

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

MAY 15, 2024
9:05 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

DR. MATTHEW SUTHERLIN, Chairperson - Coordinator of
Standards Systems Support and Charter
MR. PHIL BALDWIN, Retired Bank Executive
MR. FREDDIE SCOTT - Family and Community Engagement, School
Choice and Parent Empowerment
MR. KIM DAVIS, Walton Family Foundation - Senior Advisor
DR. TINA MOORE, ADHE - Director of Workforce Development

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

MS. DORIE SUMMONS, DESE Charter Schools Director
MR. STEPHEN REYNOLDS, Attorney Specialist - Elementary
and Secondary Education

LOCATION:

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
- Auditorium
#4 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, AR 72201

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P R O C E E D I N G S

I. CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Good morning. The May 15th, 2024, meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is called to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Department of Education and ask that you please silence all your electronic devices. The goal is to facilitate a fair and responsible hearing. So therefore, I ask that each person speaking please state your name and title for the record. I ask that you continue to speak clearly in the microphone throughout your presentation for the benefit of the Panel, this audience and the viewing audience. This meeting is being live streamed and recorded, and a transcript of the meeting will be posted on the DESE website.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Panel Members. All right.

So we have a consent agenda before you today. Are there any questions?

(NO RESPONSE)

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: If not, I'll entertain a motion.

MR. DAVIS: Motion.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Is there a second?

2 MR. SCOTT: Second.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. So we have a
4 motion and a second. All those in favor.

5 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? Any abstentions?

7 The motion passes.

8 **III. ACTION AGENDA**

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Mr. Reynolds, if
10 you'll come forward to review the procedures.

11 MR. REYNOLDS: Good morning.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Good morning.

13 MR. REYNOLDS: Stephen Reynolds, staff attorney
14 for the Department.

15 I'll just go over the hearing procedures real
16 quick. Dr. Sutherlin, you'll want to swear in all
17 the parties, except for attorneys, that are going to
18 be given testimony today. The Applicants will then
19 have 20 minutes to present. To my knowledge, there
20 is no opposition for any of the applicants, so after
21 the Charters' presentations, y'all can move into
22 questions. All parties please state your name before
23 you speak even if you talked before so that we can
24 have a clear record. Any community members or
25 community partners that are here to speak on behalf

1 of the Applicant will need to speak during the 20
2 minutes. Any elected officials that are here can
3 speak before the hearing, during the 20 minutes or at
4 the conclusion of all the testimony. That's up to
5 the official and the Applicant how they want to move
6 forward. Following the presentations we will go
7 through any legal concerns and waivers, allow the
8 Charter to -- opportunity to give you guys more
9 information about how they're using their waivers and
10 your remaining concerns out of legal concerns.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
12 much.

13 MR. REYONOLDS: Yeah.

14 **III.1. HOPE ACADEMY OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS**

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Summons.

16 MS. SUMMONS: Good morning. Dorie Summons, DESE
17 Charter Office.

18 Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas is requesting
19 a waiver of Arkansas code § 6-10-106(a)1(A) which is
20 the uniform dates for beginning and end of school
21 year. We also have Ms. Katie Drake who is on the
22 Zoom, and she'll be representing that school.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

24 All right. Ms. Drake, if you'll raise your
25 right hand. Do you swear that the testimony -- I

1 think you may need to unmute -- I guess I should have
2 told you that first, huh? Do you swear that the
3 testimony you are about to give is the truth, the
4 whole truth and nothing but the truth?

5 MS. DRAKE: Yes.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
7 much. You can begin.

8 MS. DRAKE: I don't have a presentation today
9 but Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas every year
10 attempts to align with our local district calendars.
11 The majority of our students come from our
12 surrounding districts, primarily from Bentonville
13 Public schools, from that district area. And so we
14 attempt to align with their calendar. This year,
15 Bentonville has requested to begin school the week of
16 the 14th, which requires us to request a Charter
17 amendment in order to be able to align with those
18 dates. Aligning serves our families well because
19 many of them have other children who attend our other
20 local public schools. Many schools in our areas have
21 requested that they be allowed to start the week of
22 the 14th. And so in an attempt to serve our families
23 well, as well as our students, we are requesting to
24 do the same.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

1 Are there any questions? Mr. Baldwin.

2 MR. BALDWIN: So this is really not a question
3 on your program, but why is Bentonville starting
4 earlier? I'm just curious about that.

5 MS. DRAKE: I'm not sure why our surrounding
6 schools are starting earlier. To be honest, I think
7 that -- I know that our local summer school options
8 -- our summer program options often end in early
9 August, and so that leaves a gap for families to be
10 able to -- that they have to fill between that time
11 and school starting. And so I think between that, as
12 well as them seeing the opportunity to have more in
13 school days prior to state testing. I'm not sure.

14 Also, I believe that there may be sports
15 schedules that align better by starting a week
16 earlier. And so those things have required our large
17 public-school districts around us to want to start
18 earlier, a desire to start earlier and therefore we
19 would like to also start earlier.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any other questions?

21 MR. SCOTT: I would just like to piggyback on
22 what Mr. Baldwin just shared in regards to the
23 feedback that you received from family members in
24 this change. I know that you started off originally
25 with a set schedule, but with this change you did

1 speak to the fact that some of the parents were in
2 favor of that; but if you give a little bit more
3 detail in regards to that kind of feedback in regards
4 to making that change, any kind of evidence that
5 spoke to -- from a numerical perspective what kind of
6 support there you have in making this change.

7 MS. DRAKE: I can't hear you well. I'm sorry.
8 Are you asking about the parent feedback, like,
9 family feedback?

10 MR. SCOTT: Yes, absolutely. Sorry about that.

11 MS. DRAKE: Sorry. So our families -- we did
12 not collect specific family feedback, but what we
13 know about the available options in our community is
14 that our summer programs will align with our local
15 public schools as best they can. Our local public
16 schools, if they're going to start earlier, that's
17 going to allow our summer programs to be out earlier.
18 We know that's going to leave a gap for our families.

19 As well as knowing that not being on the same
20 calendar we have -- over our four years, we've
21 experienced that when families are on different
22 calendars with their kids, often what happens is if a
23 student is out of school for another district, if we
24 don't align calendars and that school gets out early,
25 often times then our students don't get to school.

1 We don't provide transportation. We're unable to at
2 this time. And so parents have to bring students and
3 if their other children are out often, that leaves a
4 gap for our kiddos where parents end up keeping them
5 home as well. So it becomes a struggle when kids
6 have to be on different calendars.

7 MR. SCOTT: Well, thank you. I believe what I
8 heard you say is that conceptually it's -- that
9 change will be a good one. I was just wondering if
10 there was any particular feedback or surveys that you
11 received from your families to support --

12 MS. DRAKE: No, there wasn't.

13 MR. SCOTT: Okay.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Other questions?

15 If not, I'll entertain a motion.

16 DR. MOORE: I move that we accept the waiver
17 requested by Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas
18 regarding uniform dates for the beginning and end of
19 the school year.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

21 Do I have a second?

22 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. So I have the
24 motion from Dr. Moore and a second from Mr. Baldwin.
25 All those in favor?

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(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

The motion passes. Give us just a minute to fill out our voting sheets and then we'll be right back with you.

MS. DRAKE: Thank you so much.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. We'll start with Dr. Moore.

DR. MOORE: I voted to approve the waiver request of Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas to amend the school calendar to better align with other school calendars in the area and meet the needs of students and families served.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin.

MR. BALDWIN: Yes. I voted in favor of this request to change that allows Hope Academy to match the Bentonville School District calendar.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS: I voted for to help better serve students and families in the region, support the motion to align calendar with the neighboring school district.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Scott.

MR. SCOTT: I voted for the amendment request for Hope Academy in Northwest Arkansas because it

1 sets the stage for continued supportive engagement
2 with families they serve.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I voted for the motion to
4 allow for an earlier start date to ensure students
5 and families receive the most comprehensive set of
6 services and align calendar with local school
7 districts.

8 Congratulations. Thank you very much.

9 **III.2. FRIENDSHIP ASPIRE ACADEMY NORTH LITTLE ROCK**

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Ms. Summons.

11 MS. SUMMONS: Okay. Next, we have Friendship
12 Aspire Academy of North Little Rock. They're
13 requesting to change the grade levels served from
14 grades K-5 to grades K-3. And we have Dr. Simmons
15 here with her staff representing Friendship.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

17 Will all those who plan on speaking on behalf of
18 the Charter please stand and raise your right hand.
19 Do you swear that the testimony you are about to give
20 is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
21 truth?

22 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much. You may
24 begin.

25 DR. SIMMONS: Thank you. Good morning. My name

1 is Dr. Denise Simmons. I'm the superintendent of
2 Friendship Aspire Academy Arkansas.

3 I am standing before you today to request that
4 we change our friendship North Little Rock campus to
5 -- from a K-5 campus to K-3 campus. We're just --
6 we're excited about news that we received from DESE
7 on the 13th stating that our accountability
8 monitoring that we have no CAPs and no findings. So
9 I'll just read the line that's the best to me. It
10 says, "The Friendship Aspire Academies of Arkansas
11 was chosen to be monitored in the 2023-2024 school
12 cycle and there are no findings. There is no further
13 action required by the district at this time."

14 So with that being said, I want to talk to you
15 just a little bit about our North Little Rock campus.
16 The mission of the campus is to prepare students with
17 academic and social-emotional skills necessary to
18 succeed in college, career and life. Our motto at
19 Friendship is everyone grows, which means not only
20 our students, but also our faculty and our staff.
21 We're excited to have the North of Little Rock campus
22 join us. That is actually a campus that came to us
23 from Lighthouse. And the campus -- the students are
24 growing, they're thriving.

25 The merger became -- or not -- the takeover took

1 place July 1st, 2023. And our campus, the issue that
2 we're having is that the campus is, I don't want to
3 say landlocked, but where it's built -- it was built
4 on a floodplain. So I don't know if you've been here
5 for years, but there was a flood out there that
6 flooded up the whole -- the whole library and it had
7 to be torn down. So we're growing and expanding at
8 that school, especially at our K-3 grade levels. So
9 we have no room to grow out and expand the building
10 -- any more buildings.

11 So we're asking for a waiver so that we can move
12 some of our students, actually bus them, to our
13 Little Rock campus which actually has some has some
14 opportunities for enrollment. So there's room for
15 our kids there and we'll use our own buses so there
16 will be no additional cost. The campus is housed in
17 a high-poverty area and what we -- what we're looking
18 at doing is changing that school into an early
19 learning center with a STEM focus. So all the
20 campuses in Friendship will be STEM focused beginning
21 next school. So I think that's going to be great for
22 those families because it's going to make a -- an
23 impactful economic change.

24 I'm just going to give you just a little bit.
25 So the median income in that area is actually \$49,166

1 and the research shows that students in high-poverty
2 neighborhoods benefit from educational opportunities
3 like this early learning center that we are -- we're
4 prescribing.

5 We have another campus down in Pine Bluff, our
6 downtown campus, that is actually a K-3 campus and
7 it's also in a high-poverty area and it's thriving.
8 At that school, we always have a wait list for
9 students to get in. So that means that we're doing
10 well, and the scores show it. The North Little Rock
11 campus, since it has been taken over by Friendship
12 Aspire, has gone through several renovations. The
13 entire building has been completely renovated. If
14 you saw it before and you come and see it now, it
15 looks like night and day. We're day.

16 So the campus, the teachers are excited about
17 their classrooms. They're excited about having a
18 dedicated space for related services. The offices in
19 the front of the building all have been maintained;
20 they've been updated. And there's also a, what do
21 you call it? The room wherever -- the meeting room.
22 The meeting room. So they're excited about that.
23 Apparently, when they were with the other school,
24 they did not have a meeting room -- a conference
25 room. So they're excited about that.

1 We also provide support. And I did poll the
2 teachers and the staff and also spoke with parents
3 during our Title I meeting about their thoughts as it
4 related to how we were doing so far as a district
5 taking over that campus and the parents were excited
6 -- extremely excited. We had the Title I meeting
7 where we had over 80 percent of the parents
8 participate and I was actually pleasantly surprised
9 because it was during lunchtime, so that that was
10 great. And they are -- I talked to them about some
11 of the proposed changes that we have coming down the
12 pipe and they were extremely excited.

13 We have -- the teachers who gave me feedback on
14 what they like most about being taken by -- taken
15 over by Friendship and one of the things they said is
16 the support that we provide them: professional
17 development, the content specialist, the whole
18 parental involvement piece.

19 Thank you, Mr. Young.

20 The new technology that we brought into the
21 schools. They have Promethean boards. All the kids
22 have brand new Chromebooks; the teachers have
23 laptops. So they have all the things that they need
24 to highly impact learning.

25 I talked a little bit about the designated

1 spaces already and they are working out very well.

2 So our amendment request is to change the grade
3 configuration at North Little Rock Elementary from
4 K-5 to K-3. That is going to increase our enrollment
5 in those early grades. And then since we're space
6 challenged, as I stated before, we have no -- we are
7 unable to put portables; we are unable to build any
8 additional learning spaces; so we're proposing to
9 move students to the Garland Elementary and Garland
10 Middle Campus. And again, we're turning that -- we
11 want to turn that school into an early learning
12 center to benefit the neighborhood.

13 There are several benefits to early learning
14 centers, and I did put that in my presentation. So I
15 hope that you all have it. I'll just name just a
16 couple. Improve school readiness, when we teach --
17 when we start working with those kids when they're
18 younger ages, when they get to middle school, then
19 those kids are already literate. So don't we have to
20 go -- we don't have to go back and try to hire
21 literacy coaches to teach kids who are in 5th and 6th
22 grade how to read because they've already learned.
23 And I've seen that with my own eyes at our downtown
24 campus. First day of school I went in, and those
25 kids were blending. I was astonished.

1 Parental support will be increased because
2 parents -- most parents are -- really, really provide
3 a lot of support to their kids when they're really
4 young. So we want to start that training. Then keep
5 it going. Just keep the flow all the way through
6 middle school. And then, of course, high school.

7 And then reduction in future crime and
8 delinquency. My students in the North Little Rock
9 area are in a high-crime area. The police are around
10 often. Not necessarily for our school or our
11 students, but they're around pretty often. So if we
12 can educate them, we can help change that whole area,
13 that whole populace.

14 So on our numbers, currently at the North Little
15 Rock campus, we have 125 students. So as you can see
16 is it's not a very large campus. What we're
17 proposing to do is move our current 3rd graders to
18 Friendship Little Rock Elementary as 4th graders.
19 And then the same for the other grade levels as they
20 matriculate up. Our current 5th graders will then go
21 to our Garland Middle Campus, which is on the same
22 grounds as the Garland Elementary School, so our kids
23 can ride the bus together. They'll arrive at the
24 North Little Rock campus which would be their home
25 base. They'll get on their -- they'll have

1 breakfast; they'll get on their bus; they'll go over
2 to the Little Rock campus; they'll receive all of
3 their instruction and lunch, of course; snacks for
4 their ride home -- ride back home; they'll ride back
5 and their parents will pick them up from our North
6 Little Rock campus.

7 So in closing, early learning centers in
8 high-priority neighborhoods are vital in creating
9 equitable opportunities. Our desire is to replicate
10 the success of our school in downtown Pine Bluff. In
11 Pine Bluff, the median income is actually \$39,411.00,
12 which is less than North Little Rock, and yet our
13 students are thriving. So we ask the Panel to
14 consider approving our request for our future
15 scholars, their lives die in our hands. Are there
16 any questions?

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

18 DR. SIMMONS: You're welcome.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Just a clarifying point just
20 to make sure that I understand correctly. You're not
21 asking for a cap increase for either of these
22 campuses?

23 DR. SIMMONS: We're not asking for what?

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: A cap increase -- enrollment

25 --

1 DR. SIMMONS: No, we're not. We are not. We're
2 not asking for any -- any associated costs.

3 Dr. Tran, do you want to speak?

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Questions? Mr. Scott.

5 MR. SCOTT: So -- a statement. What -- you
6 started off with the statement about the fact that
7 you're in good standing relative to there are no
8 findings and I want to commend you and the staff in
9 making that happen.

10 DR. SIMMONS: Thank you.

11 MR. SCOTT: It really wasn't an easy task on
12 behalf of all of us at ADE to -- DESE to go after and
13 work with you, but you did it. There was a deadline,
14 and so you are to be commended for that effort.

15 DR. SIMMONS: Thank you, sir.

16 MR. SCOTT: And my -- it's not necessarily a
17 concern, but better understanding the pathway of the
18 quote unquote older students that you're serving now,
19 I appreciate you sharing that pathway that current
20 3rd graders have a plan to continue to get educated
21 under your system?

22 DR. SIMMONS: Yes.

23 MR. SCOTT: But at a different campus?

24 DR. SIMMONS: That's correct.

25 MR. SCOTT: Same thing with the -- on the 4th,

1 5th grades, et cetera?

2 DR. SIMMONS: That's correct.

3 MR. SCOTT: So my question really rests with at
4 the end of the day it's the parents that are making a
5 decision to support that because they have a choice
6 to go to any school they would like. So share with
7 us your data or evidence that -- I believe you spoke
8 to the Title I meeting 80 percent of your parents
9 were attending that. That's awesome. But just a
10 little bit more clarity on the support of your
11 parents in making this change.

12 DR. SIMMONS: Okay. Well, we talked with the
13 parents, as I stated before, about the potential of
14 having our schools changed. The faculty and staff
15 are excited about it. Our parents, the ones who were
16 in attendance, are excited; and I wanted to wait and
17 send out a letter once we found out if it was going
18 to be approved to the others. And then, of course,
19 they'll have the option, but I -- I've got a very
20 strong feeling that they are going to be in support
21 because they want their kids at our schools. And
22 they realize that when they go in -- because they
23 have lots of parental engagement activities on the
24 campus, so they can see how full that building --
25 we're using every nook and every cranny. And the

1 parents are satisfied with the instruction that their
2 students are receiving from Friendship.

3 MR. SCOTT: Thank you.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Davis?

5 MR. DAVIS: Just a couple of things. First of
6 all, I am very appreciative of you mentioning
7 replicating the success in downtown Pine Bluff. And
8 so it's very nice to hear that there are learnings
9 that are happening at other places that you think are
10 viable and important. And then trying to take those
11 into other -- your other environments and build --
12 build on that. So I really appreciate you sort of
13 mentioning that. Just -- I think you've done a great
14 job of sort of explaining this, I just want to get
15 some clarity, what's the enrollment cap on the campus
16 right now?

17 DR. SIMMONS: The enrollment cap at -- Dr. Tran
18 you're going to have to help me out with that one.

19 MR. DAVIS: Roughly.

20 DR. SIMMONS: At North Little Rock?

21 MR. DAVIS: Roughly, yeah.

22 DR. TRAN: It's about 150.

23 MR. DAVIS: About 150?

24 DR. TRAN: Around that.

25 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

1 DR. TRAN: Yes.

2 MR. DAVIS: Okay. And does this now -- is there
3 currently -- I mean, do you expect that -- are you
4 currently full at 150?

5 DR. TRAN: No. At this moment, I -- we're not
6 full yet.

7 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

8 DR. TRAN: Yes, sir.

9 MR. DAVIS: What -- what is the current
10 enrollment?

11 DR. SIMMONS: We're at 125.

12 MR. DAVIS: 125. Okay. And do you feel
13 positive about the enrollment moving forward
14 considering this shift?

15 DR. TRAN: Yes. I mean, considering with
16 everything that we've done to downtown as well, being
17 that we shifted to a literacy science of reading
18 model, it actually helped out; and a lot of parents
19 felt that way. Because as you know, reading is
20 integral in everything.

21 MR. DAVIS: Yeah.

22 DR. TRAN: So at this moment in time, being that
23 school is where it's at, I think changing that to
24 that science of reading model allows us to do what we
25 need to do for kids as they matriculate to the next

1 grade level.

2 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. I love this -- this clear
3 focus on the literacy piece.

4 DR. TRAN: Yes, sir.

5 MR. DAVIS: At a very young age, we know that's
6 the direction that --

7 DR. TRAN: Yeah.

8 MR. DAVIS: -- you know, we --

9 DR. TRAN: In our downtown -- yeah. They've
10 showing great results. This year we -- we're the 2nd
11 grade; next year we are going to have the 3rd grade;
12 and so far, using the NWEA scores, the growth that
13 the students have from the day one that we received
14 them to now has been tremendous. And I think it
15 actually helps, I mean, focusing on that in itself
16 actually works. So --

17 MR. DAVIS: And give me -- give me an
18 understanding around how parents will be communicated
19 with, what they should think about, particularly
20 those that will be in the 4th and 5th grade.

21 DR. TRAN: Sure.

22 ME. DAVIS: So they're coming to one campus,
23 being bused to another.

24 DR. TRAN: Yes, sir.

25 MR. DAVIS: I'm just wondering what that looks

1 like in regards to communication --

2 DR. TRAN: Sure. I mean --

3 MR. DAVIS: -- for parents. If something
4 happens on that second campus, you know, I just want
5 to make sure parents are really clear about --

6 DR. TRAN: Yeah.

7 MR. DAVIS: -- where their student is.

8 DR. TRAN: I mean, we're going to have a parent
9 -- parental meeting right after this to let them
10 know; and those that choose to use the bus, we will
11 provide them with the time, the dates and routes
12 through, you know, parental meetings, through
13 ClassDojo as well. And then that way they can be
14 aware. I mean, we own our own buses. So we can go
15 ahead and route and provide the time and the distance
16 and all that to them so that they know what's to be
17 expected next year. But that's what we're going to
18 do next. It's going to be a parental meeting right
19 after this so that way they know. And, again, if
20 they want to go ahead and drive their -- the kids to
21 the school as well, that's also an option. But we
22 want to make it as seamless as possible without the
23 interruption that's why that bussing system is what
24 we're doing.

25 MR. DAVIS: Any idea on the additional time on

1 bus between one campus to the next?

2 DR. TRAN: I don't have that time at this moment
3 time, but being that, you know, North Little Rock and
4 Little Rock isn't that far apart, I would expect -- I
5 mean, I can't -- I can't quote you --

6 MR. DAVIS: Yeah.

7 DR. TRAN: -- a number at this moment in time,
8 but it's not going to be a long distance. And,
9 again, we can start at the school where parents drop
10 them off at the school, get them on the bus and then
11 just transport straight to the Little Rock campus.

12 MR. DAVIS: Okay. Fantastic.

13 MR. HARRIS: Joe Harris. Can I just underscore,
14 it's about 16 to 20 minutes --

15 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

16 MR. HARRIS: -- distance. Parents have already
17 responded favorably to the Friendship model when we
18 made the transition. We actually did this year a
19 pilot program where every Tuesday and Wednesday,
20 I believe, kids that have dyslexia have been going to
21 a specialized program at another school. The
22 response weight of parents having their kids picked
23 up at that site and going and participating in
24 programs at other Friendship school has been
25 phenomenal, and we expect that support to continue.

1 MR. DAVIS: Sure. Thanks a lot. No further
2 questions from me.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Just one question about the
4 bus rides since we're kind of --

5 DR. TRAN: Okay.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- on that topic. What kinds
7 of educational opportunities or instructional time
8 might happen on the bus ride over?

9 DR. TRAN: So we thought about that and that's
10 what we try to do down at our other schools too. We
11 think about actually implementing -- at this point of
12 time, they have like a router system, like, a Wi-Fi
13 system on the bus that actually -- you can put on the
14 bus and then we give kids either an iPad -- and then
15 that way they can do IXL; they can do other types of
16 learning while they're on the bus. And that's
17 something that we've been working with, but
18 originally, we wanted to go ahead and put the actual
19 screen on the back seat of the bus and then that way
20 it's not actually -- it's not on the student's lap,
21 but they can interact right in front of them. But
22 that's something that we have to look at in regards
23 to safety and show that we can actually modify the
24 seat. But that's what we thinking about. And, you
25 know, there's 20 minutes, there's 30 minutes it

1 actually makes up, especially in IXL, Lexia learning
2 all that great stuff. But -- yeah.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

4 Mr. Baldwin?

5 MR. BALDWIN: I had five questions. You all
6 have answered four of them and I just want to say
7 really good job. You've explained really well what
8 you are trying to accomplish. So the only -- the
9 only question I have left is really just to
10 clarifying question. The children that would be
11 bussed to the Little Rock School, how many kids will
12 that be and how -- what is the student cap at the
13 Little Rock school? Will you need to adjust that
14 cap, possibly?

15 DR. TRAN: So at this moment in time, it is
16 actually 13 students that are going to be bussed
17 over, sir. Yeah. And -- was that your question?

18 MR. BALDWIN: The cap of enrollment at the
19 Little Rock school?

20 DR. TRAN: Okay. The Little Rock school
21 district, the cap over there, including the middle
22 school, is about 600 students.

23 MR. BALDWIN: So you have plenty of room?

24 DR. TRAN: Yes, sir.

25 DR. SIMMONS: Plenty.

1 DR. TRAN: Yes, sir.

2 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. That's all I have.

3 DR. TRAN: Thank you.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Moore?

5 DR. MOORE: So thank you. And I reiterate what
6 others have said, great job on your presentation and
7 on your performance that you've been able to
8 document. I had several questions and you've
9 addressed many of them. A few that I've still had,
10 your -- the cost of this because cost of
11 transportation is quite expensive, not even including
12 if additional screens or technology were to be used,
13 but the cost to pay someone to drive the buses, the
14 cost of the gas. So what does that look like in
15 terms of the budget?

16 DR. TRAN: Sure. So the cost isn't
17 extraordinary being that we own our own buses. So at
18 the end of the day -- and plus we -- we have drivers
19 that we actually pay, so they're on staff anyway. So
20 at this moment in time, it isn't a -- an extra cost
21 that -- that extra cost might be gas, but the bus is
22 gas run. So it's not a diesel bus, it's a gas bus.
23 So -- and the distance between the two schools isn't
24 that great. So, I mean, it's not going to be a high
25 cost and it's within the budget. I mean, we -- at

1 Friendship, we operate within the guidelines, and we
2 are fiscally sound. We've calculated the cost well
3 -- well, we haven't calculated the actual cost, but
4 we calculated what it might cost and it's within our
5 budget.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. Because gas right now does
7 cost --

8 DR. TRAN: Yes.

9 DR. MOORE: -- quite a bit.

10 DR. TRAN: I know it's actually about
11 \$3-something, you know, per gallon. At the end of
12 the day, like Mr. Harris said before, we actually
13 utilize the program to drive to our Maumelle school
14 where the kids actually get dyslexia service for two
15 to three days a week; and at the end of the day,
16 that's still within reason. So being -- you know,
17 the distance, which is approximately the same amount
18 as the Little Rock campus, we don't foresee a huge
19 amount of money being spent there.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you. And then, just a
21 few more additional questions. So follow up
22 regarding the time on the bus, is that going to take
23 away from the instructional time of the day or are
24 you adding to the length of the school days?

25 DR. TRAN: So -- no. So we're going to actually

1 ask the parents to drop them off. Like, for example,
2 our school starts at 8:00, so we're going to ask the
3 parents to drop the students off at 7:15 -- about
4 7:15 given that time getting on the bus. And by the
5 time they get to -- they get served breakfast as
6 well. And by the time they get to the Little Rock
7 campus, it will be right on time for them to start
8 school.

9 DR. MOORE: So parents that might have a child
10 in 2nd grade and a child in 4th grade, they'll just
11 drop them both off that early?

12 DR. TRAN: Yes. We have early -- we have
13 morning -- we call it before care, so they can drop
14 before care as well; and then that way both students
15 can be dropped off at the same time; and then one can
16 go on the bus and then the other one can go to before
17 care at that school.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay. I apologize. I just had
19 several --

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: No, you're good.

21 DR. MOORE: -- questions.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: You're fine.

23 DR. MOORE: So additionally -- so right now when
24 you are just the K-5 structure, what is -- what's
25 your feeder? Like, who are you feeding into for

1 middle school?

2 DR. TRAN: North Little Rock.

3 DR. MOORE: North Little Rock. Okay.

4 DR. TRAN: Yeah. Or our Garland campus --
5 middle school if they choose to go to our Garland
6 campus middle school, but usually because it's in the
7 North Little Rock area, parents feed to the North
8 Little Rock School District.

9 DR. MOORE: Okay. And then you mentioned that
10 you're going to have a parent meeting coming up, but
11 that a few parents have been contacted. I'm just
12 wondering, thinking about former years as a parent
13 and the struggle of picking up a student for doctor's
14 appointments or if they were sick, have you had any
15 feedback at all or checked with parents on that yet?

16 DR. TRAN: Regarding that, I don't think we've
17 had anything. Most of the time when parents do have
18 doctor's appointments, they actually come pick up the
19 child or check them out. At this point in time, no
20 one has said anything regarding that. And again,
21 going back to the model where we actually take our
22 students to the dyslexia school, same thing that we
23 haven't had any issues. Actually, parents said that
24 they want to leave them there. They don't want to
25 take them back. But -- you know, because that's such

1 a great program. But at this moment in time, we
2 haven't had any -- any issues regarding that.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. Because I was just thinking
4 if it's -- you're describing a low-income area where
5 transportation may be a barrier if the student gets
6 sick in the middle of the day, that the parent may
7 really struggle to drive and pick them up. So I was
8 --

9 DR. TRAN: Yeah.

10 DR. MOORE: -- just wondering, like, how that
11 would work?

12 DR. TRAN: And if we need to, we're looking at a
13 van -- a 15-passenger van as well. If we need to,
14 then we can go ahead and transport that student back
15 to the North Little Rock campus and their parents can
16 pick them up there as well if that's the case.

17 DR. SIMMONS: In addition to that, we have
18 nurses on both campuses.

19 DR. TRAN: Yeah.

20 DR. TRAN: So we'll -- we'll be accommodating as
21 possible. We've got a lot of transportation --
22 different types of transportations that we can
23 utilize to ensure that that gets taken care of if the
24 need arises.

25 DR. MOORE: All right. Thank you.

1 DR. TRAN: Absolutely.

2 DR. SIMMONS: Thank you.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any other questions? Mr.
4 Scott.

5 MR. SCOTT: Yes.

6 I do have just one, right. From a strategic
7 standpoint, we appreciate what you're doing
8 tactically in regards to handling -- because of the
9 flood -- from a building perspective, strategically,
10 could you speak to your plans for a few years out?
11 Is there a plan strategically to -- to address a
12 facility to accommodate these middle school ages?

13 MR. HARRIS: Yes. Part of our strategy when we
14 talked to this body and we talked about absorbing the
15 Lighthouse, we'd always envisioned that school
16 remaining a elementary school -- elementary school
17 level. Right now, there are no direct plans to
18 expand on that property because of the issue of the
19 flood. I think everybody remembers that it actually
20 -- Lighthouse had to come back and amend their
21 charter because they had to eliminate the 6th and 8th
22 grade. So we envision strategically that that school
23 will remain a elementary school, focus on the lower
24 grades, at least for the next five years.

25 What we would like to do is begin to think

1 outside of the box and in my capacity as CEO, we're
2 looking at -- like so many other schools -- as how we
3 can really reinforce STEM into our technology. So
4 that school will not only be a school strategically
5 -- and we're thinking down the road -- we'll also
6 have a STEM focus, so it will be a innovative,
7 early-education model that will introduce kids to
8 technology beginning in kindergarten. That's why we
9 want to concentrate it on K-3, ensuring kids get
10 their fundamentals of reading, writing and math, but
11 also introduce STEM. And so over the years, you're
12 going to hear Friendship talk about how we're
13 infusing STEM into our curriculum. That school
14 itself is going to be one of the model schools for
15 STEM, how you use STEM in an early-education model.
16 So that's our strategic plan.

17 Facility-wise, we don't have any immediate plans
18 to expand out the building. It's -- if you don't
19 know, it's ten classrooms, one long hallway, one
20 single building. And behind that is the flood zone
21 and the play area. There is space in the front, in
22 the round kind of driveway area, but we don't have
23 any plans to expand that. In fact, we're going to
24 probably use the front of the school more for outdoor
25 classrooms and outdoor -- outdoor kind of learning.

1 That is the only kind of usable space right now on
2 the lot.

3 MR. SCOTT: Thank you. I was leveraging your
4 past experience and actually coming in and servicing
5 communities that are challenged and, in many cases,
6 whether or not it's Little Rock or Pine Bluff, you
7 come in and actually it does some wonderful things
8 for some of the facilities. So that's why there was
9 the genesis of the question thinking around what you
10 might be doing strategically.

11 My last comment is that because of your mission
12 to serve in those kind of communities, as you realize
13 successes, I'd encourage you continue to document
14 that, but also document your challenges as well --

15 MR. HARRIS: Okay.

16 MR. SCOTT: -- so that we have a better
17 understanding of how appropriate solutions could be
18 mapped.

19 MR. HARRIS: Okay. To your point, I would like
20 to submit to this body, as a supplemental, a -- pilot
21 report findings that we did on the kids at North
22 Little Rock and at Garland that we took over to the
23 Maumelle Friendship Aspire Lab School for dyslexia.
24 They went two days a week for what's called executive
25 functioning training. We didn't disrupt their

1 education. They actually got their core classes at
2 that school, but they also participated in executive
3 functioning program. The findings were phenomenal in
4 just the pilot program. Kids will continue at this
5 North Little Rock, as well as our Garland to
6 participate, in that kind of supplemental and
7 supportive program for kids that need additional
8 reading supports as well as those that have been
9 defined as having symptoms of dyslexia.

10 So we're trying to, you know, introduce and be a
11 community partner. We envision, you know, if parents
12 choose not to have their kids continue in the 4th and
13 5th grade in the Friendship model, that the kids that
14 go into 4th and 5th grade to the district schools or
15 other schools will be prepared to -- and be at grade
16 level and be exceptional students that will go to any
17 school in the area that parents choose. And we're
18 already seeing evidence of that in Pine Bluff, the
19 partnership school that we have with the library, our
20 K-3 school, those kids are thriving and are going to
21 shift kind of what it means to be a 4th and 5th
22 grader in education in the public school system. So
23 we're excited about that.

24 MR. SCOTT: Thank you.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I think the report would

1 be something this body would be interested in
2 reviewing, so if you would like to send that to Ms.
3 Summons, we -- we'd appreciate it.

4 MR. HARRIS: (Indiscernible)

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

6 Mr. Davis?

7 MR. DAVIS: Nothing.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any questions on this end?

9 DR. MOORE: I do have --

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

11 DR. MOORE: -- an additional clarifying --

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Moore.

13 DR. MOORE: -- question and you may have
14 addressed this. I apologize if I missed it. Just
15 thinking about -- so I get that your current students
16 that are in 3rd or 4th or 5th, how they're going to
17 be served. So if someone in the community who was
18 not already part of Friendship in North Little Rock,
19 if they had a student going into 4th grade this
20 coming year, could they come to you and apply to and
21 be part of your Charter and get that transportation
22 over to the other campus? Because I can see that,
23 "Oh, man. I really want my kid in here, but I can't
24 drive them over to Little Rock every day." Is --

25 DR. TRAN: Most definitely.

1 DR. MOORE: Okay.

2 DR. TRAN: Being open enrollment school, we get
3 that. So if a parent does come in, regardless if
4 it's 4th or 5th grade, that's most definitely an
5 option. We are not going to shut them out.

6 DR. SIMMONS: And we welcome it.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay. Great. Just transportation
8 is often the --

9 DR. TRAN: Most definitely.

10 DR. MOORE: -- challenge of Charters.

11 DR. TRAN: Most definitely.

12 DR. MOORE: So thank you.

13 I appreciate you addressing that.

14 DR. TRAN: No problem.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

16 Any final comments or questions?

17 All right. If not, I'll entertain the motion.

18 MR. DAVIS: I move that we support the request
19 to change the current grade levels at Friendship
20 Aspire North Little Rock from K-5 to grades K-3.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do I have a second?

22 DR. MOORE: I second the motion.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Motion from Mr. Davis and a
24 second from Dr Moore. All those in favor?

25 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? Any abstentions?

2 Motion passes.

3 Give us just a minute to fill out our voting
4 sheets.

5 DR. SIMMONS: Thank you.

6 Okay. We'll start with Dr. Moore.

7 DR. MOORE: I vote to approve Friendship
8 Aspire's request and amend the grade configuration at
9 their North Rock elementary campus from K-5 to K-3.
10 Their well thought out plan for providing alternative
11 options for students in grades 4 through 6
12 demonstrates that students will continue to be
13 served. I do recommend purposeful use of
14 transportation time to increase student learning.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin.

16 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. I voted to support the
17 Friendship Aspire amendment request to adjust grade
18 levels served between locations. I believe this
19 plan, as you all have created, is very creative,
20 better utilizes existing buildings and maintains the
21 integrity of the educational experience for children.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Davis.

23 MR. DAVIS: I voted for in order to expand on
24 the success of documented performance in the K-3
25 model of downtown Pine Bluff campus and a focus on --

1 and a focused approach to improve literacy for
2 students. I support the motion to change the campus
3 designation from K-5 to K-3.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Scott.

5 MR. SCOTT: I voted for the amendment request of
6 Friendship Aspire to change the grade levels served
7 at its North Little Rock campus from K-5 to K-3
8 because of the commitment to support and resources
9 for the academic success of children and families,
10 leveraging an increased interest in literacy and
11 STEM.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I voted for the amendment
13 to change the grade band from K-5 to K-3. This
14 strategic plan allows for innovative methodologies to
15 best serve students and prepare them for the future.

16 Congratulations. Thank you so much.

17 **III.3. eSTEM PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL**

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Summons.

19 MS. SUMMONS: Okay. The last school on our
20 agenda is eStem Public Charter School and they're
21 requesting to change the grade level served from
22 grade 7-9, which is considered junior high and grades
23 10-12, which is considered high school to grades 7
24 and 8, junior high, and grades 9-12, high school.
25 And we do have Ms. Forster here who will be speaking

1 on behalf of eStem.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Will all those who
3 plan on speaking on behalf of the Charter please
4 stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear that
5 the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the
6 whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

7 MS. FORSTER: I do.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. You may begin.

9 MS. FORSTER: Good morning. I'm Jessi Forster.
10 I'm the executive director of operations for eStem
11 Public Charter School. I feel like I was just here
12 with you guys.

13 eStem Public Charter Schools is requesting your
14 approval for the reconfiguration of our current
15 junior high campuses and our high school campus.
16 Currently, we have two junior high campuses:
17 downtown Junior High and East Village Junior High,
18 both serving students in Grade 7-9. Our high school
19 campus, eStem High School, currently serves students
20 in grades 10-12.

21 To best serve our students and families, we
22 would like to merge our junior high campuses to serve
23 all students in grade 7 and 8 at one location, the
24 current downtown junior high. This scenario will
25 allow our high school to serve students in grades

1 9-12. And to provide this opportunity for our 9th
2 grade students, the current East Village Junior High
3 Campus will become a freshman academy.

4 This restructuring would allow us to provide
5 unique opportunities for students that are specific
6 to their needs and development. It will also support
7 our students and schools to increase academic
8 achievement.

9 We will align more closely with the new
10 accountability framework, which will allow our
11 students growth and achievement scores to more
12 accurately represent our schools' letter grades and
13 success. This will also allow us to focus on that
14 transition to high school, providing a supportive
15 environment for freshman students to adjust to the
16 academic rigor, social dynamics and expectations of
17 high school.

18 We will be able to provide our freshman students
19 smaller classes to receive personalized attention
20 from teachers and staff. This will allow teachers to
21 build relationships with students in order to best
22 help them meet their needs which will increase their
23 engagement and success as they continue through high
24 school.

25 We will be able to tailor our curriculum and

1 course offerings, both at the junior high for our 7th
2 and 8th grade, and at our fresh our freshman academy
3 for our 9th graders. These ages of students have
4 specific needs, and by having a more focused
5 environment, we will be able to address those needs
6 whether it's in our course offerings, targeted
7 support and intervention, and in the development of
8 their social-emotional and foundational skills they
9 need to be successful in high school and beyond.

10 This restructuring also allows us to utilize our
11 staff and resources more effectively and responsibly.
12 By serving our 7th-9th graders across two campuses
13 like we do now, we're not utilizing our staff in the
14 most effective way possible. This change will allow
15 us to be fiscally responsible while meeting the needs
16 of our students.

17 In addition to the academic benefits and
18 opportunities, this restructuring will also support
19 student recruitment and retention. In our expansion,
20 we moved our 9th grade to our junior high campuses
21 which is different than the majority of districts in
22 this area. Over the last four years, we have lost an
23 average of 30 percent of our 8th grade students as
24 they prepare to move to 9th grade and would prefer to
25 be a part of a high school environment. Our freshman

1 academy will provide a unique environment and setting
2 for our 9th grade students that allows them to be a
3 part of high school while still addressing their
4 specific needs. We believe this will be a powerful
5 recruiting tool as well to offer ninth grade students
6 and families a setting that prepares them for success
7 as they continue their education.

8 We are excited about the innovative
9 opportunities that we will be able to provide both at
10 our downtown junior high and at our freshman academy,
11 programs that focus on the foundational skills needed
12 for students of this age, as well as positive
13 behavior, incentives, and systems that speak to these
14 students. These opportunities can be designed with
15 specific developmental needs for these age groups and
16 also increase the attendance and engagement for
17 students. We can provide early exposure to college
18 and career opportunities and introduce CTE pathways
19 at an earlier age to prepare students for whatever
20 path they choose. These courses and curriculum can
21 be focused on student interest and also introduce
22 them to new possibilities. With the importance of
23 service learning and the new requirements for
24 students, we'll be able to create meaningful service-
25 learning opportunities that will resonate with

1 students at each level and allow them to see the
2 importance of giving back to their community.

3 Finally, we can build upon our community
4 partnerships to help support the needs of our
5 families and provide experiences for our students.
6 We are excited about this proposed restructuring and
7 the opportunities for our students, our families and
8 our organization, and we request your approval to
9 move forward. Thank you.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

11 Mr. Scott, do you have any questions?

12 MR. SCOTT: So -- hi, Jessi.

13 MS. FORSTER: Hi.

14 MR. SCOTT: A current 8th grader, upon approval,
15 would now be facing high school. Help me understand
16 preparation for just the mindset of that 8th grader
17 that before thought they would stay in junior high
18 and now excited or challenged to face high school.
19 Help me understand that.

20 MS. FORSTER: Yeah. So I feel like this
21 restructuring provides kind of the best of both
22 worlds. We get a lot of feedback from 8th to 9th
23 grade students that they are ready to move on from
24 7th and 8th graders and to be a part of the high
25 school and be, you know, a little bit older and more

1 incentives and opportunities.

2 So I think that this freshman academy will not
3 only give them an experience that's different from
4 junior high, as they're ready to move on to high
5 school, but it will also allow us to put in some
6 programs that really build those foundational skills;
7 especially since our high school is on UALR's campus,
8 even though it is its own building there and they
9 don't necessarily have to have a lot of interaction;
10 but it does provide us with some opportunities to
11 prepare them for life when they get to that campus.

12 MR. SCOTT: Okay. Thank you. Just one other
13 question.

14 MS. FORSTER: Yeah.

15 MR. SCOTT: You mentioned community
16 partnerships. Could you help us understand how that
17 -- the landscape of the partners?

18 MS. FORSTER: Yeah, sure. So for example, we
19 have a partnership with, like, Rock Region METRO, and
20 we think that this will help us if there are any
21 transportation needs for families at different
22 campuses to help us provide ways for them that
23 doesn't inconvenience the parents. In addition, we
24 partner with some programs that provide not only
25 professional development for our teachers but help

1 them to understand trauma-informed practices and come
2 in and speak to students and provide those resources
3 to students who may have areas of need in that area.

4 MR. SCOTT: Thank you.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Davis?

6 MR. DAVIS: Is there an expectation that your
7 9th grade will grow or -- I know you mentioned being
8 smaller, more tailored. So is the thinking that the
9 number of 9th grade students served will remain the
10 same although they're on their own campus? This
11 allows them to have smaller classrooms, smaller
12 settings? Or do you expect that that 9th grade will
13 grow then funneling into your 10th through 12th?

14 MS. FORSTER: We -- right now, we have -- we're
15 losing, you know, 30 percent of those students. So
16 we're hoping to maintain --

17 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

18 MS. FORSTER: -- the students that we have and
19 there is a little bit of room for growth there, but
20 to continue to keep it in a smaller environment
21 there.

22 MR. DAVIS: Okay. And then, first of all, I
23 love the thinking around the transition point, such a
24 critical transition point, so I really like the
25 thinking there. Can you talk a little bit about --

1 you mentioned financial alignment and -- what are
2 some of the expectations in regards to the finances
3 or the shifting that you think you see either to help
4 save some money or invest in a better way, or, you
5 know, just we're going to have to think about these
6 three things or four things differently when it comes
7 to the financial impact.

8 MS. FORSTER: Right. So right now having both
9 of our junior high campuses and being able to
10 provide, you know, an equitable experience for both
11 sets of students, we're staffing about the same
12 amount of places; but with one school having about
13 100 students less, we aren't able to really maximize
14 that staffing. And so we feel that by combining the
15 7th and 8th grade we aren't losing a lot of our
16 staff, they'll move with them, but we'll be able to
17 maximize them there without -- with still having a
18 good student to teacher ratio. So that and then our
19 use of our facilities, we feel like that this will be
20 a better use of our East Village campus and provide
21 some opportunities for different therapists to be on
22 site in our schools and some different things like
23 that.

24 MR. DAVIS: Last question for me because I am
25 kind of enthralled around this idea of the 9th grade

1 academy or -- have you all started to have
2 conversations about, you know, what that -- what a
3 student leaving 9th grade should have or what a 9th
4 grade academy student should ensure, you know, the
5 type of student they are? You talked about the
6 service projects, you know, so there's just a lot
7 there that I think, you know, you may have already
8 developed. I would encourage you to continue to
9 develop that. I think from a community standpoint,
10 it builds a lot of belonging and I think it has some
11 really high -- I have some, you know, high
12 expectations, but I think it also can provide some
13 tremendous opportunity there. Have you all talked a
14 little bit about that?

15 MS. FORSTER: We have started having those
16 conversations. I think by this realignment, it will
17 allow our school leaders to be more a part of that
18 and so that our students are really getting that same
19 experience. So when they're leaving 8th grade, we
20 know what they need to come to this freshman Academy
21 and start to prepare and then our high school
22 teachers and leaders can be a -- really a part of the
23 planning of that process at the freshman academy to
24 know; and be assured that when they're leaving 9th
25 grade and they're about to step one to our high

1 school at UALR's campus, that it will be -- they'll
2 be ready whether it's, you know, social and emotional
3 skills, study skills, different things like that kind
4 of beyond just the books and academics that they'll
5 be ready. And we can really align that better in our
6 secondary campuses this way.

7 MR. DAVIS: Thank you.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

9 MR. BALDWIN: So really just two questions.

10 MS. FORSTER: Okay.

11 MR. BALDWIN: A lot of moving kids here it
12 sounds like with junior high going to one building,
13 so it would be students moving from a building to a
14 new building and then 9th graders becoming high
15 school students. And I know you all have thought a
16 lot about all this. And, you know, the plan makes
17 sense to me from the school perspective. Talk to us
18 a little bit about maybe the biggest challenges that
19 you all are looking at as it relates to the
20 experience of the child. So what are the two or
21 three things you all are going to make sure it
22 happens right for the kids?

23 MS. FORSTER: Right. So that relocation will be
24 a big opportunity and challenge, but with -- the
25 campuses that those students will be attending their

1 one to two miles away. So we think for parents who
2 maybe will have to drop a student off at three
3 campuses -- that doesn't affect very many parents as
4 we've looked at our families. But for those that do,
5 you know, looking at possible staggering of start
6 times and end times to accommodate that. And luckily
7 that they are so close together and won't prove a
8 huge obstacle for parents. That and then just in
9 staffing and really looking at what -- what we need
10 to be offering our 7th and 8th graders as far as
11 electives and different courses. And then what
12 really needs to be a part of that freshman academy to
13 prepare them for high school. So that we know
14 whether it's maybe they're getting computer science
15 at 9th grade and so we know when they're moving on to
16 10th through 12th, we have that requirement covered
17 and we can move on to kind of higher-level courses.
18 So aligning that vertically, I think is going to be
19 an opportunity and something that will really pull in
20 school leaders to help us think through. But a way
21 to meet those needs whereas now it's -- it hasn't
22 been as thought out, so we're hoping that that will
23 really solve that problem.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

25 Any other questions?

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(NO RESPONSE)

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Reynolds, do we have a quorum? Do we have a quorum?

MR. REYNOLDS: There are seven members; correct?

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh.

MR. REYNOLDS: And there are four are here.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yeah. So we're good? Okay. Just double checking with you.

MS. FORSTER: Thank goodness.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. So if there are no other questions, do I have a motion?

MR. BALDWIN: I'll make a motion to approve the amendment request as presented.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do I have a second?

MR. SCOTT: Second.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. I have a motion by Mr. Baldwin and a second Mr. Scott. All those in favor?

(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? Any abstentions? Motion passes. Give us just a minute to fill out our voting.

All right. We'll start with Mr. Baldwin.

MR. BALDWIN: Yes. Thank you. Yes. I voted in favor of the amendment request to consolidate

1 junior-high buildings from two to one and to include
2 9th grade students into the high school. I think
3 this change will streamline school operations and
4 improve efficiency and will also provide expanded
5 educational opportunities for students.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

7 Mr. Davis.

8 MR. DAVIS: I voted for in order to provide a
9 focus on high school transition, smaller classrooms
10 -- classes for freshmen, and the opportunity to
11 provide a tailored curriculum and support. I support
12 the motion to change the campus designations.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

14 Mr. Scott.

15 MR. SCOTT: I voted for the amendment request of
16 eStem academy to change its grade levels served
17 because of the impact it will have on increased
18 academic performance and career opportunities for
19 life success of their scholars.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then I voted for the
21 amendment to change the grade bands to 7, 8, 9 and
22 10-12. I believe the transition space that will
23 occur in the 9th grade academy will aid in retention
24 and student growth.

25 So Congratulations.

1 **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. If there is no new
3 business?

4 (NO RESPONSE)

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: If not, I'll entertain a
6 motion to adjourn.

7 MR. SCOTT: I motion to adjourn.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Do we have a
9 second?

10 MR. BALDWIN: I second.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. All those in
12 favor?

13 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

15 All right. We are adjourned.

16 (The agenda was concluded at 10:10 a.m.)

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