster for them to want to teach those

1 children. We thought that, as far as the absenteeism
2 with the kids, you know -- because they were missing
3 school, we thought that that would allow the parents
4 and/or students an opportunity, instead of missing
5 for doctor's appointments and all of those kinds of
6 things consistently. That day off, that would take
7 care of itself, you know, with -- with that kind of
8 thing. And I --

9 CHAIR WOODS: And has it? Or do you still have
10 absenteeism?

11 MS. DUNBAR: We do, but it is not -- and I don't
12 know the percent, but we do not have as near amount
13 of absenteeism as we used to have. And Mr. Estes is
14 -- he -- he brought that up in one of our meetings
15 about the number not being anywhere near what it used
16 to be. And I -- I want to pivot for just a minute on
17 Mr. Estes. I support him. I was a -- was one that
18 -- and I will support him because I felt like he is
19 what this district needs in this time. I was happy
20 he accepted the position to come and try to help us
21 out of this mess that we're in. We didn't get in it
22 overnight. And that's one of the things I had to
23 tell myself, was, "Good Lord, you didn't get in it
24 overnight. So Christie, hey, you are not going to
25 get in it, get out of it in a year or two." But we

1 were going to have to have the right leadership and
2 the right direction to clean this thing up, to fix
3 it.

4 MR. WOOD: But see, I -- I disagree. I think
5 this can be turned around in a year or two. You --
6 you only had 400 kids.

7 MS. DUNBAR: Well, no. I --

8 MR. WOOD: You only had -- I mean, you go -- how
9 many teachers do you have?

10 MS. DUNBAR: Well, no. I was -- I was saying in
11 reference to when I had first got on this board, but
12 yes, it can. He is making significant changes, and I
13 can see it, and I appreciate it.

14 MR. WOOD: What -- what is the weekly schedule?
15 Which day did y'all vote to not have school?

16 MS. DUNBAR: Mondays.

17 MR. WOOD: So everybody has Monday off, and we
18 go to school Tuesday through Friday?

19 MS. DUNBAR: Tuesday through Friday, 7:40 to
20 4:15.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Was that a unanimous decision on
22 the board?

23 MS. DUNBAR: No. I think one -- no, no, no. It
24 was unanimous because one was just absent that day of
25 the meeting.

1 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Has -- did Mr. Estes bring
2 up going back to -- to a traditional model for this
3 year?

4 MS. DUNBAR: I'm sorry?

5 CHAIR WOODS: When did y'all vote on the
6 calendar for this year? Was it prior to Mr. Estes --

7 MS. DUNBAR: It was prior to -- yes, it was
8 prior to Mr. Estes coming on board.

9 CHAIR WOODS: -- coming on board?

10 MS. DUNBAR: And then also too, looking at his
11 resume and everything, he came from a district
12 similar to ours, if not exactly the same. He guided
13 a school through a four-day school week. But we also
14 understood too that this wasn't something that would
15 be ongoing. So if there were problems, issues,
16 persistent, if nothing changed per se, we had no
17 problem going back to a traditional calendar.

18 CHAIR WOODS: So I want to hear from the co-op
19 here in just a second, but I want to give you a piece
20 of advice. I understand being new on a board, you
21 clearly saw an issue, and you stepped up to run; and
22 you got elected. And I know it can be hard to be the
23 new person and be that voice of change because you
24 don't want to be looked at as the person who's
25 constantly being negative, but that's how change

1 happens.

2 MS. DUNBAR: That's what it was. Yes.

3 CHAIR WOODS: And so you -- if you're the only
4 person in that room screaming at the top of the lungs
5 that we're -- the building's on fire, keep throwing
6 water.

7 So can we talk to you for just a second? What
8 support are you currently providing, and when did
9 that start?

10 MS. BAILEY: We've always been supportive, but
11 currently we -- our math specialist is there. She
12 has such a routine that if she has to change a day or
13 time of the week, Mr. Estes is like, "Where is
14 Yamicka? She's usually here. I -- I see her in the
15 halls on Thursday, and today it's -- it's Wednesday.
16 You know, is she coming?" So -- but our math
17 specialist is there in both elementary and high
18 school. Science specialist is there. Our dyslexia
19 person is there. Our CTE person just, was it last
20 week, brought a team from the state down to make sure
21 that the career pathways that Lafayette is offering
22 will match up with the new jobs that we anticipate
23 and hope that are coming through the lithium project
24 so that our -- our students will be ready.
25 Technology at -- back the end of last year, their

1 technology coordinator quit. So ours was down there
2 helping, got a new technology person. We have
3 special ed testing for them. We've got a preschool
4 there. I'm down there. My assistant director is
5 down there. So I -- I just told Harvey a while ago,
6 I said, "I guess, you know, maybe instead of me
7 driving back and forth every day, you're just going
8 to give me an office sometimes." So -- but we are --
9 and one thing we do seriously is we meet with our
10 staff because Lafayette, though, are -- they're only
11 F District, we have other districts that are in need.
12 So we sit with our staff and say, "Look, these are
13 our district grades, these are our building grades,"
14 because, as Secretary Oliva's pointed out, at times,
15 you've got districts or built districts that have
16 those buildings, maybe that are hiding an F and it's
17 really easy to kind of overlook them because, oh,
18 look, their overall grade is a C or a B. So we meet
19 with our -- our specialist, our team, and say, "We
20 need to prioritize our time." We -- you know, we've
21 got great districts that are performing, and we're
22 not saying we're not helping them, but similar to
23 you've got a house on fire, you've got to save the
24 kids, save the -- save the building first. So we
25 make sure that it's not just the squeaky wheel

1 because sometimes your A districts, your B districts,
2 are the ones wanting to improve and calling. And we
3 make sure that we have our time prioritized so that
4 we are actually in -- in our districts.

5 CHAIR WOODS: But when did you get involved with
6 this district? Was it just this year?

7 MS. BAILEY: No, ma'am. I actually taught there
8 back in the day.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

10 MS. BAILEY: So as long as I can remember, I've
11 been, but I mean, it goes back. They used to be two
12 separate districts, and when they combined, that's --
13 part of the financial issue is both of them had their
14 own cafeteria staff. I mean, we've got other small
15 districts that they're all under one building, and so
16 they can share those services. But in Lafayette,
17 you've got the cafeteria staff in Lewisville and
18 another one in Stamps, and you know, you're either
19 having to figure out how to get that food from one
20 place to another. So no, we have been involved,
21 probably not as heavily as we are right now. I don't
22 know that I've ever had as many staff down there
23 committing two to three days a week, every day --
24 every week, but we've always had a presence in -- in
25 Lafayette County.

1 CHAIR WOODS: Any questions?

2 DR. ABBOTT: I -- I have a couple more questions
3 I want to ask, one -- one of the board and then one
4 of Mr. Estes.

5 MS. BAILEY: Oh. Any more for me?

6 CHAIR WOODS: You can sit down.

7 DR. ABBOTT: I -- I -- was the -- I'll start
8 with the board. Either one of you, I guess, can --
9 you come on up. Was the support, like, for -- was
10 the vote for Mr. Estes unanimous when he came before
11 the board?

12 MS. DUNBAR: Yes.

13 DR. ABBOTT: Okay. That'll -- I think that'll
14 be all for you.

15 Mr. Estes, you have -- both board members today
16 have said that -- that they -- that you have their
17 support. Do you feel -- not just the board members
18 present today, and this may be kind of an unfair
19 position to put you in right now, but I want to know.
20 Do you feel like you have the support of your full
21 board?

22 SUPT. ESTES: I do.

23 DR. ABBOTT: Okay.

24 DR. ARNOLD: Tag on. Is your community -- are
25 they satisfied with the school board at this time?

1 Is there public concern about it?

2 MR. WOOD: I would -- I would just respectfully
3 intercept that question.

4 DR. ARNOLD: Okay. That's fine.

5 MR. WOOD: I want you to think about the
6 position you're putting a superintendent in to
7 comment on --

8 DR. ARNOLD: Well, it kind of tests --

9 MR. WOOD: -- politicians who are elected --

10 DR. ARNOLD: It kind of tests the support
11 theory.

12 MR. WOOD: -- in their community.

13 DR. ARNOLD: It kind of tests the support
14 theory, but hey, I got it. As a courtesy, I will --
15 I will retrieve my question.

16 SUPT. ESTES: Just I'm going to answer anyway.
17 We have five boards --

18 CHAIR WOODS: And this is why you're going to
19 change.

20 DR. ARNOLD: I thought you might. I thought you
21 might.

22 SUPT. ESTES: And I can do this. And we have
23 five board spots up for re-election. Two of those
24 are contested.

25 DR. ARNOLD: Okay. That's factual.

1 SUPT. ESTES: Three of them are not.

2 DR. ARNOLD: Factual.

3 SUPT. ESTES: You talk about other schools. If
4 I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times.
5 We're on high -- highway 29. Eighteen miles to the
6 south of us is Bradley, Arkansas. Eighteen miles to
7 the north of us is Hope, Arkansas. The names are the
8 same. The names of the families are the same. If
9 they can do it in Hope and they can do it in Bradley,
10 we can do it in the middle.

11 DR. ARNOLD: Right.

12 CHAIR WOODS: Motion?

13 DR. ABBOTT: I move that we accept the --

14 CHAIR WOODS: Accept the --

15 DR. ABBOTT: -- assurance.

16 CHAIR WOODS: -- statement of assurance? Okay.
17 I have a motion by Dr. Abbott to accept the
18 statement. Do I have a second?

19 MR. BRAGG: I second.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Mr. Bragg. All in
21 favor, say aye? We may have to roll call that one.
22 Okay. We'll start with Mr. Peacock.

23 MR. PEACOCK: I'll say yay for Mr. Estes.

24 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Yes from --

25 DR. ABBOTT: Yes.

1 CHAIR WOODS: -- Dr. Abbott. Dr. Arnold?

2 DR. ARNOLD: Present.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

4 CHAIR WOODS: I think -- well, I think I can
5 abstain.

6 MR. BRAGG: Yes.

7 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Wood?

8 MR. WOOD: No. Out of concern with the board
9 leadership, not the superintendent leadership.

10 DR. ARNOLD: Correct.

11 CHAIR WOODS: I have 3-2. So motion passes.

12 SECT. OLIVA: So I just want to remind the board
13 what -- what we're doing is accepting their
14 assurance, meaning the district has a plan. They
15 have support of their board, support of their co-op,
16 and the oversight of our Agency through school
17 improvement and support. I do think if the Board
18 wants to follow up -- and I'm not saying it needs to
19 be condition of this motion, but to act with urgency,
20 if we want to go ahead and say we're going to make a
21 commitment and work on scheduling a calendar day in
22 either January or February for an on-site, we would
23 -- I think as an Agency -- welcome that. And we can
24 start maybe after holidays working with Mr. Estes to
25 find out, like with Hope's team, when we'll get that

1 data and do a deep dive and invite the community to
2 come hear from us and hold a community forum like
3 we've done in other communities in the past. So I
4 feel like I know where I feel in my confidence with
5 this board. I feel like we should just go ahead and
6 be proactive and take that suggestion if that's the
7 will of the board.

8 DR. ABBOTT: I would just say that my vote and
9 motion there was an acceptance of the plan. I am in
10 concurrence with Mr. Wood (inaudible) Dr. Arnold.

11 DR. ARNOLD: All right. I would say if we can,
12 let's calendar it for February. Okay. All right.

13 DR. ARNOLD: To those in the room who are
14 sitting under the ducts, I know how cold you are, so
15 feel free to move closer.

16 **1.e. CROSSETT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

17 CHAIR WOODS: All right. We'll move on to
18 Crossett.

19 Okay. All right. Let's go.

20 MS. SMITH: All right. Next -- yeah, we went
21 from hot to cold, didn't we? Okay. Next district is
22 Crossett School District. Crossett is seven points
23 from a D. Crossett is in the Southeast Cooperative.
24 Their enrollment is around 1,500 students. They had
25 three schools, and this is a little bit different.

1 You've only seen one other school like this today, so
2 I do want to lift this up to you. They have three
3 schools: an elementary, a middle and a high. And in
4 their letter grades for 2025, we had their elementary
5 and their middle were held harmless, okay, because we
6 had legislation. Their letter grade actually under
7 the new accountability was actually an F. But they
8 got to remain hold harmless because we had
9 legislation and we had data points that -- because we
10 were placing a new accountability system, we went
11 back and looked. Did their achievement, did their
12 growth, did they have factors to say that they were
13 moving in the right direction? And under our old
14 accountability system would have remained at that
15 letter of grade. And in our determination, it was
16 yes. Okay? So you actually had Crossett Elementary
17 and Crossett Middle who were held harmless and
18 remained a D because they did have achievement
19 growth. They did not have -- they had achieve --
20 they had grow -- their achievement scores went up.
21 They did not, though, have individual student growth
22 that was above what they had the previous year, okay,
23 but they did get held harmless for that. But it was
24 definitely one of those moments in terms of needing
25 to pay attention to what's going on with individual

1 student growth and all students moving. So I did
2 want to bring that to your attention, though, about
3 the hold harmless on those two schools. In all of
4 their buildings this last year, their growth went
5 down. So that's just something to be able to ask
6 about. So their superintendent is Anthony Boykin.
7 This is his third year as superintendent in the
8 district.

9 SUPT. BOYKIN: Good afternoon, Board. My name
10 is Anthony Boykin. I'm the superintendent of
11 Crossett School District.

12 The way I've tailored this PowerPoint is around
13 the statement of assurances that were provided to us
14 from this Board to show you the plan that we've put
15 in place to move forward. We've actually been doing
16 a lot of work over the last three years to make some
17 changes within our elementary school and our middle
18 school, specifically. What I would like to do first
19 is go through the actual PowerPoint. I was told 15
20 minutes, and so I've kind of summarized the
21 PowerPoint down to allow you all an opportunity to
22 ask any follow-up questions that we might have.

23 So within the PowerPoint, we have the statement
24 of assurances that were provided to us for myself and
25 my board president to sign, and then that moves us

1 into the comprehensive needs assessment that we've
2 placed for Crossett Elementary School, Crossett
3 Middle School and Crossett High School. It's pretty
4 much the same whenever you look at all three
5 buildings. The biggest problem that we're running
6 into within the classrooms is actual tier-1
7 instruction occurring on a consistent basis. What
8 that means is we have a lot of time where we're
9 teaching below grade level. We have high-quality
10 instructional materials. We have teachers that are
11 trained on those high-quality instructional
12 materials. We spend a lot of time teaching below
13 grade level. The reason that there's a lot of time
14 taught below grade level is there's a concern that
15 trying to get our students up to that level three and
16 four, the rigor needs to be lowered in the actual
17 classroom. We know that's not actually true. We can
18 see that from our scores that we've gotten for this
19 current school year. So all learning that's across
20 the district is focusing not just on tier one, but
21 making sure that tier two and tier three is also done
22 appropriately at the appropriate time that is
23 provided inside the actual schedule that we have; and
24 not only that that it's connected to the Arkansas
25 State Standards.

1 So something that -- and I know I said 15
2 minutes and I would summarize, but I just -- I kind
3 of want to give you an overview here of what I've
4 noticed because I am in the buildings every single
5 day and I walk in the classrooms and I observe the
6 classrooms. And so we have for English Language
7 Arts, we have Wit and Wisdom through Great Minds.
8 It's a very heavy curriculum. It's a very good
9 curriculum. It's a really good curriculum. I think
10 it's a -- good to move our students forward. What
11 you have whenever you're actually walking inside of
12 those classrooms is they'll follow the curriculum the
13 way the curriculum is actually prescribed. But the
14 individual pedagogical decisions and the teaching
15 decisions that the teachers have to make to ensure
16 that they're actually internalizing that lesson, to
17 ensure they're teaching these state standards so that
18 whenever they get to the end of the lesson and they
19 assess the students, they understand that what
20 they're actually -- the end product is based off of
21 an actual learning of the material, that's tied to
22 the state standards. And that's the reason why you
23 see a lower outcome whenever you provide these
24 assessments, whenever you're just strictly sticking
25 to the script and you don't have any type of

1 internalization. And I'm not saying that's across
2 the board, I'm saying that's some things that I'm
3 seeing that we need to make some changes on.

4 So going back to the comprehensive needs
5 assessment, we actually have a team that we pull in;
6 it's a progress monitoring team. And what we do as
7 that team is we go through and we look at what we've
8 observed in the classroom. This team consists of
9 myself, my director of curriculum, my federal
10 programs coordinator that's at the central office,
11 all the building administration, both the principal
12 and the assistant principal, all the interventionists
13 that we have in the district and all the
14 instructional coaches that we have in the district
15 that go through and look at the classrooms. We come
16 together and we say, okay, so basically what are you
17 seeing that is a deficit inside of these classrooms
18 in terms of what are we not providing the teachers to
19 get them to the next level to where what they're
20 putting before the student is going to push them to
21 the next level. And that's where you're going to see
22 in this PowerPoint a lot of the professional
23 development that we're prescribing to these teachers,
24 we get that through our actual classroom observations
25 as well. So some of the professional development

1 that we've already had -- and I got a little ahead
2 here. Let me back up just a second. What we see is
3 the tier one, the tier two intervention and the tier
4 three, and implementing them appropriately. That's
5 the biggest thing that we're seeing in terms of
6 comprehension and moving kids to the next level and
7 making sure that what we're doing is appropriate for
8 the students.

9 Moving into the implementation of the core
10 instruction district-wide. Again, we've had help
11 from the Southeast Arkansas Co-op where they've come
12 in and they've provided coaching. We've had teachers
13 go to the Southeast Arkansas Co-op to receive
14 professional development. We've also contracted
15 through Solution Tree to provide a 15-day challenge
16 where we have somebody from Solution Tree come down,
17 work with our teachers, work with our grade levels,
18 take a look at the standards, take a look at the
19 actual curriculum that we're teaching and try to move
20 it forward. Now, just recently, I was actually
21 blessed to have Ms. Sandy Shepherd and Ms. Alicia
22 Whiteside come and visit the district. That was a
23 very good visit. I spent the entire day with both of
24 those ladies at my elementary school. We walked
25 through every single classroom except for maybe two

1 or three. And one of the ahas that we had whenever
2 we were walking through there was, you have the HQIM,
3 you have the teachers, the class sizes are
4 manageable, the behavior is good, it's marrying the
5 two, the standards and the curriculum, to make sure
6 that it's being taught with fidelity, but it's also
7 being internalized during the actual planning period.

8 And again, this is just across the board. These
9 are some expectations that we've established. These
10 are expectations that we've had. And these are
11 expectations that we're going to ensure that we're
12 actually achieving. So something different that
13 we're doing this year whenever it comes to classroom
14 walkthroughs is being intentional whenever it comes
15 to the principal actually going into the classroom
16 and observing. Something that I've assigned my
17 principals, all three building principals, to do is
18 they have to conduct 15 classroom observations every
19 single week. Whenever they do those classroom
20 observations, I go through and I look at the actual
21 feedback that they're providing to the teacher, and
22 then I have a follow-up with that principal to tell
23 them whether or not I feel like that is adequate
24 based off of what I'm seeing in the classroom as
25 well. Because what we do, also, is we have

1 walkthroughs with myself, the director of curriculum
2 and the building principal to calibrate what we're
3 seeing in the classrooms, meaning that what I see,
4 what they see, what that director of curriculum sees
5 is all three lining up. Because if what I'm seeing
6 is not tier-one instruction and the principal is
7 seeing -- they think art would be considered tier-one
8 instruction, that's a problem. That's a problem that
9 we have to address, and we have to make sure it's not
10 happening. So we're having these calibrating
11 walk-throughs. It's not something that's a one-and-
12 done. It's something that we actually are doing
13 periodically throughout the school year. Going back
14 to the 15-classroom observations, it's not that
15 principals weren't observing in the classrooms
16 before, but we're making sure that they're being
17 intentional. How I'm monitoring that is whenever I
18 go through and I look at the classroom observations,
19 I look to see what the feedback's given. And if it's
20 surface level, I follow up. And then what I ask the
21 principal to do is if they're seeing something that
22 is considered a deficit, then they need to go through
23 and have a secondary follow-up direct observation
24 with that teacher. Whenever they have a direct
25 observation with that teacher, it's more in-depth,

1 they have the ability to follow up afterwards, ask
2 questions, talk about the lesson plan specifically
3 given during that lesson, the pacing, word alliance
4 inside of the standards, where they should be during
5 the day, excuse me, during the school year at this
6 point in time. And whenever they have that
7 conversation, they're to follow up with that teacher
8 through another observation. So that's three
9 observations. If they're seeing no fruit from any of
10 those observations, the teacher should be placed on
11 an intensive-growth plan, and that's where we
12 prescribe the professional development to the
13 teacher. They do not have an option on what
14 professional development they receive. If that does
15 not show fruit, then they are non-renewed at the end
16 of the school year. And that's something that we
17 have done in the past because failure is something
18 that I do not accept. I'm not -- I'm not here to
19 make any excuses about this letter grade. I'm very
20 upset about this letter grade. I have three kids in
21 this school district. I have a vested interest in
22 this school district. I want to lead this school
23 district to greatness because I think it can be a
24 very good school district. We have a great school
25 district; we have a -- great staff; and we have a

1 very supportive community and a very supportive
2 board. And so what I want to do is I want to push it
3 forward and move us to the next level. And so this
4 is not satisfactory at all. So we are moving with a
5 sense of urgency based off of these scores. When we
6 got these scores back, we wanted to make sure that we
7 started to make some pretty effective changes to
8 begin with. And it's not to say that what we were
9 doing before was not making changes. And I'll get
10 into that because I'm sure there's going to be
11 questions pertaining to what have I been doing over
12 the last few years.

13 Instructional expectations district-wide,
14 something that we do at the Crossett School District
15 is we provide a new-teacher academy. That
16 new-teacher academy is for all new teachers that come
17 into the district. It's not as in you're a
18 first-year teacher. You could be a 20-year veteran
19 teacher. If you come into the Crossett School
20 District, you go through the new teacher academy.
21 That's where we provide you with professional
22 development on our high-quality instructional
23 material, our pacing, our process and what we expect
24 that to actually look like as we go throughout the
25 school year.

1 So what we're doing with our lowest quartile,
2 there was -- there was a question on -- and I'm going
3 to go off script just a little bit. There was a
4 question on calendar. All right. So the buzzword
5 and the big thing around the state was alternative
6 calendar. That was one of the things that I heard
7 quite a bit whenever I was a superintendent. Well,
8 you know, I know other school districts have an
9 alternative calendar. They have a year-round
10 calendar. They have a four-day calendar. They have
11 a minutes calendar. You know, there was just endless
12 examples that were given. And so, I -- I was
13 resistant to any change to our calendar, per se.
14 However, last year, there was the thought, again,
15 with teacher absenteeism, student absenteeism, maybe
16 we'll try an alternative calendar and see if that
17 shows any fruit. And we did go five days a week, and
18 we did have our minutes that we were required to do,
19 but it was the minimal requirement. And that was
20 something that, as you can see with our score, I
21 attribute a lot of where we're at right now with that
22 alternative calendar. So whenever it come to the
23 25-26 calendar, whenever the personnel policy
24 committee came to me and said, Mr. Boykin, we'd like
25 to propose an alternative calendar again for the

1 upcoming year, I said no. Now that's their
2 prerogative to present it to the board. They do not
3 have to listen to me at all. But what I did is I
4 told them if they go before the board with an
5 alternative calendar that is anything other than
6 traditional, I will not support it, and I will let
7 that support be known to my board while we're sitting
8 there in an open meeting. And so we're back on a
9 traditional schedule. We're back on a traditional
10 calendar. We've actually added days. Our schedule
11 is completely student-focused as we move forward. We
12 tailored our master schedules around our students for
13 this upcoming school year. And so I just wanted to
14 touch a little bit on that because I'm sure that was
15 a question. I'm one of those that I like to preempt
16 questions just to try to give you an answer so you
17 can think about it. But I wanted to give you an
18 overview on why we've made that change and what I
19 personally felt was part of the root cause to that
20 slip that we saw.

21 We do screen our students. We screen our
22 students for dyslexia and we actually have -- with
23 them I'd like to kind of go through some data that I
24 jotted down before we actually got here to talk
25 specifically about what we're doing. So

1 kindergarten, tier three, we have 24 students in our
2 BUILD program with reading intervention. First
3 grade, tier three, we have four in building -- in the
4 building program with reading intervention. First
5 grade, tier three, 35 with classroom teachers, Fun in
6 Focus from Wilson's reading. Second grade, tier
7 three, we have six in Wilson's reading system and
8 reading intervention, 16 in Take Flight with dyslexia
9 therapist for reading intervention, six in Barton.
10 For second grade, tier two, we have nine with
11 classroom teachers, Fun and Focus from Wilson's.
12 Third grade, tier three, 15 in Take Flight with
13 dyslexia therapist for reading intervention, and six
14 in the Sonday system, with trained classroom teacher.
15 Fourth grade, tier three, we have six in Take Flight
16 with dyslexia therapists, two in Barton with support
17 staff, one-on-one setting. Fifth grade, tier three,
18 we have four in Take Flight with dyslexia therapists.
19 Sixth grade, tier three, we have three in Wilson.
20 Seventh one in Wilson's. Eighth currently reviewing
21 data with the teacher. In 9th grade, we have four
22 enrolled in the strategic reading. And so those are
23 some of the things that we're using to address based
24 off the screeners that we deploy at the beginning of
25 the school year to see where we're at with the

1 students. And so to go back to -- I wanted to
2 mention that to hit on what we're doing for the
3 lowest quartile.

4 And something that I mentioned whenever
5 Secretary Oliva actually come to the district -- and
6 I'm sorry, Secretary Oliva, actually, it was cohort
7 to cohort whenever I was giving you that statistic.
8 It wasn't the same cohort moving into the upcoming
9 school year. And so just to give you a good idea, so
10 in 24-25, with our beginning of the year screener, 95
11 percent of the students were potential risk and five
12 percent were ready. That was last year. The
13 screener for this year, 66 percent are now considered
14 ready. So we went from five percent to 66 percent.
15 And you're going to ask me why? What did you do to
16 do that? Well, that's easy, that's human capital.
17 We made some changes whenever it comes to our human
18 capital and the teachers that we actually have in the
19 classroom. Because one of the things that I actually
20 look at are the VAM scores whenever we get those in
21 LEA Insights. I take a look at the VAM if it's
22 available, take a look at the classroom data and we
23 look at that to make decisions whenever it comes to
24 placement within the classroom. So that's our lowest
25 quartile.

1 Our workforce. So I mentioned that with the 15
2 classrooms, but, you know, mentoring -- this was a
3 question that I heard you ask. So my high school
4 principal is in his first year -- or he's had a year.
5 He's a year and a half in. My middle school
6 principal is three and a half years in. My
7 elementary principal, she's our longest, she's got 15
8 years in. One of the things that we have asked them
9 to do is to actually go through Kids First and that
10 was something that was provided to us by our co-op.
11 What that does is it's somebody that works with our
12 principals to mentor them on what they need to be
13 looking for and what they need to do to move the ball
14 forward. We also have a coach from Solution Tree.
15 Dr. Vergara specifically focuses on ensuring that not
16 only is the Tier 1 instruction occurring, but that
17 the Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction that the teachers
18 are providing is appropriate and that your master
19 schedule aligns with that. And so that's some of the
20 support.

21 I've also required them to sign up for the ADE
22 Virtual Leadership Development Series. That was
23 something that I mandated to them. And as I review
24 their performance for the upcoming year, and whether
25 they continue in the role that they're in, these are

1 some of the things that we're going to look at and
2 have conversations about as we move forward.

3 We've got a lot of support, we really do. I
4 can't thank Secretary Oliva and his team enough, Ms.
5 Stacy Smith, Dr. Kiffany Pride, Ms. Sheila Whitlow,
6 very sorry that you're retiring, by the way. She's
7 -- she's been wonderful to talk to. She answers my
8 questions as I call and text quite often. And so the
9 support we're receiving has been great. And like I
10 told Secretary Oliva, I'm not one of those
11 superintendents that shies away from any type of
12 support. Anybody that wants to come to the district,
13 if they see something different that I'm not seeing,
14 then I welcome it because we will change it. I'm not
15 one that's going to say we're not going to change it
16 because, like I said, I have three kids in the
17 district. I have a sense of urgency. My babies go
18 to this district. My babies are in these classrooms.
19 I want my babies to have great educations. And just
20 like I want everybody in our community's babies to
21 have great educations. We hold their most valuable
22 resource in our community. And so I to ensure that
23 we're giving them the best product, and we have it.
24 And so that's something that we're going to improve
25 as we move forward.

1 Additional support is comprehension strategies,
2 meaningful learning activities, appropriate
3 scaffolding, Tier 2 small group centers, questioning
4 and purposeful learning. Here's what I mean by each
5 one of those. Comprehension strategies are what we
6 teach the kids something that we know they are
7 actually comprehending; and how do we know that? Are
8 they just sitting there? You can teach all day long,
9 but how do you know that they're actually
10 comprehending what they're teaching? So we're
11 actually creating a data protocol where each team has
12 to go through and dig through that data, and it's
13 going to be aligned K-12. It's not something that's
14 negotiable at this point. This letter grade, as
15 horrible as it is, allows me to say to anybody that
16 pushes back, none of these things are negotiable. We
17 have no room for negotiating. We have to move our
18 kids. Period. End of story. That's just where
19 we're at. I'm sorry.

20 CHAIR WOODS: I'm sorry to interrupt you.

21 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah.

22 CHAIR WOODS: You're at 20 minutes, so if you
23 could --

24 SUPT. BOYKIN: That's what --

25 CHAIR WOODS: -- summarize.

1 SUPT. BOYKIN: -- I was afraid of.

2 All right. So let me just -- let me end with
3 this because I've hit a lot of the things within the
4 slides, so I apologize. I'm a history teacher by
5 nature. I don't know if you've been around a lot of
6 secondary history teachers. We tend to talk quite a
7 bit. So let me -- let me back up here.

8 These are our next steps that we're
9 implementing, as in the now. These are not things
10 that we've already done. These are things that we're
11 implementing in the now for each one of our campuses.
12 Specifically, whenever it comes to -- I cannot
13 emphasize enough the small-group structure which is
14 tier two and making sure that it's appropriate. The
15 elementary level, the center specifically. Are the
16 centers that's going on in the classroom appropriate
17 to the actual learning that should be expected.

18 And for -- with that I will answer any questions
19 that you might have.

20 SECT. OLIVA: I just want to say too for the
21 Board, you know, we visit a lot of districts, and
22 we've been on the road a lot. And the challenge that
23 Dr. Boykin has mentioned around, how do you improve
24 tier-one instruction? That's not just a Crossett
25 issue; right? Like, that's the conversation we have

1 across the state. And when he says that he's open to
2 feedback, he's willing to work with partners, he
3 truly is modeling, I think, for other
4 superintendents, that cycle of inquiry and that
5 belief and the cycle of continuous improvement. And
6 I wanted to share one story because he was even brave
7 enough to have Ms. Whitlow, Ms. Smith and myself do
8 classroom walkthroughs all across that school, all
9 three of us at the same time. So you're going to get
10 an earful; right? You're going to get a lot of
11 feedback. And he manned up; and he took it all day.
12 And we would walk through classrooms and talk about
13 what we were seeing. I remember we walked out of one
14 classroom, we were all talking about the quality of
15 teaching, what was the lesson, what was the standard,
16 what were students working on. And we were all
17 saying, I was like, yeah, that was one of the best
18 classrooms we saw, you know, so far in the district.
19 And I think there was a sigh of relief, because that
20 was his wife's classroom and it could -- it could
21 have got really awkward, really quick. And we didn't
22 know that he was keeping that from us. And so kudos
23 to them. And I just figured -- I thought I had to
24 share that story.

25 CHAIR WOODS: Well, kudos to her.

1 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah, it would have gotten
2 awkward.

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: It would have been for -- an
4 awkward night. But I would not have been afraid to
5 have a tough conversation. And that is from 8
6 o'clock to 3 o'clock. Yeah.

7 MR. PEACOCK: Thing that jumps out at me is the
8 consistency from presentation to presentation about
9 teacher atrophyism. I -- that just blows my mind. =
10 The -- what are those conversations like? Is -- I
11 know in my world, if a salaried person doesn't come,
12 they still get the full pay.

13 SUPT. BOYKIN: Right.

14 MR. PEACOCK: Is there a comp impact? Why are
15 -- has this been a historical problem and it's just
16 getting worse, or is it a new phenomenon?

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: It's been a historical problem.
18 We -- I will say that we are seeing an improvement
19 with teacher attendance. We really are seeing an
20 improvement with teacher attendance. And a lot of
21 that has to do with some of the decisions that were
22 made with the teachers that we allowed to continue
23 within our school district. You know, whenever it
24 comes to teaching, specifically teaching, if the
25 teacher's not in the classroom, the kid's not

1 learning, period. There -- that's just -- that's all
2 there is to it. You can't phrase it any other way.
3 And so one of the things that we're looking at is to
4 try and provide some type of an incentive for
5 actually coming to work. However, my incentive as of
6 right now is you get to keep your job. And so that's
7 where we're at currently.

8 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah, two things. One, You lead
9 by example, right?

10 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

11 MR. PEACOCK: So how do you expect the students
12 to come to class if the teachers won't even come to
13 class?

14 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

15 MR. PEACOCK: That's basic leadership 101. And
16 whether teachers realize or not, they're leaders for
17 their class.

18 SUPT. BOYKIN: One hundred percent.

19 MR. PEACOCK: The second one is compensating
20 people for coming and doing their job, you're going
21 to be -- you're going to be spending a lot of money
22 on it. My experience is it's not -- that doesn't
23 change behavior.

24 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

25 MR. PEACOCK: That you'll be paying more money

1 out to the teachers who are going to come to work
2 anyway.

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

4 MR. PEACOCK: And you're not going to be paying
5 -- the ones who don't come to work that you're trying
6 to incentivize aren't going to be motivated by a
7 small change in compensation. So I would suggest
8 that's not a viable path forward. The other thing is
9 that -- and I don't know if the results in the scores
10 are the results of the change in the evaluation. I
11 know we got some information on that earlier. But
12 it's -- what -- I understand all the things you're
13 saying. And there's a lot of good things in here.

14 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

15 MR. PEACOCK: But how is that going to change
16 the direction that you're on or the -- it's -- when
17 you look two years in a row, you move the needle up
18 into one percentage point and the other one down a
19 percentage point.

20 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah.

21 MR. PEACOCK: So for all practical purposes,
22 it's flat and it's flat in a really low area.

23 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

24 MR. PEACOCK: And so the -- why do you have
25 confidence that this plan is going to make a

1 difference?

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: So I can give you -- I'm going to
3 try to give you an abridged version on why I feel
4 confident about this. A good example -- whenever I
5 took over as superintendent at our elementary school,
6 for example, our elementary school's hallways were
7 set up in colors. So you had the blue hall, the
8 green hall, the yellow hall, the orange hall. Okay.
9 Those classrooms were set up K-5 -- K-4. So it was
10 kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade,
11 fourth grade. They didn't see what everybody else
12 was doing in kindergarten, first grade, second grade,
13 third grade, fourth grade. They did have time where
14 they would plan together, but then they would break
15 apart, and it was just kind of like, you know, I'm
16 doing my thing; I know what I'm doing; I've been
17 doing it for 32 years, so I've got this. So one of
18 the things that we did is we changed that. We put
19 our teachers back in grade levels. So we have a
20 hallway of fourth grade teachers; we have a hallway
21 of third grade, second grade, first grade,
22 kindergarten, pre-K and infants because we offer free
23 childcare to our staff. That's something that we
24 piloted last year. That was something that I put in
25 place to try to stabilize our attrition whenever it

1 comes to teachers leaving. One of the biggest
2 incentives to keeping people is if you can take care
3 of their kids while they're actually at work and
4 provide them a safe environment. So in that
5 building, we actually have birth until fourth grade.
6 But what we did is we put the teachers to where they
7 could actually have collaboration with one another.
8 That was year one.

9 Year two was strengthening what that
10 collaboration actually looked like because teachers
11 would rely a lot on our instructional coaches for the
12 pacing, for the data digs, for the internalization of
13 what that data was telling, how they were going to
14 teach the lesson moving forward. And there was
15 really no buy-in from the teacher because it was
16 something that was actually handed to them by the
17 instructional coaches. We did away with that. One
18 year I didn't even allow instructional coaches to
19 come into team meetings. It was just simply the lead
20 teacher that was in there. They had to establish a
21 lead teacher for -- to begin with, and that's
22 somebody that was actually going to lead it.
23 Typically it's a teacher that has a model classroom.
24 And so we've started building systems over the last
25 three years to where now we can actually start

1 fine-tuning this work to where we will start to see
2 fruit from this.

3 One of the biggest things that we did at the
4 middle school is we did away with our block schedule.
5 So our middle school was under a block schedule.
6 Whenever you throw a schedule like that out the
7 window and you start over completely different, it
8 causes something that I probably would not want to
9 experience again, I'll be honest with you. But we
10 aligned 5th and 6th grade to where it was an
11 elementary schedule, and we aligned 7th and 8th grade
12 to where it was a high-school schedule. And the
13 whole idea behind that was that it was a transition
14 year. What we had is we had 5th and 6th grade
15 teachers teaching whole core because that's what we
16 had at our elementary school meeting. One teacher
17 taught math, science, English, social studies. We
18 discovered very quickly that was something that was
19 not going to work. Mid-year last year, I completely
20 did -- I'm not one of those that's afraid to make a
21 change in the middle of the year, so we completely
22 revamped that schedule going into the spring and made
23 that change. We also made a change with our 5th
24 grade, and we created it to where they had partner
25 teachers, to where they weren't trying to gobble up

1 so much of the curriculum to where they could
2 actually get in and actually teach the curriculum to
3 the depth that needed to be taught to move the kids.
4 So to answer your question, it is a lot of the things
5 that we've put in place, we've done a lot of the
6 heavy lifting, now we're actually able to start
7 fine-tuning to get the product. It's kind of like
8 building the factory. We built the factory; we got
9 the machine in place; now we can make the Corvette,
10 hopefully, or the Prius, whichever way you want to go
11 with it.

12 MR. PEACOCK: Definitely the Corvette.

13 DR. ABBOTT: You have an 81 percent graduation
14 rate last year.

15 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yep.

16 DR. ABBOTT: Well below --

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yep.

18 DR. ABBOTT: -- 90 percent. What do you
19 attribute that to?

20 SUPT. BOYKIN: I can tell you exactly what I
21 attribute that to. So one of the things that we did
22 whenever I became superintendent is we looked at our
23 alternative learning environment that we had and we
24 wanted to do something a little bit different. And
25 here's what I mean by a little bit different. We had

1 a traditional alternative-learning school where you
2 had 15 high school students inside of a classroom;
3 right? There were also other options out there
4 called the Hub and Connect Care. Where Connect Care
5 come into place was students that we would expel from
6 school in order to ensure that we offered them the
7 ability to continue in an education, We provided them
8 a Chromebook, we provided them a hotspot and we
9 placed them in Connect Care, which is an alternative
10 learning environment. What that turned into were
11 students that would have typically went to home
12 school that wanted to still be a part of our school,
13 they went to Connect Care as well. What you have in
14 Connect Care is you have a lot of instances where
15 whenever you're monitoring these kids, they fall off;
16 and then you lose them; and then they're tied to your
17 graduation rate; and then whenever it comes time for
18 scores, you see a drop in that graduation rate. So I
19 attribute a lot of that to Job Corps, GED, and our
20 Connect Care.

21 DR. ABBOTT: So what are you doing to fix that?

22 SUPT. BOYKIN: So I actually looked at our
23 graduation correction window and so if we stay on
24 track, our graduation rate should actually be 90
25 percent.

1 DR. ABBOTT: Great.

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yep.

3 DR. ABBOTT: You mentioned earlier with the
4 classroom walkthrough, you're doing some
5 triangulation there to kind of check and see how
6 that's going. I would be curious to know, are you
7 finding that you're seeing the same things that your
8 principals are seeing in the classroom? How's that
9 going?

10 SUPT. BOYKIN: So that's actually going pretty
11 well. We're having really honest conversations about
12 that and what that actually should look for. And
13 what we're seeing is a consistency. There's a --
14 there was a little inconsistency whenever it come to
15 the calibration, like what they considered tier one.
16 Like I think back to whenever I first did the
17 calibration walkthroughs, I went -- I'm sorry, I
18 don't mean to turn my back to you all. What I
19 noticed whenever I was in a history classroom,
20 because I -- I mean, excuse me, a high school
21 classroom. I was a high school principal; I was a
22 high school history teacher. So one of the things
23 that I noticed when I was doing the calibration walk
24 is whenever we walked out, it was, man, didn't you
25 think that was great? It was -- it was, yes, you

1 could tell the teacher was working. Absolutely. The
2 teacher was working; they were working very hard,
3 they were teaching; they were using the HQIM.
4 However, did you notice that five of the students had
5 their head down, or three of the students were the
6 only ones answering questions, and it was only the
7 students that were at the front of the classroom and
8 not at the back of the classroom. So it's
9 fine-tuning those things because I'm not looking for
10 a 500-foot view at this point; I'm looking for
11 granular.

12 DR. ABBOTT: Yeah.

13 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yep.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Mr. Bragg.

15 MR. BRAGG: All these reports have references to
16 tier one, two, three.

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

18 MR. BRAGG: What distinguishes between those
19 tiers? Is that a statewide standard or something
20 that y'all determine with yourself? Just kind of
21 walk me through how all that works.

22 SUPT. BOYKIN: So tier-one instruction is
23 on-grade level instruction. That's actually teaching
24 on grade level. So if you're reading a third-grade
25 text, you should have a third-grade text in your

1 class -- in your hands. That's what the kids should
2 actually be looking at. That's what should be going
3 on during the actual traditional school classroom
4 day. Tier two is an intervention that's put in place
5 for those students that we're seeing are struggling
6 to get on grade level with that actual grade level.
7 Tier three is something where you have a student that
8 is multiple years behind in a grade level, and so
9 they need very intensive intervention that is
10 one-on-one to help move the needle very quickly with
11 those students.

12 MR. BRAGG: So they're pulled out of the
13 classroom for this intervention?

14 SUPT. BOYKIN: No, sir. So actually what we did
15 is we tried to -- again, student driven whenever it
16 comes to lessons and the schedule. We tailored our
17 schedule around the kids' needs. And so if we have a
18 student that needs tier 3 intervention, whenever it's
19 a tier 2 time inside of the actual school day, what
20 that usually looks like is the teacher sitting behind
21 their kidney table and then you have centers that are
22 around the classroom. The kids are rotating around
23 those centers the teacher has a group of students
24 back there working on the actual lesson where they're
25 struggling. An interventionist will come in and pull

1 that student for a quick 15-minute tier three, kind
2 of like injection, so to speak.

3 MR. BRAGG: How do you anticipate looking at
4 this third grade reading level and being able to make
5 those standards as far as intervention and --

6 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir. So something that I
7 ask the board to approve -- and again, I've got a
8 very supportive board. If I ask for it and it's
9 legal and it's something that we can do, they usually
10 approve -- they approve it. And so to answer your
11 question, I asked the board to go through and allow
12 us to take the teachers that we consider to be high
13 performing in the third grade and allow them to work
14 after school and to get their hourly rate of pay and
15 to pull in those third-grade students that are in
16 need of support and work with them after school.
17 Something Secretary Oliva pointed out -- and I'm a
18 money guy, and I did not even realize this -- is we
19 actually have availability to the \$1,500 to become a
20 vendor for the tutoring. And I did not realize that
21 the school district actually had access to that. I
22 thought that was something that was going to be more
23 tailored toward an individual vendor. And so what
24 we're going to do is we've actually -- we've got the
25 round one and the round two letters, and we've got --

1 we're going to go through that process.

2 Ms. Smith, I'll be calling you quite a bit to
3 ask you that.

4 And we're going to apply to be a vendor to where
5 we can open that up. What we're going to do at that
6 point is we're going to have a family night. We're
7 going to bring in the parents and we're going to show
8 them the process for how you get registered for it.
9 And we're going to bring in more teachers and more
10 kids. And we're probably going to extend it down as
11 far as we can go.

12 MR. BRAGG: Thank you.

13 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

14 MR. WOOD: All right. I'm going to ask you the
15 same questions. Do you agree that lack of growth is
16 almost always an adult issue and not a student issue?

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

18 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that lack of
19 achievement is almost always an adult issue --

20 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

21 MR. WOOD: -- and not a student issue? Do you
22 agree that poor students can learn if adults do their
23 job correctly?

24 SUPT. BOYKIN: A hundred percent.

25 MR. WOOD: I ask these questions, helps

1 eliminate excuses.

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: Absolutely.

3 MR. WOOD: Okay. We don't blame kids.

4 SUPT. BOYKIN: No, sir.

5 MR. WOOD: You -- you've been the superintendent
6 how long?

7 SUPT. BOYKIN: Three years. This is -- I'm 3
8 1/2 in now.

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah. And what did you do before you
10 were the superintendent?

11 SUPT. BOYKIN: I was the high school principal.

12 MR. WOOD: Where?

13 SUPT. BOYKIN: At Crossett.

14 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. Crossett High
15 School has an F grade now.

16 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

17 MR. WOOD: What did it have when you were the
18 principal?

19 SUPT. BOYKIN: We had a C. And then we went
20 into COVID and we dropped down to a D. Then I went
21 into the superintendency and the principal that took
22 over -- actually, if you look at the simulated grade,
23 we were less than a point away from a C and then we
24 have a new principal this year and we went down to an
25 F.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. You referenced
2 Crossett Elementary, I believe, the principal's been
3 there 15-plus years?

4 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

5 MR. WOOD: Okay. What -- what gives you
6 confidence that individual can bring that elementary
7 school out of its D status?

8 SUPT. BOYKIN: So whenever you go back --
9 because I have been in the district, so historically
10 Crossett Elementary School was a C under the
11 accountability system, and they were high performing
12 under her leadership. One of the things that we had
13 really in-depth conversations about, her and I, was
14 excuses and the lack thereof, and there is no need
15 for excuses. What I have done is monitored. I've
16 been in that elementary school from the first year
17 that I took over. That was the one that I saw that
18 needed the most support. And so I've spent a lot of
19 time with that principal, growing that principal.
20 She no longer gives me excuses. She accepts where
21 she's at, and she is very much so meeting with those
22 teachers to outline those expectations. So
23 confidence level is we'll see changes or we won't.
24 If we don't, there's different avenues.

25 MR. WOOD: Okay. And Crossett Middle School,

1 how long has that principal --

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: Three years.

3 MR. WOOD: How long?

4 SUPT. BOYKIN: Three years.

5 MR. WOOD: Three years?

6 SUPT. BOYKIN: Uh-huh.

7 MR. WOOD: Okay. I guess I consider three years
8 kind of on the cusp.

9 SUPT. BOYKIN: It is. It is. And here's where
10 we're at with that. It was like I was saying,
11 whenever he took over, we did a completely total
12 overhaul of the master schedule with block
13 scheduling. We completely did away with that. And
14 we put in a process where it was 5, 6 looking one
15 way, 7, 8 looking one way. And we changed it again
16 because it just wasn't working. And so to be fair to
17 him, he's had three different schedules in three
18 years to try to move the needle, plus we've -- we've
19 had some staff changes that we've made.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay.

21 SUPT. BOYKIN: And so I -- we've put the pieces
22 in place to see where we move for the end of this
23 year.

24 MR. WOOD: Looking your general region of the
25 state, there are -- there are some other school

1 districts that need some help. There are some others
2 that are doing a decent job. I mean, El Dorado's not
3 far from you. You've got Norphlet-Smackover, seems
4 to be doing okay. Harmony Grove. Washita County.
5 Bearden, slightly less. But what -- what have you
6 done to reach out to your contemporaries in that
7 region to help improve the processes in Crossett?

8 SUPT. BOYKIN: So one of the superintendents
9 that I've reached out to quite a bit has
10 high-performing schools in our co-op region. And
11 what I've asked him to do is share his master
12 schedules with me, his teacher hub. So this is
13 something that we stole from them. Here's what a
14 teacher hub means to us, we actually have a Google
15 document. Inside of that Google document are
16 hyperlinks, and it literally tells every single thing
17 that a teacher needs to know. What is the pacing
18 supposed to look like? What are the summative
19 assessments supposed to look like? Here's the
20 curriculum that we actually have. Here's what a
21 second-grade student should know by the end of the
22 second grade to make sure that they're prepared for
23 the third grade. And that's something that we're
24 building to implement this year. So to answer your
25 question, I do not shy away from calling other

1 superintendents. I call quite a few of them.

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: Your dyslexia testing, you're
3 compliant with your requirements --

4 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

5 MR. WOOD: -- in that?

6 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

7 SUPT. BOYKIN: And I believe you mentioned it,
8 maybe at the beginning of your presentation, but what
9 were you identifying with dyslexia in Kindergarten,
10 first grade, second grade?

11 SUPT. BOYKIN: I was going through and I was
12 talking through, based off the screener, specifically
13 how many students that we had inside of those
14 interventions. And so we have 24 kindergarteners.
15 We have --

16 MR. WOOD: What percentage do you know?

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: 20, ooh, my goodness. 30
18 percent, 20 percent, some --

19 MR. WOOD: Thirty?

20 SUPT. BOYKIN: Somewhere in that neighborhood.

21 MR. WOOD: Okay.

22 SUPT. BOYKIN: Because we have 118
23 kindergarteners.

24 MR. WOOD: Okay.

25 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah.

1 MR. WOOD: Well, that's in line. One-fifth-ish.

2 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

3 MR. WOOD: Kindergarten?

4 SUPT. BOYKIN: Uh-huh.

5 MR. WOOD: Okay. And what specific strategies
6 are you implementing in your K-1-2-3 to have higher
7 performance on third-grade assessments?

8 SUPT. BOYKIN: So making sure that the students
9 are actually receiving grade appropriate reading
10 material, for one, making sure that the books that
11 they have in their hand while they're reading is on
12 grade level. Making sure that they're actually doing
13 the reading. For example, in fourth grade the
14 teacher doesn't have to read the entire paragraph to
15 you. You should be able to read the paragraph.

16 MR. WOOD: In what grade?

17 SUPT. BOYKIN: Fourth grade.

18 MR. WOOD: Okay. Sure.

19 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah. Third grade even. Yeah.
20 Third grade. I have a third grader, so yes,
21 absolutely. One of the things that we notice -- I
22 can speak to this as a parent of a third grader, my
23 son can read to me all day long, and he reads very
24 well. What he cannot do is he cannot formulate
25 exactly what all he read into a cohesive,

1 comprehensive summary.

2 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: So we can read a book all day
4 long, but then whenever I say, okay, Asher, tell me
5 exactly what you read, he'll give me surface-level
6 information. So that's something that I've noticed
7 as a parent that I've relayed to the principal to
8 relay to the to the teachers, to -- also that I've
9 relayed to the math -- the English coach, excuse me.
10 You know, one of the things that I note to our
11 director of curriculum, my kid can read great, but I
12 want to make sure my kid can read and comprehend what
13 he's reading and then tell me what he read. And so
14 to answer your question, because I wasn't trying to
15 walk around it, here's what you -- here's what we
16 actually put in place. Making sure, number one, that
17 we're teaching tier one in the classroom. That's
18 something that we're really focusing on. That we --
19 we don't spend a lot of time scaffolding. Here's
20 what I mean by that. That we actually put the book
21 in the kid's hand and not stand there and read the
22 book to the kid. Whenever it comes to actually the
23 phonemic awareness in the bottom of the rope and the
24 top of the rope, making sure that we're following our
25 systems with precision and that we're actually

1 aligning those, internalizing those, and implementing
2 those to our students. Our centers, our centers are
3 so important. What I discovered is we have a
4 haphazard approach to centers whenever I walk through
5 a classroom. It's not that the teachers are not
6 working. I can tell you, my teachers are working.
7 They are working very hard. But the way I describe
8 it is, it's kind of like swimming upstream with logs
9 coming at you and then there's a bridge. So I can
10 jump in the water and swim upstream with all those
11 logs or I can walk along the bridge. Whenever I get
12 to the bridge and the person's finished swimming
13 upstream and then the person swimming upstream is mad
14 because they're wet and I'm not, you can't really be
15 frustrated at that. And so what I've tried to teach
16 to them is quit swimming upstream, walk across the
17 bridge. It's right there. And so that's what we're
18 working on because they really are. I don't want to
19 take anything away from my teachers because they are
20 working very, very hard. We've made some
21 human-capital adjustments that I -- that were needed,
22 to be completely honest with you. And I think what
23 we have is great. And those that are struggling,
24 whenever they get in on an intensive-growth plan,
25 it's not to get you out the door. It's to actually

1 help you. We want to keep you. Southeast Arkansas
2 is a place that does not have a high number of
3 teacher applicants. And so what I do is I look to
4 grow my own teachers. For example, I was the high
5 school principal. I have quite a few teachers that
6 now work in the district where I was their high
7 school principal. I know I don't look old enough.
8 That's where people are supposed to laugh, but I'm
9 getting that to where they don't laugh very much
10 anymore.

11 MR. WOOD: You actually don't look that old.

12 CHAIR WOODS: I was going to say. You talked
13 about like 30 years ago --

14 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah.

15 CHAIR WOODS: -- you were 12?

16 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yeah. I know. Good genes.

17 But anyway, that's -- that's what we're doing to
18 address that K-3. And again, offering that
19 after-school reading for 3, especially for those that
20 are struggling, that we've identified as struggling,
21 take advantage of what we have out there with
22 additional monies to where we can hire additional
23 people.

24 MR. WOOD: I would encourage you to think about
25 expanding that into 2nd grade and 1st grade, not just

1 3rd grade. Third grade is where we identify it first
2 --

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: Right.

4 MR. WOOD: -- but if you can prevent it from
5 getting there, you're ahead of the game.

6 SUPT. BOYKIN: A hundred percent.

7 MR. WOOD: Listen, I feel like you're honest
8 enough with yourself that you know that it's about
9 more than just trying.

10 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

11 MR. WOOD: It's about achieving.

12 SUPT. BOYKIN: Right.

13 MR. WOOD: It's about accomplishing, moving the
14 needle.

15 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

16 MR. WOOD: I can tell that you really want to
17 move the needle. I love it that you're from
18 Crossett. Been there -- well, I don't know if you're
19 from --

20 SUPT. BOYKIN: I'm not from Crossett.

21 MR. WOOD: From -- but you've been there a
22 while?

23 SUPT. BOYKIN: But here's what I say. I can't
24 say that very much anymore because I've been there so
25 long. All three of my kids don't know anything but

1 Crossett. So the community has been wonderful,
2 wonderful, wonderful, wonderful to me. We've got a
3 fantastic community. If you ever get a chance to
4 visit, I'd encourage you to.

5 MR. WOOD: You inspire confidence in what you're
6 doing.

7 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes.

8 MR. WOOD: You've got to get this up.

9 SUPT. BOYKIN: A hundred percent. But I -- but
10 I believe that you believe that you're on a path to
11 do it. And --

12 SUPT. BOYKIN: One way or the other.

13 MR. WOOD: So -- well, good luck.

14 SUPT. BOYKIN: And I'm sorry. That's all I can
15 say. No, I'm saying I'm sorry because I know I'm
16 being watched. It's live stream. But, you know, I
17 just -- I want anybody that's listening to know that
18 I do have a sense of urgency. My principals have a
19 instilled sense of urgency. My teachers do. They're
20 not happy with this. I'm not happy with this.
21 Nobody in my district is happy with this. And so for
22 that, I do, appreciate -- actually, I looked at this
23 as not something to shy away from because there's a
24 lot of things that typically float around and
25 whenever you don't know what's actually going on, you

1 make up what's going on in your mind and it's a lot
2 worse than what's actually going on. So I welcome
3 this opportunity to present what we're actually doing
4 to show that we are trying to move the needle.

5 DR. ARNOLD: That's why it's a conundrum, this
6 one is, because apparently self-aware, good
7 leadership, good knowledge, an okay plan, and as you
8 say, great context for potential improvements. But
9 it's -- it's still a conundrum to me because I just
10 don't know if the real core issues have been
11 adequately addressed yet. So that's where we'll have
12 to see how this plays out. But --

13 Does -- that kind of clear what I'm trying to
14 say, Jeff? I mean --

15 MR. WOOD: I think so.

16 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah. It's -- maybe the board
17 might want to address it. But there's been a lot of
18 specificity, but I'm still not sure if we know
19 exactly what has to change to get out of the F
20 category.

21 MR. WOOD: Do you know?

22 SUPT. BOYKIN: I --

23 MR. WOOD: What are the top three things that
24 have to change?

25 SUPT. BOYKIN: Tier 1 instruction. We have to

1 teach on grade level every single day, all day. We
2 have to be consistent with it. We have to plan and
3 internalize that planning. Planning just to plan for
4 plan's sake is not planning. That's just going
5 through the motions and going through a checklist.
6 So internalizing that planning. And again, to answer
7 your question, I do understand what you're saying by
8 that, but I want you to know that we are self-aware
9 of the deficits and we're trying to -- we're not
10 trying, we are putting things in place to address
11 those.

12 DR. ARNOLD: Yeah.

13 SUPT. BOYKIN: So tier 1 instruction whenever it
14 comes to every day, every child, all the time in that
15 class period planning appropriately making sure we
16 internalize that lesson plan and then whenever we get
17 the end product what are we actually doing with that
18 end product? And how is that going to reshape our
19 pacing moving forward? So I hope that gives you a
20 little bit more confidence that I do know where we're
21 at and what we need to do --

22 DR. ARNOLD: Oh, yeah.

23 SUPT. BOYKIN: -- moving forward.

24 DR. ARNOLD: Yes. I know the knowledge is
25 there. I just feel like, it's a good package,

1 something's missing and we haven't been able to put
2 our hands on it yet.

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: I think I have my -- I think I
4 honestly do feel like I've got a good hold on it.

5 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

6 SUPT. BOYKIN: I really do.

7 DR. ARNOLD: Okay. I don't know if I was
8 attributing it to you.

9 SUPT. BOYKIN: No, no, no. I'm saying, I
10 scratched my head and asked the same question, and
11 here's how I know that is because I actually called
12 Ms. Smith whenever we got our test scores back and I
13 said honest to goodness I'm ready to beat my head
14 against the wall. I do not understand where the
15 disconnect is and we actually had a follow-up
16 conversation and so I know where the disconnect is.

17 DR. ARNOLD: Okay.

18 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yep.

19 MR. PEACOCK: I think several of us are saying
20 the same thing that makes sense from your
21 presentation that you've got an F school district.

22 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir.

23 MR. PEACOCK: It just doesn't -- it just doesn't
24 make sense. You -- this is one of the more -- one of
25 the better presentations we've had all day long. And

1 if you told me to pick one of -- it just doesn't make
2 sense you've got an F school district. And so --

3 SUPT. BOYKIN: We made some changes in staff
4 from last year.

5 MR. PEACOCK: Yeah. It goes back to the
6 previous comment that it's time for the results to
7 come through.

8 SUPT. BOYKIN: Yes, sir. A hundred percent. I
9 agree.

10 CHAIR WOODS: Based on that, motion?

11 MR. PEACOCK: I make a motion to accept.

12 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

13 DR. ARNOLD: Second.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Motion from Mr. Peacock, Dr.
15 Abbott, or Dr. Arnold, that was you?

16 DR. ARNOLD: Yes.

17 CHAIR WOODS: Second by Dr. Arnold. All in
18 favor, say aye.

19 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

20 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

21 Hearing none, motion passes.

22 Thank you.

23 SUPT. BOYKIN: Thank you all for your time.

24 Thank you.

25 **1.f. FORDYCE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

1 MR. WOOD: And my apologies to Fordyce. I do
2 have to step out. But --

3 CHAIR WOODS: No one else can leave or we lose a
4 quorum. So let's hear Fordyce.

5 MR. WOOD: No disrespect at all. I will be
6 listening to what you all have to say. I'm very
7 interested in what you have to say.

8 CHAIR WOODS: Do you want me to ask your
9 questions?

10 MR. WOOD: I would love for you to.

11 DR. ABBOTT: I was fixing to say, somebody needs
12 to ask your questions.

13 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Say them again. Just so I wrote
15 them correctly.

16 MR. WOOD: Why don't I give them to you?

17 CHAIR WOODS: Give me the paper.

18 MS. SMITH: Do you want to ask them right now?

19 MR. WOOD: Sure, yeah.

20 SECT. OLIVA: Do you have two minutes?

21 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

22 CHAIR WOODS: Two minutes?

23 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

24 CHAIR WOODS: Before you do your portion.

25 MS. SMITH: Okay.

1 CHAIR WOODS: We're going to go out of order.

2 SECT. OLIVA: Then we can have it on record.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Then you can have it on record.

4 SECT. OLIVA: And then, we can go and do the
5 highlight -- the overview of the district.

6 MS. SMITH: Uh-huh. And this is Fordyce School
7 District. They are very similar to the last district
8 in terms of points away. There are seven points from
9 a D. They have 635 students in their district. This
10 is Rhonda Lawson. This is her third year to be
11 superintendent in the district. They also -- so
12 their high school was on that hold harmless as well.
13 They actually met their achievement and growth there.

14 But Rhonda Lawson.

15 SUPT. LAWSON: Like she said, I'm Rhonda Lawson.
16 This is the 2 and -- the 2 1/2-year mark for me.

17 Mr. Wood, do you have questions for me?

18 MR. WOOD: Sure. Yeah. I'm going to ask you
19 the same three questions.

20 SUPT. LAWSON: Yeah. Okay.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Well done.

22 MR. WOOD: Do you agree that lack of growth is
23 almost always an adult issue, not a student issue?

24 SUPT. LAWSON: Definitely.

25 MR. WOOD: Do you -- do you agree that lack of

1 achievement is almost always an adult issue and not a
2 student issue?

3 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

4 MR. WOOD: And do you agree that poor students
5 can learn if adults do their job correctly?

6 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

7 MR. WOOD: All right. Real quickly, do you have
8 any building level administrators, principals that
9 have been in their building more than four years or
10 more and have an F or a D?

11 SUPT. LAWSON: I have --

12 MR. WOOD: -- for their building?

13 SUPT. LAWSON: I have one. The elementary
14 principal, this is her fourth year.

15 MR. WOOD: Okay.

16 SUPT. LAWSON: She is -- she has an F.

17 MR. WOOD: Okay. And what gives you confidence
18 that her continued leadership there will move the
19 school from an F rating?

20 SUPT. LAWSON: I feel that I've seen a shift in
21 her this year. I feel that she has stepped up to the
22 leadership role and she's taking the criticism. I
23 know I shouldn't say it like that, but I mean, it is
24 criticism. I think she's taken that, and she's
25 turning it around.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay.

2 SUPT. LAWSON: And she's using that -- and she's
3 asking the questions. She's asking those in-depth
4 questions that she needs to ask. And she's getting
5 into those classrooms.

6 MR. WOOD: What did you do before you were the
7 superintendent at Fordyce?

8 SUPT. LAWSON: I was the principal at the
9 elementary.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay. What grade level did it have
11 --

12 SUPT. LAWSON: It --

13 MR. WOOD: Well, what letter grade did it have
14 when you were the principal?

15 SUPT. LAWSON: They were two points from a B.

16 MR. WOOD: Two points from a B. So they were a
17 C. What year was that? Was that post COVID?

18 SUPT. LAWSON: Right after COVID.

19 MR. WOOD: Right after COVID. So the '22ish --

20 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

21 MR. WOOD: -- area, 23 maybe?

22 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

23 MR. WOOD: Okay. All right. You have a member
24 of your board here?

25 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes. I have my board president,

1 Nick Cranford.

2 MR. WOOD: Will you -- Mr. Cranford, you know,
3 I'll give you the same admonition kind of that I gave
4 board members earlier. You must support your
5 superintendent's decisions. You've hired a
6 superintendent. You've entrusted them. You must be
7 active in accountability. You are here today because
8 things aren't going well at Fordyce Public Schools.
9 Too much failure. And the community must be involved
10 in accountability. And that doesn't mean be in the
11 way of what she's trying to do. If you believe she's
12 not doing the right things, get a different
13 superintendent. But hold them accountable to achieve
14 the results that you're looking for and support them.
15 And -- and I'm namely talking about personnel
16 decisions. Too often, that is the problem that
17 boards get in the way of is because they know a
18 friend, or because a friend of theirs has a job, or
19 because somebody's kid has a job, they won't support
20 a decision that a superintendent makes. I have no
21 idea if that's what's going on. I'm just giving you
22 general --

23 MR. CRANFORD: Yes.

24 MR. WOOD: -- former board member here, advice.
25 You must put that stuff aside and support

1 superintendents when they need to make the hard
2 decisions that are going to hurt somebody, some
3 adult's feelings. Okay. Support your
4 superintendent. Thank you so much for letting me go
5 out of order here. Thank you.

6 SUPT. LAWSON: And I also want to introduce my
7 vice president, Susan Ridings. She's here with us
8 today too.

9 MR. WOOD: Thank you all for being here.

10 MS. RIDINGS: I used to have the principal's job
11 there. I'm retired now, so I --I've got a long
12 history with the education part. Nick's got a long
13 history with the community part.

14 MR. WOOD: Well, good luck to you. I look
15 forward to listening to this and hearing what's going
16 on.

17 MS. SMITH: Okay. We're just going to reset now
18 and allow Ms. Lawson to go through her presentation
19 that she prepared for you. Okay.

20 SUPT. LAWSON: Good afternoon. I thank you for
21 the opportunity to tell our story today. I want to
22 begin with complete honesty with you today. Our
23 current performance, as reflected in the F rating, is
24 completely unacceptable to myself, to my board and to
25 my community. I -- we owe more to our community and

1 our students than that. Our students deserve better;
2 our community deserves better; and the teachers and
3 staff deserve better. So as superintendent, I take
4 responsibility for these outcomes, but I'm going to
5 show you what we have done and what we're going to do
6 to fix this.

7 Oh, turned it off.

8 Okay. Okay. Okay.

9 There are comprehensive needs assessment. These
10 are some things that we went through with our
11 district admin team, the teachers in their PLCs. We
12 started looking at some identified issues. The first
13 one was we saw a lot of varied instructional
14 practices, and they were not good instructional
15 practices. So that's one thing that we are working
16 on. That tier one instruction is key. We had a
17 workshop yesterday -- or a PLC -- with the whole
18 staff. APSRC came in yesterday and met for two hours
19 with our teachers on tier one instruction. And it
20 amazed me at the teachers that did not know what Tier
21 1 instruction is. We have to clear that up. That's
22 instruction for all kids, on grade level, every day.
23 So that's one thing. Walkthroughs that showed us our
24 instructional strategies were not in place, that
25 people were using all different kinds of

1 instructional strategies. Another issue that we
2 found was the training and support for teachers was
3 not in place. You know, South Arkansas -- it's not
4 an excuse, I promise you -- but we don't have a high
5 applicant pool. But you know, one thing that I've
6 learned this year, that I'm going to stop hiring
7 because that's the only person that applied. I will
8 have to figure out another way to get it done. I
9 have promised myself that, that I'm going to stop
10 saying that is the only person there is because the
11 only person there is may not be best for our kids.
12 So we've got to work on getting training and support
13 for our teachers, and that's going to be done through
14 PLCs. The co-op has been instrumental. I will say
15 that our math department has struggled, as you can
16 see in our scores in the high school. The math
17 specialist from the co-op has been with us from week
18 one. She has been there once or twice a week, every
19 week since school has started. That has come to a
20 conversation where our seventh and eighth grade math
21 teacher, he is making progress. Our high school math
22 teacher, Algebra 1 and geometry, not so much. We are
23 making a change at Christmas. I'm not afraid to make
24 changes at Christmas. We are flipping the schedule.
25 We're putting two other teachers in those roles to

1 teach high school geometry and algebra one. I do not
2 have time to wait. I feel like I've wasted a
3 semester. I do not have another semester to wait.
4 Also, our curriculum is not aligned. We are working
5 on that through PLCs. The next thing is staffing.
6 Some hard decisions had to be made at the end of last
7 year because I am on the campuses every day and I'm
8 in and out of the classrooms. I saw things I did not
9 like. So last year, at the end of the year, I did
10 not offer four -- contracts to four people because of
11 what I saw in the classroom. And you know that's
12 hard in a small town, but it's the right thing to do
13 for kids. So -- and with that, we replaced three of
14 those spots with certified teachers because we do
15 have a lot of people that were on 1240 waivers that
16 were not completing their pathways. We've gotten a
17 handle on that. They have to -- the principals have
18 a form each semester the teacher has to fill out.
19 They also have the TLP through the state, the teacher
20 licensure plan, that they have to have completed. So
21 we are keeping a tight rein on that, but the goal is
22 to find certified teachers. And I did find three to
23 replace those four spots. I didn't need the fourth
24 spot, so I didn't have to replace it.

25 Restructured federal and state categorical funds

1 last year to bring in instructional facilitators.
2 What I did was, my dyslexia specialist, she works
3 half a day as our dyslexia specialist and half day as
4 an instructional facilitator. In turn, at the
5 elementary, I have another teacher who does K-6
6 science labs half a day because we know that science
7 is an important part now too. We're not -- you know,
8 our science scores are -- we've got to start
9 somewhere. And the other half of the day, she is an
10 instructional facilitator. Both of those teachers
11 have been through NIET coaching training, and they
12 meet with teachers weekly in PLCs. At the high
13 school, I did the same thing. Our testing
14 coordinator, she's district testing coordinator part
15 of the day. The other half day, she is an
16 instructional facilitator. I have an English
17 teacher. She teaches three English classes. And the
18 other half a day, she is an instructional
19 facilitator. That's how we're working things. So I
20 took that, I restructured those federal and state
21 categorical funds from ESA and Title I to meet those
22 needs. We were partnering with a company that wasn't
23 there every day. They were doing a good job, but I
24 felt like our teachers needed that support on a daily
25 basis from someone there. So now there is someone

1 there to support them on a daily basis besides the
2 principal.

3 The next thing, supporting our teachers. Daily
4 classroom walkthroughs: principals, instructional
5 facilitators, and myself. I've charged them with
6 doing two walk-throughs a day, at the least. I
7 charge myself with doing two walk-throughs a day.
8 There's two campuses. I try to go to one at high
9 school and one at elementary every day. Sometimes we
10 go together so that we can come out and calibrate
11 because sometimes what I see, they may not see. The
12 next thing is we have weekly admin meetings with the
13 instructional facilitators and the principals.
14 That's where we review our observations, what we're
15 seeing, the trends that we see, the adjustments we
16 may need to make, any kind of PD that we may need to
17 bring in, or what we need to do for our teachers and
18 our kids. And also, that timely feedback is
19 important because teachers need to know how they're
20 doing. I don't need to wait until the end of the
21 semester to say, oh, hey, this is what I saw in your
22 classroom. They get that immediate and timely
23 feedback. And when the principals give them
24 feedback, and instructional facilitators, it comes to
25 me also because I want to see what they're telling

1 them. Lesson plans are reviewed with feedback.
2 Lesson plans are due every Monday morning by 8:00
3 a.m. Instructional facilitators go through those,
4 spot check those, principals check them and I go
5 through and spot check them every once in a while.

6 Our instructional practices, they have changed.
7 The instructional facilitators and co-op specialists,
8 they're building teacher capacity in both content and
9 instructional strategies, where they're helping them
10 plan. Like I said, that math specialist has been on
11 site from the co-op from week one. I've watched her.
12 I've gone in with her. She's sat with those math
13 teachers. She's planned with them. She's taught
14 them lesson internalization. So they've been there.
15 Now we're bringing the science specialist on board.
16 She came and gave me some bad news last week for
17 elementary. I haven't told my board yet. But --

18 SUPT. LAWSON: I know. I'm just going to tell
19 them in front of y'all that our science that we're
20 using is not HQIM. So I'm going to have to purchase
21 some new science, which I knew at the high school
22 that we were, but I thought -- I didn't know that
23 elementary didn't have the green lights that I
24 thought they did. So we're going to have to review
25 that HQIM science across the board. Our elementary

1 interventionists are trained. We have a retired
2 teacher who comes in and provides three days a week
3 Barton reading interventions. We have another
4 retired para that comes in that -- three days a week
5 that provides Sonday System interventions. We also
6 have paras that provide -- they're trained in Sunday
7 System that provide interventions. We also are
8 basing our PLCs around the ATLAS blueprint and the
9 content standards, and the high school is looking at
10 those ALDs. We now have a state-appointed literacy
11 coach for the elementary. She has come in; we've had
12 her for about a month; she's doing a great job. She
13 is providing feedback to teachers. She's going into
14 modeling lessons. She's keeping me in the loop on
15 things. I've gone in with her a couple of times, and
16 she's actually taught me some things that I didn't,
17 you know, some things I didn't know. And like I
18 said, we are reviewing all of our HQIM, and we did
19 find out that our science -- we've got to work on our
20 science.

21 Our academic supports. We've got targeted math
22 interventions. You know, math interventions are
23 mandated in elementary now. And I'm proud to say
24 that we have a teacher in elementary, a third-grade
25 math teacher, that has a VAM score of 86. And she

1 teaches -- we've restructured our math in 3rd and 4th
2 grade. They rotate in 3rd and 4th grade between four
3 teachers. There's a 3rd/4th grade literacy teacher,
4 a 3rd and 4th grade science teacher, a 3rd/4th grade
5 social studies, and then a 3rd/4th grade math. So
6 she is touching -- she is teaching all third and
7 fourth grade math. So I'm anxious to see what her
8 scores are going to look like. And also, they have a
9 30-minute math intervention time. She is seeing the
10 bottom 25 percent for 30 minutes a day in 5th and 6th
11 grade. So I'm anxious to see. And she's had those
12 kids before. And when she saw their scores, she
13 said, they can do better than this. When I had them,
14 they did better than this. And they did.

15 Our high school science labs is a big thing this
16 year. Our K-2 have never really gone to the science
17 lab. We have a room that's a science lab now. And
18 that instructional facilitator brings in -- once a
19 week, the K-2 kids get to go by classroom for a
20 science lab. And she does the same thing for 3-6,
21 for science labs.

22 Our high school dyslexia, we were kind of
23 lagging in that, but now we've -- the co-op
24 specialist has come in, and she's gotten my high
25 school people where they need to be with the

1 screeners and all that kind of stuff. And like I
2 said, I knew I needed HQIM science for high school,
3 but now I need it for elementary. So I know that,
4 and we are working on it.

5 Okay. We were not giving interim tests at both
6 campuses. We are giving the interims at both
7 campuses. Lowest 25 percent have been identified at
8 both campuses, and we are looking at curriculum gaps,
9 and that's an ongoing process. I do want to let

10 CHAIR WOODS: I do want to let you know you're
11 at 15 minutes if you want to --

12 SUPT. LAWSON: Okay. Okay. Okay. These are
13 our future plans. We've got to continue to
14 strengthen professional development. For leadership,
15 that's the first thing. I've got my high school
16 principal's in her second year. My elementary
17 principal's in her fourth. I've got to strengthen
18 that leadership and strengthen the leadership for the
19 teachers. And I also need to create incentives and
20 supports that reduce teacher turnover and elevate
21 instruction because we do have a high teacher
22 turnover. And then I want to form some partnerships
23 with teacher prep programs to strengthen our
24 recruitment through them, to get teachers straight
25 out of who have gone the traditional route. And then

1 we would need to integrate ongoing professional
2 development that's aligned to our student outcomes.

3 And that's it. I know that was quick, but
4 questions?

5 CHAIR WOODS: Can I talk just a little bit on
6 your identification. So do you use screeners in K-2?

7 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

8 CHAIR WOODS: And what are you using? I know
9 you mentioned Barton. I think that was for dyslexia;
10 right?

11 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes, we use Barton. Oh, gosh, if
12 you wouldn't have asked me. Barton, Sunday.

13 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Do you have any --

14 SUPT. LAWSON: DIBELS.

15 CHAIR WOODS: Is anybody certified in Take
16 Flight?

17 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes. That's what my dyslexia
18 specialist is certified in.

19 CHAIR WOODS: She is?

20 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

21 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Excellent. And what are
22 you seeing in terms of who you're identifying for
23 early intervention?

24 SUPT. LAWSON: It kind of varies from year to
25 year. To me, this year it's a lower number than I

1 thought. Like, I think it's -- she didn't -- she
2 told me maybe -- in kindergarten, maybe six or seven
3 kids. We've got like 50 kids in kindergarten.

4 CHAIR WOODS: And what's your typical trajectory
5 through, if you have identified in kindergarten, do
6 they start receiving intervention then?

7 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes, we do an early intervention
8 then.

9 CHAIR WOODS: You do? Okay. And then are you
10 seeing it -- are you tracking those students to see
11 how their progress --

12 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes. Yes.

13 CHAIR WOODS: -- has changed over the years?

14 SUPT. LAWSON: Uh-huh.

15 CHAIR WOODS: Okay.

16 Dr. Arnold, do you have any?

17 Dr. Abbott?

18 DR. ABBOTT: You said you said you're doing
19 interim tests at both campuses now?

20 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

21 DR. ABBOTT: Have you already given those this
22 year?

23 SUPT. LAWSON: We have one in January.

24 DR. ABBOTT: You have one in January?

25 SUPT. LAWSON: Uh-huh. We have had an interim

1 IXL, but that's not the ATLAS test.

2 DR. ABBOTT: Right.

3 SUPT. LAWSON: And it did show a lot of growth.
4 Like, my instructional facilitators called me and
5 they said, you've got to get here right now to see.
6 And it showed a lot of growth, especially in the area
7 of math. But like I said, my teachers touching them.

8 DR. ABBOTT: Right.

9 MR. PEACOCK: How did you learn that your
10 science HQIM was not approved or inadequate?

11 SUPT. LAWSON: The science specialist from the
12 co-op.

13 MR. PEACOCK: So how -- the obvious next
14 question is this, how did it slip through until --

15 SUPT. LAWSON: Honestly, I -- it's my fault. I
16 thought it had green lights. And when we went --
17 when she went back and showed me, she said, no, in
18 EdReports it doesn't. But we've had it for a while.
19 So it's -- it's old.

20 MR. PEACOCK: I'm assuming then that you went
21 back and looked at all of your materials, not just
22 science --

23 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

24 MR. PEACOCK: -- to make sure that there was
25 nothing else?

1 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

2 MR. PEACOCK: And can --

3 SUPT. LAWSON: And science is our worst.

4 MR. PEACOCK: All right. Can you speak to
5 teacher absenteeism?

6 SUPT. LAWSON: We have a problem with teacher
7 absenteeism. And I do agree with you. We've tried
8 the money thing, giving them incentives. That
9 doesn't help. I hate to say this, but this is -- it
10 has to be in your heart. Teaching is a passion and a
11 heart thing that you got to want to be there every
12 single day. And that's what we've got to build in
13 the -- try to build in these teachers because it
14 kills me to miss a day. I mean, I can't -- I hate to
15 miss days. Because when a teacher's not there, kids
16 get nothing. So we do -- I mean, I haven't found
17 anything that works, but we do have an absenteeism
18 problem.

19 MR. PEACOCK: Okay. Thank you. I enjoyed your
20 presentation.

21 SUPT. LAWSON: Thank you.

22 MR. PEACOCK: The -- I like the fact that, you
23 know, you identified right out of the gate that you
24 had four underperforming teachers, and you dealt with
25 them. So --

1 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

2 MR. PEACOCK: A lot of other people skirt those
3 types of issues. It looks like you tackled them head
4 on.

5 SUPT. LAWSON: I did.

6 CHAIR WOODS: Mr. Bragg.

7 MR. BRAGG: I see everybody's talked about these
8 walkthroughs. What -- do you have a specific
9 checklist or things you're looking for when you do
10 those things?

11 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes. We have a tool that we use.

12 MR. BRAGG: Is that your primary way of
13 evaluating teacher performance?

14 SUPT. LAWSON: Well, the primary way is with
15 TESS, but that's -- the walkthrough is the daily one
16 that they're used to.

17 MR. BRAGG: And that's -- do you document?

18 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes, it's documented.

19 MR. BRAGG: Okay. You mentioned your curriculum
20 not aligned. Wouldn't that have an effect on your
21 test scores?

22 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes, definitely. Because here's
23 the thing. Sometimes we think, oh, these kids, they
24 can't do this, so I'm going to give them something
25 lower. So they're never exposed to grade-level work.

1 When they get to that test, they're exposed to grade
2 level work on that test. And so they give up and
3 they don't want -- they just mark stuff. I mean,
4 they do. I'll just be honest.

5 MR. BRAGG: So you're in the process -- are you
6 going to have that completed just by the end of this
7 year?

8 SUPT. LAWSON: I'm hoping so, yes.

9 MR. BRAGG: Okay. Your literacy coaches, have
10 you been able to see results yet?

11 SUPT. LAWSON: I've seen a lot of results.
12 They're work -- yes. I think that was one of the
13 better investments that we made.

14 MR. BRAGG: Okay.

15 CHAIR WOODS: Can I talk to your board
16 president?

17 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

18 CHAIR WOODS: Hi. How long have you been on the
19 board?

20 MR. CRANFORD: I think this is my fifth year, 5
21 1/2 years. I got in half term five years ago.

22 CHAIR WOODS: Five years ago.

23 MR. CRANFORD: Yes.

24 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. And do you feel like your
25 board supports your superintendent?

1 MR. CRANFORD: I do. I support her a hundred
2 percent.

3 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. Do you -- have you
4 reviewed these changes with your board that she
5 has proposed?

6 MR. CRANFORD: Yes, ma'am.

7 CHAIR WOODS: And did they --

8 MR. CRANFORD: Yes, ma'am.

9 CHAIR WOODS: Unanimous support or -- okay.
10 Sounds good.

11 Any other questions?

12 (NO RESPONSE)

13 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. If nothing else, then --

14 SECT. OLICA: Well, and I -- and I'll add, you
15 know, I had a time -- an opportunity to spend some
16 time at Fordyce. And, you know, when you talk about
17 a superintendent that has the courage to release four
18 teachers in a really small district, in a small
19 community -- that has probably not happened in a very
20 long time -- that's a recommendation that goes to the
21 board, that that board has to support. And I
22 guarantee those were people connected to the
23 community and I applaud the courage to make those
24 decisions because you're doing what's right for kids.
25 And other people are going to notice that in the

1 buildings too. And so I would encourage you to stay
2 the course, hold high expectations. We can love our
3 students into mediocrity --

4 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

5 SECT. OLIVA: -- but lowering expectations is
6 actually hurting them.

7 SUPT. LAWSON: Yes.

8 SECT. OLIVA: And the only way to help set them
9 up for success is to keep raising that bar. So stay
10 the course.

11 SUPT. LAWSON: I just keep thinking about what
12 you said to me Friday, that we're not an employment
13 agency and we're not.

14 CHAIR WOODS: You wanted to speak to the
15 dismissals?

16 MR. CRANFORD: I wanted to speak on what you
17 were saying about the four people that we non-renewed
18 last year. You're right. You said what I was going
19 to say. That was tough. In a town the size of ours,
20 that small of a town, we knew them. You know, it's
21 personal. It's tough. And I support her even more
22 for having the gumption to be able to do that because
23 we know that's what's best for our kids. Because I
24 will tell you, I'm probably not the easiest board
25 member for her. I support her more than anything,

1 but we hold her feet to the fire. And she -- she
2 exceeds my expectations, you know, with it every
3 time. And the ability to do that really lets us know
4 we are -- we're moving forward with that, you know,
5 because that was not -- that was not easy to let them
6 four -- four go. So --

7 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

8 MR. CRANFORD: Thank you.

9 CHAIR WOODS: And I'll entertain a motion.

10 DR. ARNOLD: I'd like to move to accept the --

11 CHAIR WOODS: The assurance document? Okay. I
12 have a motion by Dr. Arnold to accept.

13 MR. BRAGG: I'll second.

14 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Mr. Bragg. All in
15 favor, say aye.

16 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

17 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

18 Hearing none, motion passes.

19 SUPT. LAWSON: Thank you.

20 CHAIR WOODS: Thank you.

21 **2. 2026 STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATES**

22 CHAIR WOODS: Okay. All right. We will go on
23 to the next point in our agenda, which I think is
24 approval -- we had tabled last month the board
25 meeting dates. I'm going to recommend that we go

1 ahead and keep the board dates throughout the next
2 year. If we end up needing to convert them to work
3 sessions or school visits, we at least have them
4 calendar on the date. If y'all are good with that,
5 then I just need a motion to approve the meeting.

6 DR. ABBOTT: I move -- move to approve.

7 CHAIR WOODS: I have a motion by Dr. Abbott to
8 approve the 2026 State Board of Education meeting
9 dates. Do I have a second?

10 MR. BRAGG: I'll second.

11 CHAIR WOODS: Seconded by Ken -- Mr. Bragg. All
12 in favor, say aye.

13 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

14 CHAIR WOODS: Any opposed?

15 Hearing none, motion passes.

16 (The action agenda concluded at 4:01 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

) ss

COUNTY OF PULASKI)

I, Miranda McEntire, Certified Court Reporter #852, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me in the caption on the foregoing proceedings are true; and that the foregoing proceedings were reported verbatim through the use of the voice-writing method and thereafter transcribed by me or under my direct supervision to the best of my ability, taken at the time and place set out on the caption hereto.

I FURTHER CERTIFY, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or employed by the parties hereto, nor financially interested or otherwise, in the outcome of this action, and that I have no contract with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an interest in the action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original deposition transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial attorney, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties in the action.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 27th day of January, 2026



MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #852

