

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

AUGUST 15, 2023
1:02 P.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
MS. KARLI SARACINI, ADE Assistant Commissioner -
Educator Effectiveness and Licensure
DR. SONJA WRIGHT-McMURRAY, Associate Director -
Division of Career and Technical Education
MR. KIM DAVIS, Walton Family Foundation - Senior Advisor
MS. TOYCE NEWTON, Former State Board of Education Member
DR. TINA MOORE, Arkansas Department of Higher Education -
Director of Workforce Development

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

MS. SHASTADY WAGNER, DESE - Legal Counsel
MS. DORIE SUMMONS, DESE - Charter Schools Director
MR. TRIPP WALTER, APSRC - Staff Attorney

LOCATION:

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

I N D E X

	Page
Call to Order	3
Consent Agenda	3
1. Minutes	3
Action Agenda	4
1. Consideration of AMS Schools Arkansas Open Enrollment Charter School Application Request	4
Adjournment	66
Court Reporter's Certificate	67

P R O C E E D I N G S**I. CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. So good afternoon.
The August 15th, 2023, meeting of the Charter
Authorizing Panel is called to order.

Are we getting some feedback?

I'd like to welcome everyone to the Department
of Education and ask that you all please silence 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
into the microphone throughout your presentation for
the benefit of the Panel, this audience and the
viewing audience. The meeting is being live streamed
and recorded, and a transcript of the meeting will be
posted on the DESE website.

II. CONSENT AGENDA**II.1. MINUTES**

So we do have a consent agenda item today before
you. It's actually the minutes from last month's
meeting. If there are no questions, then I'd -- I'll
accept a motion to pass the consent agenda.

DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So moved.

MS. NEWTON: Second.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. All those in
2 favor?

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? All right. The
5 motion passes.

6 **III. ACTION AGENDA**

7 **III.1. CONSIDERATION OF AMS SCHOOLS ARKANSAS OPEN ENROLLMENT**
8 **CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION**

9 All right. I'll call Ms. Wagner.

10 MS. WAGNER: Good afternoon, Panel Members.
11 It's good to see you again. Shastady Wagner with ADE
12 legal. So I'm just going to give you guys our
13 general hearing procedures. So the charter will --
14 the Chair will swear in everybody who is testifying.
15 You can swear everybody in it once. The charter will
16 then get 20 minutes to present in their entirety.
17 The Chair can grant more time if you so choose. We
18 have not received any opposition, so after they
19 present their 20 minutes, I don't believe we have any
20 public comments either; is that right, Ms. Summons?
21 So we haven't received any public comments after they
22 present for their time, we can then begin our
23 deliberations and discussions.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

25 MS. WAGNER: All right.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Ms. Summons.

2 MS. SUMMONS: Dorie Summons, Charter Office.

3 AMS Schools of Arkansas has submitted an application
4 to establish an open enrollment charter school
5 beginning in '24 -- the school year of 2024-2025
6 academic school year. The charter will follow a
7 traditional and college prep educational model, and
8 we do have a team of speakers here from AMS.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLINE: All right. Thank you. All
10 those who plan to testify would you stand and raise
11 your right hand. Do you promise to tell the truth,
12 the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

13 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

15 MR. GREENBURG: Dr. Sutherlin, members of the
16 Authorizing Panel, my name is Erik Greenberg. I'm
17 the CEO for the Academies of Math and Science. On
18 behalf of my team with us today, I want to thank you
19 for the time that we have to introduce you to the
20 Academy of Math and Science; and chat a little bit
21 about our program and our intent in coming to the
22 great state of Arkansas and serve the communities in
23 Little Rock.

24 Our agenda today -- going to spend a couple of
25 moments talking about the history, the vision and the

1 impact of the Academies of Math and Science, go in
2 and talk about our program here in Arkansas and how
3 we plan to serve the -- the communities in Little
4 Rock and then open to any Q and A that you all might
5 have.

6 I want to quickly introduce the team that we
7 have with us today. Mr. Nate Lowry, who is our chief
8 academic officer. Ms. Kate Bracher, who will be our
9 executive director for AMS Arkansas. Mr. Steven
10 Hykes serves as our chief financial and growth
11 officer. Ms. Brandi Adams is our chief operating
12 officer. Mr. Robert Biggs is our chief information
13 officer. Mr. Zach Larison, who is our chief of
14 staff. And joining us today is Mr. Terry Warren, who
15 serves as the Academy of Math and Science nonprofit
16 attorney.

17 Real quick, I want to -- want to walk you
18 through the history of the Academies of Math and
19 Science. The founder, Ms. Tatyana Chayka, immigrated
20 to the United States in Tucson, Arizona, back in
21 2000. Working multiple jobs, trying to make ends
22 meet, her desire was to enroll her son in a high-
23 quality school that served -- that taught a lot of
24 sciences and math being a math teacher from her
25 native country. In addition to that, she didn't have

1 enough money to teach him guitar, get him enrolled in
2 arts, and so her desire was to build a school that
3 focused on sciences -- on math, but also allowed all
4 students to receive music instruction, have all
5 access to arts, etc.

6 So in 2002, she started the Academy of Math and
7 Science with 30 kids; and had a successful start of
8 the of the school year; and realized very quickly
9 that it was very expensive to operate a program
10 offering all those things free of charge to those
11 families in need. So serendipitously, through a
12 visit by Ms. Cathy Lund from the Walton Foundation --
13 visited the Academy of Math and Science, bought into
14 the mission that Ms. Chayka had for the school and
15 unfortunately Ms. Chayka had to communicate that she
16 could no longer keep the school running because of
17 the cost. Ms. Lund told her, do not close the
18 school. Keep it going. Today, because of that, the
19 Academy of Math and Science has served over 30,000
20 students and their families since 2002.

21 On behalf of our 900 staff members who
22 passionately serve a little over 8,500 students
23 across nine campuses in Phoenix and Tucson, our
24 mission is very clear. It is through a well-rounded
25 education to transform today's scholars into

1 tomorrow's global visionaries. We are very
2 passionate and very driven by our mission to serve
3 high FRL communities.

4 This is one of the main reasons why we are very,
5 very excited and very passionate about serving the
6 communities in Little Rock. We seek expansion in
7 areas that have a lot of need, who we feel are under
8 underserved, whose families and communities deserve a
9 high level of education. We are extremely proud as
10 we've gone through these past six to eight months of
11 getting to know various community members in
12 Arkansas, getting to know the education system, but
13 most importantly, getting to know the families and
14 the need in the communities. We're extremely excited
15 and very proud to come to the state of Arkansas and
16 serve -- serve these families. Sorry, I keep hitting
17 the wrong one.

18 Our vision is very simple and clear. It's to
19 provide the best education and the best environment.
20 We are driven by three specific values and that's:
21 do whatever it takes, act with honor and be
22 vulnerable, candid and kind. We promote these
23 amongst all of our staff members who then promote
24 them across all of our student base as we believe
25 these three values can help lead to consistent growth

1 and improvement across all of our schools.

2 We have three very specific objectives and that
3 is to operate A-rated schools, having a data-driven
4 approach to close academic gaps. We want to be fully
5 enrolled and fully staffed. It is important for
6 schools to be healthy schools, but also to have fully
7 staffed schools to provide all the amenities and
8 services to our students. And then our focus is
9 growth and development both of our students -- of the
10 learners -- of our families with our community-based
11 approach as well as all of our staff members that
12 focus on learning growth and development.

13 I'd like to introduce Mr. Nate Lowry who's going
14 to walk through a few of our results over the past
15 couple of years.

16 MR. LOWRY: Good afternoon, everyone. As Erik
17 said, my name is Nate Lowry, and I am proud to serve
18 as AMS' chief academic officer. I wanted to just
19 talk -- I'll walk you through this slide that has
20 lots of data. I know we're all educators, so we love
21 looking at data.

22 I'm actually going to start at the bottom. So
23 you'll see there these are results from the AASA,
24 which is the Arizona Academic Standards Assessment;
25 and at the bottom, it tells you the number of raw

1 points that campuses need to earn an A, B, C, etc.
2 Looking up at the top of the chart, you'll see those
3 are our nine campuses. We have seven schools in
4 Phoenix, two in Tucson, and in the second column
5 you'll see how our schools performed two years ago,
6 so 2021-2022, and right next to that, you'll see the
7 number of points that we were awarded for last year's
8 academic data.

9 So the state just released the points that we
10 were able to earn based on our student achievement
11 results. And we're really proud just to show you
12 that in our first year -- many of us, this is our
13 first year on this team -- we saw increases at every
14 single one of our campuses for an average gain of
15 just over eight percentage points. You'll see the
16 last year's letter grade -- the 2021-2022: we had
17 two A campuses, a couple of C campuses, many B
18 campuses. The final column there is what our
19 projected letter grade from the state of Arizona is.
20 They have not released those yet, but if they keep
21 the cut scores the same, we anticipate having all A
22 and B campuses.

23 So really, really proud to say that we are the
24 highest performing, largest charter school in the
25 state serving over 75 percent free and reduced lunch

1 for our kiddos. And when I think about some of the
2 ingredients in our secret sauce, I think the most
3 important thing we did is what Erik talked about, we
4 obsess over data at the network level, at the campus
5 level, even in the classroom. We really look at data
6 to drive our instruction. We place a premium on our
7 people, so this past year we created a talent
8 development department to make sure that every single
9 person is successful in their job, not after one year
10 or two years, but the moment that they step into that
11 classroom or step onto that campus. And then
12 finally, we made sure that all of our curriculum
13 products are aligned to state standards and not the
14 other way around which is what we plan to do here in
15 Arkansas.

16 And then this last slide there just shows you
17 the overall percent passing. This is all students,
18 all tests across our schools and again, just really
19 proud to share that we saw increases across every
20 single one of them. We're not there yet. We know
21 the best education, the best environment means every
22 single one of our kids is passing every one of their
23 exams, but really, really grateful and proud of the
24 team for the improvement that we were able to show in
25 just one year.

1 And with that, I would like to turn it over to
2 Ms. Kate Bracher.

3 MS. BRACHER: Hi everyone, Kate Bracher,
4 executive director for AMS Arkansas. So given our
5 commitment to building exemplary schools in
6 low-income neighborhoods, we are proposing that our
7 first school in Arkansas be in Southwest Little Rock,
8 so we can be uniquely positioned to serve the John
9 Barrow, Windamere, Oak Forest and Terrytown
10 neighborhoods, specifically.

11 Based on our research, we know that between 75
12 and 90 percent of students living in these
13 communities currently are eligible for free and
14 reduced-price lunch. We also know that within our
15 ten-minute-drive-time boundary, an estimated 69
16 percent of students currently attend a D or F rated
17 school. The first AMS school in Arkansas in Little
18 Rock would be able to serve up to 600 K --
19 kindergarten through 8th grade students. And we
20 would hope to be able to serve many more in the years
21 to come.

22 This brings me to talk a little bit about the
23 AMS Little Rock model. Everything that we do is
24 centered around generating and sustaining
25 transformational outcomes for our students. Ensuring

1 that they have the tools and the resources that they
2 need to build and design and ultimately achieve their
3 wildest dreams. Our team of experienced educators
4 know that adult actions and mindsets often create the
5 enabling conditions and systems for this kind of
6 transformational change to be possible. And so we
7 have championed an impact model that you see on this
8 slide that is really focused on building and
9 developing empowered students who have effective
10 educators every single year who are then sustained
11 and supported by an invested community of partners
12 and families.

13 To drill down one layer below that, we have five
14 pillars on this slide that we believe are essential
15 to our model. First and foremost, creating a
16 student-centered culture. For us what that means is
17 fostering a culture of high expectations driven by
18 core values. Creating a warm, inviting environment
19 so that our kids feel an authentic sense of belonging
20 every single morning that they walk through our
21 doors.

22 We also believe in designing instructional
23 routines that place an emphasis on deliberate
24 practice, a high ratio of student voice and
25 discussion, constantly communicated rationale for why

1 they are learning and what they are learning as well
2 as collaborative projects to -- that focus on real
3 world application. Our emphasis on inquiry and
4 visible learning is achieved through applying a lens
5 of scientific investigation across every single
6 content area through essential questions in our units
7 coupled with the practice -- practice of constantly
8 providing our students immediate feedback that will
9 support the revision of their thinking and their work
10 products to mastery.

11 Another golden thread throughout all of our
12 contents is really honing in on the skill of
13 elegantly using evidence to substantiate claims which
14 we know is really going to prepare them for the --
15 the real world beyond. We are deeply committed also
16 to using high quality evidence-based curriculum and
17 materials to support alignment and rigor in student
18 learning and teacher internalization. And we are
19 ready to learn absolutely everything that we can
20 about the Arkansas state standards over the coming
21 year to make sure that we can execute them at the
22 highest level, especially given the ATLAS Assessments
23 that are coming this spring.

24 Fourth, at AMS our educators receive weekly
25 observations and immediate actionable feedback always

1 based in data and aligned to our standards for leader
2 effectiveness and teacher effectiveness so that we're
3 constantly measuring and monitoring progress against
4 that high standard that we have developed.

5 Last but not least, we truly view ourselves as
6 community schools prioritizing organization,
7 proactive communication and authentic opportunities
8 to collaborate inside of our school community. We
9 base our offerings directly on community needs. One
10 example of this being high quality before and after
11 school care that really is integrated into our
12 program and also can serve that need that families
13 have. Woven together, these components allow us to
14 create new pathways of opportunities for our students
15 and families, and we're so excited to bring this
16 mission to life in Arkansas.

17 And with that, I will turn it over to Steven
18 Hykes.

19 MR. HYKES: So in the back of your handouts, you
20 will see a juxtaposition of what the current site
21 looks like and what we hope it can become. For those
22 of you who are not familiar with this part of town,
23 this will be a state-of-the-art facility to replace
24 the facility that has been there since the 70s. This
25 is a transformation for that community and investing

1 in that community an educational facility that they
2 have not seen before and that will motivate them to
3 come to school and be a part of this AMS community.

4 We have a purchase agreement in place for the
5 former David O'Dodd Elementary School that's on sale
6 by the Little Rock School District pending closing --
7 pending the charter. There are site improvements to
8 this, including a new ground-up facility that will
9 include an indoor sports field with a performance
10 stage, seven brand new classrooms, a full-length
11 outdoor soccer field and a brand-new place --
12 facility for K-3. Our break-even student enrollment
13 for this model is 300 students. Previously, this
14 campus served 253 students in the K-5 space. We will
15 be serving the K-8 space. And the building is to be
16 owned by a nonprofit support organization that will
17 be funded through a public bond issuance which will
18 have no obligation to the school or the state in the
19 event that the charter is not renewed, or the school
20 is not able to continue at some point in the future.

21 On this next slide, just showing the history of
22 AMS Arizona, our historical and projected financials,
23 which I think is important to showcase a couple of
24 items. One, that we are good stewards of public
25 funds, that we understand that a school that is --

1 does not have excellent financials is not
2 sustainable. You can see today's cash on hand that
3 has continued to build over time as well as the cash
4 that's continued to build over time. But this also
5 shows the support that is behind AMS Arkansas in the
6 short term, should there -- we not meet those 300
7 student projections.

8 In conclusion, these are just some of the
9 thousands of students whose lives have been affected
10 and impacted by the education they received in AMS
11 Arizona. They serve as the foundation, along with
12 the 20-plus years we've been doing educational work,
13 to allow us to look outside the state of Arizona to
14 serve additional communities. We have assembled a
15 team of highly accomplished educators and subject
16 matter experts who are passionate about education and
17 ready to support Kate as she starts a new chapter in
18 the AMS story. That first page is Little Rock. So
19 we are excited today about the opportunity to come
20 alongside the state of Arkansas and the Department of
21 Education to enhance the educational opportunities
22 for families in Little Rock and across the state of
23 Arkansas. Thank you.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Ms. Wagner.

25 MS. WAGNER: All right. With that conclusion, I

1 think we will move straight into the legal review if
2 that is good with all of you? All right. Perfect.
3 So if you will pull that legal review up.

4 Tripp do you want to come up here?

5 MR. WALTER: Sure.

6 MS. WAGNER: Okay. So you will notice -- I'll
7 go through these one by one. So on the first one,
8 acquisitions of commodities, I didn't have any legal
9 concerns. They fully effectuated that. If you -- do
10 you have any questions about that one?

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any questions?

12 MS. WAGNER: Okay. Alternative learning
13 environment, they have fully effectuated that waiver
14 and I had no concerns about that. It's going to go
15 really fast.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

17 MS. WAGNER: For board of directors, everything
18 was good. I had no concerns about that. Was there
19 anything to add to board of directors? We're good.

20 MR. WALTER: Yeah.

21 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any question? Okay.

23 MS. WAGNER: Okay. For class size and teaching
24 load, they fully effectuated for the standard and the
25 rules and plan to compensate their teachers if they

1 go over is my understanding; correct? Perfect. Any
2 questions?

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I just -- I have a question
4 about -- looking at the lower-level grades, what
5 support will be provided? And I know -- I think it
6 said one to, like, one to 100 -- they would have a
7 paraprofessional?

8 MS. WAGNER: I will let the charter answer that
9 -- or the applicant --

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yeah.

11 MS. WAGNER: -- answer that rather.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yeah.

13 MR. HYKES: So as far as the support on the
14 lower grade levels, we tend to run a one-to-one ratio
15 for kinder --

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh.

17 MR. HYKES: -- depending on the class sizes and
18 then the ratio goes up from there. So it will the
19 model will depend on the number of students fully
20 enrolled. But yes, to start we have a one to 100 and
21 it would go down from there. But most of that
22 support going to kinder and this -- lower grade
23 levels.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Thank you.

25 MS. WAGNER: Any other questions? All right.

1 Number five is classified employee minimum salary. I
2 had no legal concerns. Number six is flag display.
3 I also had no legal concerns. Seven, gifted and
4 talented, no legal concerns.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any questions about any of
6 those?

7 MS. WAGNER: All right. Number eight,
8 instructional materials, no legal concerns. Number
9 nine was leased academic facilities, legal concerns.
10 Number ten is library media specialist. No legal
11 concerns. Eleven, personnel policies, duty-free
12 lunch period, no legal concerns. Number 12 is daily
13 planning period. Also, no legal concerns. And No.
14 13 non-instructional duties, no legal concerns. Any
15 questions on any of those? Okay.
16 14 through 22 are also all personnel policies and I
17 had no legal concerns about any of them with the
18 caveat being on the website posting, the charter is
19 aware that it will have to have a salary schedule.
20 All right. Number 23 is principal, and I had no
21 legal concerns. Twenty-four is superintendent and
22 again, no legal concerns. Twenty-five is school
23 counselor and it's just that one standard, no legal
24 concerns.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So on that one is that -- is

1 that the ratio?

2 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So --

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I -- sorry.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Go ahead. Go ahead.

6 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I -- so looking at the
7 responses and that is provided -- or rationale
8 provided for the waiver, I would like a little bit
9 more explanation from the applicant on the ratio that
10 they have identified. And I -- and I know you kept
11 looking, but I was trying to flip through my notes
12 and you guys were going really fast, so some of my
13 other questions may come up during the question
14 section. But that's one that I know that I would
15 like a little bit more explanation on at this point.

16 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

17 MS. BRACHER: So for the counseling program
18 specifically, the way that we defended the ratio that
19 you see there is, we really just leveraged current
20 research on effectiveness to be able to support that
21 as well as the experience that this team has
22 operating with a similar ratio in Arizona. Given the
23 counseling program specifically, though, did want to
24 make sure that we noted that we are not waiving the
25 certification requirement for our counselors.

1 We're also not waiving the comprehensive
2 counseling program itself, so we fully intend to
3 execute on every single aspect of that program making
4 sure that the counselor that we have on-site, in
5 person, every day devotes the majority of their time
6 to direct student services. And then, of course, as
7 our school grows, if we realize that that ratio is
8 not effective or is not working, we are willing to
9 hire a second counselor as well. I will turn it over
10 to Nate.

11 MR. WALTER: Do you mind if I --

12 MS. BRACHER: Of course. Of course.

13 MR. WALTER: Good afternoon. Tripp Walter,
14 staff attorney, Arkansas Public School Resource
15 Center. I just wanted to add a couple points as to
16 what was not requested as a waiver. So you'll notice
17 that there was no counselor licensure waiver asked
18 for so there will be a fully licensed counselor -- or
19 counselors -- in place and also the full
20 comprehensive school counseling plan will be
21 administered by the school.

22 DR. MOORE: So regarding that same topic, were
23 you able to read the feedback -- our internal
24 feedback -- from our counseling office at the
25 Division of Elementary and Secondary Education that

1 cited specific quotes from the articles that you
2 provided that speak to the detriment of increased
3 ratios?

4 MS. BRACHER: Yes, we did. We also -- given the
5 research that we were able to use and the discourse
6 that we were able to engage in just responding to
7 that feedback, we definitely kind of assert -- we
8 assert and acknowledge that a lower ratio is always
9 going to be more effective for student services.
10 However, we are -- we have every confidence in our
11 ability to execute this comprehensive counseling
12 program at the ratio cited and are willing to adjust
13 and pivot as needed just to prioritize student needs.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Any other
15 questions on that one?

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I -- I have a couple, but
17 we can just move forward with the rest of the waivers
18 --

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- then I'll go back to
21 that question.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. All right. Thank you.

23 MS. BRACHER: Thank you.

24 MS. WAGNER: Okay. The next one up is teacher
25 licensure and I have no legal concerns. And then the

1 last one is transportation; and I have no legal
2 concerns with that one either. They have stated that
3 they will provide, of course -- if an IP requires
4 transportation, it will be provided. So I have no
5 legal concerns about any of that.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

7 MS. WAGNER: So I will turn it over to the
8 charter.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
10 much. Do we have some questions from anyone on the
11 Panel?

12 DR. BALDWIN: Just go down?

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yeah.

14 DR. MOORE: I have further questions about the
15 class size. I -- I feel like you addressed maybe the
16 teaching load part, but as far as the class size in
17 the early grades, could you speak more to that
18 because I have concerns with kindergarten classes
19 that have 30 or more students.

20 MR. HYKES: Yes. So as far as class size, we
21 did ask for a maximum of 30 which is actually a
22 departure from our Arizona model which is 34 to 36
23 students K-8 consistently. So in terms of that
24 waiver, we are feeling like we know it is a higher
25 number than the state of Arkansas has on the books

1 and what you all are used to, but we also know that
2 we're coming down from the size that we're used to
3 and not changing the program there.

4 So we are asking for 30. There may be less than
5 that depending on who enrolls. But we think with the
6 paraprofessional support as well as the professional
7 development that we give teachers to meet that class
8 size, we feel that our academic results that we
9 presented today were achieved using that same class
10 size and we feel like with similar deficits
11 educationally. So we feel that -- that is important
12 to us to be able to serve as many community -- people
13 in the community as possible, and we also feel that
14 limiting that class size to a lower number that's
15 currently the standard prohibits as many folks in the
16 community from joining the school as possible.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Moore, did you have any
18 other questions?

19 DR. MOORE: I will just mention with the -- math
20 and science being in the title, I didn't see a lot of
21 explicit attention to how math and science would be
22 taught differently, more aggressively than in a
23 regular school.

24 MS. BRACHER: Yeah. I can absolutely respond to
25 that. So with the model that we have components of

1 mathematics and science are woven throughout thinking
2 about our lens of scientific investigation and focus
3 on, you know, evidence substantiating claims. All of
4 those components we weave into every single content
5 that we have regardless -- regardless of the subject
6 matter.

7 And so it really is the spirit of ensuring that
8 our students are prepared for, you know, the next
9 generation of jobs; and making sure that in addition
10 to comprehensively offering English and social
11 studies and arts and all of the things that are
12 critically important to the development of students
13 that we really emphasize microelectives that allow
14 for coding opportunities or some more of those
15 technical skills that we know our students are going
16 to need. So that's driven kind of the focus that
17 we've embedded there, but I'll -- I will turn it over
18 to Nate for just a little bit of extra.

19 MR. LOWRY: Yeah. Thank you for that question.
20 So in addition to having computer science, a lot of
21 our after-school clubs are geared towards the STEM
22 sort of field. So think engineering, think
23 mathematics, but you'll also see you in your
24 resources, you have kind of a day in the life of a
25 scholar, and we added increased instructional time to

1 both math and reading.

2 One, because we know that teachers don't have
3 time a lot of times to teach both the fundamental
4 skills that kids need as well as the conceptual
5 understanding. But then in addition to that, every
6 day kids have time in what we call G.A.M.E which
7 stands for goals are my everything and that is where
8 the kids are going to the classes where they
9 specifically need additional help or additional
10 enrichment for kids who are already at or above grade
11 level. And that time typically will focus on reading
12 for kids who are way behind in reading and then math
13 and science for kids who are getting that sort of
14 enrichment piece. Appreciate the question though.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

16 MS. NEWTON: I have a question. Other than the
17 public meeting, what tools or approaches have you
18 used to assess the potential population for the
19 campus in this -- AMS?

20 MS. BRACHER: Sure. I'll start from my
21 perspective and then we'll also bring in any team
22 members who were involved much earlier than I was.
23 For my own role being the executive director of AMS
24 Arkansas, you know, as soon as I had the honor of
25 stepping into this role, I personally moved myself

1 and my family to Little Rock. I've been here for
2 about two months so far.

3 But my goal in doing that and to also address
4 your question is to really start building strong
5 community partnerships and relationships within the
6 Little Rock community to ensure that, you know, upon
7 hopeful, successful authorization, we have some
8 networks in place to be able to leverage and be able
9 to use. And a big part of that has been entrenching
10 myself into this community and speaking with
11 perspective families and community members just on
12 what their hopes and dreams are for their kids; and
13 for what they want; and their ideal school, just to
14 better understand that.

15 So from my perspective, step one was really
16 getting here to Little Rock and ensuring that I was
17 devoting the appropriate time and space to getting to
18 know the community. I will turn it over to anyone
19 from our team who wants to speak a little bit about
20 what came before.

21 MR. LOWRY: Yeah. I would agree with everything
22 Kate said and then just want to really share our
23 point of view is that our academic model really
24 should be the same everywhere. Obviously, we'll
25 adapt our standards, but the quadratic formula in

1 Arkansas is the same quadratic formula in Arizona,
2 but the look and feel of a school really should
3 reflect the different needs of the community. And
4 that's something we want to partner with community
5 leaders and parents and guardians on because the
6 culture should reflect the area that we -- that we
7 want to serve.

8 Of our nine schools now, many of them look
9 different. Our kids are all going in the same
10 direction. We want them to be college and/or career
11 ready, but in terms of like the culture and how we
12 want the school to feel, that's something we're
13 definitely engaging with stakeholders as we move
14 through the process.

15 If anybody wants to add anything?

16 MR. LOWRY: The last thing I would just add
17 there, Kate talked about it, the genesis of why
18 coming to Arkansas or Little Rock. Prior to the
19 pandemic, we knew that there was educational needs
20 across the nation that we felt that we could serve
21 because our mission is different than a lot of
22 charter organizations where we specifically focus on
23 those high FRL populations; and we specifically focus
24 on those areas where there is not great school
25 choice.

1 So from that we start -- when the pandemic
2 happened as everybody did, kind of re-pivoted and
3 looked internally to see how we make sure we still
4 served our students in Arizona. As we've come out of
5 that pandemic, we repositioned our look across the
6 national landscape. We looked at over 20 different
7 states and communities to understand the challenges
8 they would face. And we kept coming back to Arkansas
9 and, specifically, Little Rock in that we felt what
10 was the -- what was the need? We showed it on the
11 slide that over -- close to 70 percent of students in
12 this high FRL area were in D and F rated schools.
13 They did not have school choice. That choice was
14 forced upon them to attend these D and F rated
15 schools, so we knew that there is demand for an
16 A-rated education.

17 In addition to that, as we met with folks from
18 Arkansas and, specifically, Little Rock, we just saw
19 the passion that was there to not be the status quo.
20 Coming from Arizona we should be looking up at
21 Arkansas in some ways. You all are in the -- in the
22 middle of the pack educationally, but you're not
23 where you wanted to be, and we saw an opportunity to
24 come alongside and partner with that.

25 We've met no resistance to that as Kate --

1 everyone we've met in this community from folks we've
2 partnered with to design the school, to build the
3 school, to market the school, anyone we talked to is
4 excited about this opportunity for the specific
5 communities in the areas we're serving and that we're
6 not just coming in to just be another school to water
7 down a product, we are here to change that
8 educational landscape in Little Rock. And thus far
9 we've -- we've seen nothing but support to do that.

10 MR. WALTER: Tripp Walter, APSRC. I just wanted
11 to kind of piggyback a little on that -- on the
12 community piece and emphasize the importance of
13 community. This is something that there's been no
14 pushback on. You notice the Little Rock School
15 District is not here today in opposition. As far as
16 I know, has not submitted anything. The -- AMS, as
17 they mentioned, is in the purchase of -- the process
18 of purchasing the building from Little Rock School
19 District. Being able to provide a continuity of
20 educational services in that community -- so I think
21 those are additional points to speak as to how
22 community minded and community oriented and how much
23 they want to be here and serve that portion of the
24 Little Rock area with their educational model.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So circling back

1 around to my previous question about the school
2 counseling ratio. So I -- I do appreciate that there
3 was not a request to waive the certification for
4 that, but thinking about the population that you have
5 described in your application that you are intending
6 to serve -- and typically those students will have
7 greater need versus less -- so I would like a little
8 bit more explanation on the rationale for the higher
9 ratio. And -- unless I'm not reading it correctly?
10 I've been trying to wrap my mind around it and I'm
11 having a bit of a struggle why we feel as if -- that
12 600 to one would be reasonable for this population of
13 students.

14 MR. HYKES: So as Kate alluded to as well, we
15 know that the research we provided does state in
16 there that 600 -- we feel that we can still
17 adequately serve that population. That is also based
18 on our experience in Arizona. But we also recognize
19 that if we were to come down to that lower ratio
20 which is required with our 600-student cap, we'd be
21 well below that 450. So it is our intention as we
22 grow as we get more economies and more efficient,
23 that we're nearing in that 450 ratio which we think
24 -- we agree with, as Kate mentioned, the lower ratio
25 over time is better, but for the outset of the school

1 -- we do have a ratio of one to 600 in Arizona. We
2 do see success with that with the other supports we
3 put in place. And we do think that that one to 450
4 would serve as a as a barrier to our students as a
5 whole at the outset of launching this school. And I
6 know Nate has some more color on this.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And also, as you're
8 transitioning to the other presenter, could you
9 provide a little bit more detail on what that
10 comprehensive plan looks like? How is it implemented
11 in your schools now? Are there other staff members
12 that are involved in this process? If I could have a
13 little more detail there, that would be helpful also.

14 MR. LOWRY: For sure. And then Kate might have
15 some things to add. So what you'll notice in the --
16 the day of the life of is every day our kids
17 participate in morning meeting. There's a curriculum
18 that we use called CharacterStrong. It's research
19 based. We think of it as the sort of the tier one
20 intervention for kids who otherwise wouldn't have the
21 social skills to deal with some of the things that
22 that you're mentioning. Obviously, that doesn't work
23 for everyone, but it is something that is -- every
24 kid gets that every single day. We chose that
25 because it is research based for Title I schools and

1 it's quite frankly an easier lift on teachers. It
2 doesn't involve a lot of extra sort of planning
3 things because we don't want to put that on folks.

4 In terms of the comprehensive support plan for
5 students, we follow the MTSS process just like we do
6 for special education. And what our counselors
7 ultimately try to do is move kids off of their
8 caseload. They want to reduce the amount of time
9 that they're seeing that counselor if they're able
10 to. It doesn't always happen, but if they're able to
11 because they're giving those kids the additional
12 skills and coping mechanisms to really help them
13 become better versions of themselves despite what
14 might be going on outside of home. And then I will
15 -- the only other thing I would name is that we
16 obviously partner with local agencies as we need to
17 to bring in additional help and additional support as
18 we partner with families.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So that seems to address
20 the personal counseling part. So how are we
21 supporting their career counseling needs?

22 MR. LOWRY: So -- I'm sorry. I didn't hear the
23 question.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: That seems to address the
25 personal counseling components that are necessary,

1 but how are we addressing their career counseling
2 needs? So as we're thinking about the student with
3 their personal needs --

4 MR. LOWRY: I see.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- how they come to us,
6 those -- addressing that. But on the other side of
7 it, the school counselor is also responsible for
8 providing that support as relates to career
9 exploration, career readiness -- and I notice there's
10 some mention of that in the application, but that's
11 not really fleshed out as well to me to be able to
12 understand how that's going to operate again with the
13 ratio being as high as it is.

14 MR. LOWRY: Kate, do you want to talk a little
15 bit about that?

16 MS. BRACHER: And you're correct that in our
17 application there was just brief reference to this,
18 but we really see this as an integrated component of
19 our student success plans. And that being a really
20 -- we're passionate about data tracking and
21 data-driven portfolios that our students keep. You
22 heard a little bit about our Goals Are My Everything
23 time where students are receiving meaningful
24 extension intervention that is unique to them and
25 they're engaging in academic practice unique to them.

1 A key component of that is really cultivating and
2 creating a portfolio from the moment that a student
3 comes to us where they are the owners of their data
4 and their progress. A key component of this is
5 thinking about interest inventories at different
6 levels as appropriate on a grade level band.
7 Thinking about what is appropriate to talk about
8 career exploration in the K-5 space versus what kind
9 of survey or inventories that our students can take
10 in 8th grade to really hone in on what are my
11 strengths as a student and how could this translate
12 into what I might pursue in a high school of my
13 choice or what I might pursue in a career of my
14 choice. So those student success plans begin with
15 our student from the -- our students from the moment
16 that they come with us, and those portfolios travel
17 with them every single year. And our G.A.M.E time is
18 a really important aspect of when those come to life
19 and when our students interact with them. And on a
20 regular basis throughout the year, we also invite
21 parents to parent-teacher conferences and student
22 exhibition nights where career exploration is
23 directly woven into those portfolios.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And just one -- sorry.
25 Also looking at your application, I noticed that you

1 do reference, like, coding or robotics or some things
2 that you plan to offer. And so as we look at other
3 ways to support students that are -- as we we're
4 thinking about career technical education, there are
5 some expectations that grade 5-8 that students will
6 have access. And so when -- I didn't see a waiver
7 against any of that, so I'm anticipating that you're
8 going to follow the expectation of what is needing to
9 be in place. But what is that going to look like for
10 students outside of the courses, but again also that
11 support of preparing, as you mentioned, to go into
12 high school curriculum and being able to have access
13 to those CTE courses?

14 MS. BRACHER: Yes. And first and foremost, we
15 absolutely will follow every single requirement in
16 what you just mentioned, 100 percent. Within -- for
17 our students who are ready for the academic challenge
18 within that G.A.M.E time, that is an opportunity for
19 the microelectives that we mentioned in our
20 application to focus on: coding, robotics, Adobe,
21 Photoshop, whatever. It really is aligned to student
22 interests and led by the teachers. That's one aspect
23 of it. As well as just after-school extracurriculars
24 that can also focus on these different interests
25 aligned to career and technology -- yes -- computer

1 and -- computer science and technology careers in the
2 future.

3 We also though plan to bring in community
4 members and community partners who can be speakers
5 and role models for our students and can also
6 leverage different programs that are embedded within
7 the Little Rock community to give them that exposure
8 through the partnerships that could happen through
9 extracurricular times or different exhibitions
10 throughout the year.

11 DR. MOORE: Just to add on to
12 Dr. Wright-McMurray's questions about the counseling
13 piece. So although Arkansas' ratio is 450 to one,
14 you know, that's the maximum. It's not necessarily
15 the saying that's even best when we say that then.

16 MS. BRACHER: Of course.

17 DR. MOORE: Counseling -- American School
18 Counseling Association recommends 250 to one. And
19 Arizona, actually, it's my understanding has the --
20 the, you know, what's quote is the worst ratio in the
21 United States. It's the highest ratio for
22 counseling. So when it's mentioned that if you had
23 two counselors, it would be 300 to one potentially
24 and how that's so much lower. That's -- you know,
25 the 450 is the max. It's not saying that we

1 recommend 450.

2 MS. BRACHER: Of course.

3 DR. MOORE: So would there be any consideration
4 or is it just not within your model to support having
5 a lower ratio?

6 MS. BRACHER: I'll first turn it over to Steven
7 and then I'll answer from the programmatic components
8 to follow up.

9 MR. HYKES: Yeah. I would say again, it is not
10 currently part of our model. You're absolutely
11 correct that Arizona has historically not done a good
12 job of supporting students on the counseling side.
13 That's something that we recently were awarded a
14 national grant to add additional counselors to our
15 schools because the state was not providing that
16 support and funding.

17 And again, none of us are here disputing that a
18 lower ratio is best for students at the end of the
19 day. But we do know that the resources for our
20 programs and the resources for students as a whole
21 does not at this time allow us to go beyond that --
22 or go lower than that 600 ratio which is why we asked
23 for that. Again, we do believe that we've had the
24 academic success and support of our students with
25 that ratio, but with a movement towards lower -- that

1 being an area where we would eventually look to
2 lower.

3 So I do understand that that is the highest bar
4 in Arkansas, that 450, but again, with our experience
5 and what we've seen in Arizona, we do not -- and all
6 the other supports that Nate and Kate have already
7 talked about -- we've seen that our students are able
8 to be successful at that one to 600 ratio for us that
9 being our high bar.

10 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do you have a question, Mr.
12 Baldwin?

13 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah. Let me ask a few questions
14 and maybe approach this from a different way. So I'm
15 looking at the sheet that shows that you guys have A
16 and B schools, but two C schools; and I was intrigued
17 by your handout that shows that you expect one of
18 those C schools to move up to be in an A school next
19 year. And so I was -- I really want to ask you, why
20 do you -- why do you believe that's going to happen
21 and what specific things are you doing to achieve
22 that?

23 And then as you answer that question, think
24 through the population of students in Southwest
25 Little Rock who are currently D and F students and

1 explain how the movement at Peoria could mirror the
2 movement in Southwest if you think it would. And I'd
3 be interested in knowing how -- how many years do you
4 think it will take you to improve the grades for the
5 Southwest students because the schools that they are
6 currently attending are not good, so help us
7 understand that process.

8 MR. LOWRY: Sure. I'll start and then I'll turn
9 it over to Kate. So I think quite frankly high
10 expectations and not allowing anyone to make excuses
11 for the challenges that our kids are facing while
12 also understanding and having empathy was a huge
13 reason why we were able to see these results.

14 And something we didn't include in here, but I'm
15 also really proud of is that we retained a
16 significantly higher number of our students at every
17 one of our campuses this year than we did before. So
18 what you're seeing on these academic results, they're
19 not coming at the expense of taking out kids who
20 can't perform or kids who don't know how to do the
21 things that we need them to do. We simply believe
22 that they can do it and then we teach them that.

23 We also had, in full transparency, a leadership
24 change at that campus. We now have an executive
25 principal there, someone who is mentoring to resident

1 principals so that we can see these kinds of gains in
2 all of our schools and not just one. And obviously,
3 when you have a really strong, effective leader who
4 believes that all kids are capable of achieving no
5 matter what, we just need to get them there, you
6 really can move -- move mountains. And that's
7 exactly what we saw this past year at Peoria and what
8 we absolutely believe we can do here in Little Rock.
9 It took us one year at Peoria. I can -- we can do it
10 in one year here as well.

11 MR. BALDWIN: You -- in your -- and I'm going to
12 ask a few financial questions, so maybe you guys can
13 change places. So I see that you -- that you're
14 estimating 486 students in the first year and I'm
15 wondering if you have ever missed that, you know,
16 that's, you know, that's a best guess. I know you're
17 going to work hard towards that.

18 It goes back to Ms. Newton's question, but are
19 you are you confident with that and you -- have you
20 -- do you have a good track record of that? And then
21 what happens if you don't hit it? And I appreciate
22 the break-even number of 300 students. So that was
23 another question, but how comfortable are you --
24 because that's a lot of kids in one year. So tell us
25 how you're going to do that.

1 MR. HYKES: Yes. And -- and I apologize, it --
2 it's probably sounding like a refrain. We know that
3 Arkansas is different than Arizona, but in my almost
4 eight years of experience with this organization,
5 we've been launching 1000-plus schools from the jump
6 in Arizona for over five years. That goes to the
7 passion of which we believe the need is there.

8 So we know that there are a lot of charter
9 schools that start small K-1, K-2, K-3 -- kind of
10 grow -- as Nate talked about, retain those students
11 and grow them. We don't think that that necessarily
12 serves all of the community members that need served.
13 So when you ask that number seems large, to us that
14 number seems small, and we will feel like we were
15 unsuccessful if we don't hit that 486.

16 We develop marketing systems and metrics; we
17 talk about data a lot. There's data on how you
18 enroll students, which families, how they engage in
19 the process, how likely are they to attend, where
20 should we be at different parts and different months
21 to hit those numbers. So we obsess over data in many
22 different ways. So to us again, that 486 number is a
23 low bar for us, but is set there to make sure that we
24 all know what we're working --

25 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

1 MR. HYKES: -- towards.

2 MR. BALDWIN: So you've never missed?

3 MR. HYKES: Have we ever missed in the past? So
4 we have not missed our initial projections. We have
5 had -- Nate mentioned Peoria, that is a turn around
6 campus for us, if you will, that -- in the first year
7 we hit the enrollment mark, but because we didn't
8 have the correct leadership there, we did lose those
9 students; we did lose those families. And we hit --
10 in the second year -- a low watermark and we learned
11 a lot from that experience.

12 So we're not coming into this as -- as a group
13 that's always been successful. We've had our
14 failures. Peoria has been a -- has -- had been a
15 struggle for us in the past. And so what did we
16 learn? Something that I wanted to add to what Nate
17 said is we never gave up on that campus. We looked
18 for the right leader. We looked to that community
19 and said we need to serve them better and we never
20 gave up. We knew the potential was there.

21 And as I showed in the -- in the presentation,
22 there is a strong financial strength backing this
23 network that can fill those temporary gaps in the
24 event we didn't even meet the 300. But we think with
25 the team we have assembled, with the facility we're

1 providing to this community and with the passion with
2 which we want to serve this community, we believe
3 undoubtedly, we will get there.

4 MR. BALDWIN: So my -- my last question is on
5 the facility.

6 MR. HYKES: Yes, sir.

7 MR. BALDWIN: So you are close to buying the
8 facility from the school district which I think is a
9 good sign that the school district is selling that to
10 you. Will that -- will that building be remodeled
11 and complete before '24?

12 MR. HYKES: That's always the -- the \$1,000,000
13 question -- multi \$1,000,000 question -- as I've done
14 these projects time and time again, that is one thing
15 we have never missed. We have never missed a school
16 start date. Now, a lot of sleepless nights; I've --
17 I've missed sleep, but we haven't missed an opening.

18 So we are confident with the partners that were
19 recommended to us with a passion. We met with them
20 very early on in this process and the edict to them
21 was we cannot miss a start date. This is not a
22 corporate office. This is -- this is a school that
23 families are counting on to be open when we say and
24 even open sooner than that because these are
25 staff/teachers that thrive on routine and want to be

1 in there early. They don't want to be there the same
2 day as the students. So yes, you've put even more
3 pressure on me now with this question, but we will be
4 open --

5 MR. BALDWIN: Well --

6 MR. HYKES: -- by the start of the school year.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Why -- I would say that especially
8 in low-income communities that if you invest in them,
9 they will invest in you because they're not used to
10 investments in them. And so the building itself, I
11 think, will help you with your numbers. When they
12 see that if that -- if it looks like what you have in
13 the picture, that's a lot better than the David
14 O'Dodd building looks now.

15 MR. HYKES: Yes, sir. And I will add to that
16 question, we do have a contingency plan as always in
17 place. A ground up would be the one area where we
18 think we might need more time should we need it. But
19 through the remodeling of the existing facility, Kate
20 and I have already discussed what that looks like
21 with the 486 students. So we have a contingency plan
22 in place, but again, it's -- it's not -- not our
23 intention nor --

24 MR. BALDWIN: So -- so finally to conclude the
25 -- the bond issuance, explain that in a little bit

1 more detail --

2 MR. HYKES: Yes, sir.

3 MR. BALDWIN: -- about who that -- who does
4 that, and I noticed in your budget that your interest
5 carry on that's 564,000 in year one. So that's a
6 substantial carry. So maybe just explain that to us.

7 MR. HYKES: Yes. So we have worked in the past
8 with RBC Capital. John Snyder leads the national
9 charter group there. They have never had a default
10 in his thirty years leading that, so they -- we --
11 when we partner with them, they know us, and we know
12 them. And they know to look at what we're doing and
13 does it work. We're not building a school that
14 doesn't support -- is not supported by the students.

15 That process looks like we go out to the
16 national investor markets, your big capital houses,
17 BlackRock, things that invest in 401k's, etcetera.
18 Through our track record, we are BB+ rated school
19 network in Arizona. We're super proud of that. We
20 started as a non-rated and over those five years have
21 worked up to double BB+. For a network of our size,
22 that's pretty tremendous work we've done. And so
23 that debt is issued, it is 100 percent on this
24 nonprofit support organization to make those
25 payments. And again, in the event of default or the

1 school closing, those folks that invested in those
2 bonds would be the ones that would -- would miss out.

3 MR. BALDWIN: How many schools do you have now
4 that are funded by bonds?

5 MR. HYKES: All nine of our campuses are
6 currently publicly funded. In Arizona, we do not
7 have the ability -- I believe it's similar here in
8 Arkansas. We do not have the ability to raise bonds
9 through the taxpayers, so our bonds are backed 100
10 percent by our state equalization.

11 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. HYKES: Yes, sir.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And, Mr. Davis, I haven't
14 forgotten about you yet, but I think Ms. Saracini has
15 some questions she wants to ask.

16 MS. SARACINI: Yes. I would like for you to
17 explain -- I know you're asking for a licensure
18 waiver, but in the state of Arkansas with that
19 waiver, you still have to meet the requirements of
20 Arkansas qualified teacher. Can you explain to me
21 how you are going to reach to meet those
22 requirements?

23 MS. BRACHER: Yes. And so we absolutely -- and
24 we made sure to emphasize this in our application as
25 well -- we will absolutely ensure that they meet

1 those standards to be highly qualified in the state
2 of Arkansas. We -- and even with all of our -- the
3 teaching candidates that we will be -- that we'll be
4 hiring, we will -- the ideal scenario in state is
5 that they do have the licensure and they have the
6 required certifications. In absence of that, I as an
7 executive director and principal, really look at
8 experience. I look at licensure by reciprocity as
9 well as the content areas that they have their
10 degrees in so that it aligns with their teaching
11 assignments. I have an incredibly high bar for the
12 teachers that go in front of our kids. We just also
13 recognize that given our launch year, given kind of
14 coming into a new state and given the state of
15 teaching right now on a national scale, that was the
16 rationale for asking for that. But in practice, we
17 would really be pursuing either looking for
18 candidates that have that licensure and certification
19 or throughout the -- their first year with us really
20 encouraging that they pursue that.

21 MS. SARACINI: And I don't -- I'm going to bring
22 this to your attention too. Our science of reading,
23 you have to have -- all teachers by 2023, have to be
24 proficient or on an intensive support plan. Are you
25 aware of that?

1 MS. BRACHER: Yes, we are aware of that. Yeah.
2 And coming from Texas, deeply entrenched in the
3 science of teaching, reading will be the first
4 assessor with that that we will ensure that we meet
5 compliance for every single one of our staff members
6 with that.

7 MS. SARACINI: Well, I hope you reach out to my
8 office --

9 MS. BRACHER: Absolutely.

10 MS. SARACINI: -- Educator Effectiveness and
11 Licensure and we have people on staff that can help.

12 MS. BRACHER: Absolutely. We really look
13 forward to partnering on that.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Thank you.

15 MS. BRACHER: Thanks.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Mr. Davis, do you
17 have any questions?

18 MR. DAVIS: I do. Can everyone hear me?

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

20 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Fantastic. First of all,
21 thank you to my Charter Panel Members, they have
22 asked most of the questions that I have written down,
23 but I do have a couple of questions.

24 First, I want to go ahead and support I think
25 what is coming through loud and clear when it comes

1 to the idea of lowering the counselor/teacher --
2 counselor/student ratio. Just as you have kind of
3 been able to identify some additional support in
4 Arizona, I would hope that that same sort of vigor of
5 identification and support in order to lower that
6 ratio is something that happens in Arkansas as well.
7 So that's more of a statement, not a question.

8 Some of my -- a couple of my questions -- let's
9 stay on the teacher leadership bit. I'm a firm
10 believer that that person in front of the students
11 are the most important piece. Considering that
12 you've now done this, you've replicated the model a
13 number of times in Arizona, can you give me an
14 understanding of how you look for, identify and help
15 teachers make a decision that your institution is the
16 place that you'd like to be?

17 I mean, it's one thing to say, you know, we're
18 looking for experienced teachers who demonstrate it;
19 right? But there's a fight for talent, so help me
20 understand why would a teacher select your
21 institution versus another institution, and what have
22 you learned as you continue to expand out to the
23 state of Arkansas in regards to how teachers think
24 about where they might want to be? And I think these
25 are all lessons for us to think about as we do this

1 work across the state and glean some of the insight.
2 So I'm asking from an understanding perspective to
3 try to glean some of the insight in how you've been
4 able to be successful in doing that.

5 MR. LOWRY: Yeah. I can start and then turn it
6 over to Kate. So what I -- that was one of the
7 things I spoke about us creating a talent development
8 team. We -- when we say best education and best
9 environment, we let our teachers know that we mean
10 that for them too. We want them to be continually
11 growing and we want to develop them. We tell them
12 from the very beginning, we are going to pour into
13 you even from the moment the interview happens. When
14 they do a sample lesson and they get feedback and
15 they're asked to do it again, that could be really
16 scary for some folks, but a lot of people actually
17 walk away really enjoying that experience. They
18 understand that, like, that feedback helps them
19 become a better teacher. And to your point, we're
20 not getting a ton of experienced teachers.
21 Unfortunately, we're taking some of our, you know,
22 people who are straight out of college and helping
23 turn them into really great teachers. So that's one
24 of the things that we tell them is we really are
25 going to pour into you whether you start off as a

1 para or a teacher, we want your career to really grow
2 at AMS. And then we also find folks who are really
3 passionate about the kids that we serve. We look to
4 find people who live in the communities that we serve
5 to teach because we know that they are invested in
6 and care about the kids who come through their door
7 every single day.

8 MS. BRACHER: The only thing I will add to what
9 Nate just shared is, you know, beyond mindset and a
10 true passion for working with kids, which has to be
11 the No. one when you're looking for teaching
12 candidates as well as the culture of feedback and
13 really ensuring that, you know, we are prioritizing
14 our teachers' development above all else. You know,
15 as a -- as a former principal and about to be the
16 founding principal, something that is incredibly
17 important to me about leadership is that leaders are
18 in classrooms 90 percent of the time if not more,
19 right there hand in hand with our teachers, not only
20 coaching and supporting them, but also having their
21 backs and jumping in to support instruction in the
22 moment if that's what that means; and really being
23 right there in the everyday fabric of -- of leading a
24 school.

25 And so I, you know, knowing what teachers need

1 right now, they are hungry for that support. I would
2 also say, you know, the adoption of high-quality
3 instructional materials so that the focus really
4 becomes on teacher internalization of high-quality
5 material and taking away the burden of teachers
6 having to source materials or go to Teachers Pay
7 Teachers or other places just to find a lesson plan,
8 having that codified -- having those codified
9 instructional materials in front of them, and really
10 focusing on the rehearsal of excellent lessons takes
11 an immense burden away from teachers, but also really
12 works in service to students.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Dr. Wright
14 McMurray, did you have any further questions?

15 MR. DAVIS: Well, there are a couple more
16 questions I have.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Oh, okay.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: He did.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Sorry.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I apologize.

22 MR. DAVIS: That's okay. That's not a -- not a
23 problem at all.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: He knows I typically have
25 -- have a ton. So --

1 MR. DAVIS: Do you -- what is the -- what is the
2 number and/or percentage of students that self --
3 self-select out of your institutions on an annual or
4 yearly basis? Is it -- are we talking -- you know,
5 out of -- how many students do you need to replenish
6 students who have self-selected out on some of your
7 campuses? What does that look like?

8 MS. BRESSLER: I get a turn. My name is Brandi
9 Adams Bressler and I'm the chief operations officer
10 for AMS. So what we've found in our Arizona campuses
11 is that depending on the campus, obviously, we see
12 anywhere from a 30 percent up to more like a 20
13 percent turnover rate.

14 We do find that that is often -- we track the
15 reasons students leave. Arizona is a very transient
16 area both with people moving out of the state and
17 just transferring to different neighborhoods within
18 the Phoenix area and -- and back and forth to Tucson.
19 So a high number of the students that we see that are
20 leaving are actually transferring from one of our
21 campuses to another. So that gives us a lot of
22 comfort that although they are experiencing some
23 transition in their home lives, that they're choosing
24 to come to another AMS campus. So that's a -- kind
25 of little feather in our cap.

1 Thanks.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

3 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Thanks for that. One last
4 question from me and I think you've kind of gone into
5 a little bit and -- and you've obviously provided
6 some information. Can you bring the light -- can you
7 bring to light to me this idea of, you know, the AMS
8 -- how do I know I'm engaging with the student who's
9 at AMS? Like, what -- what is -- what is distinctive
10 about the interactions with students at AMS? Or
11 another way to put this, when I step on your campus,
12 what am I going to see at AMS that I might not see
13 anywhere else?

14 MR. LOWRY: I think you're going to see kids
15 that are learning really rigorous material and are
16 joyful about learning that material. So we want our
17 kids to be excited about going to science; right?
18 Like, recess should not be the only thing that's fun
19 at school. We want kids -- you're going to hear kids
20 say something like, I haven't gotten this yet, but
21 I'm working on it and I'm going to get it. And they
22 are in love with the rigor that they're experiencing
23 in their classrooms.

24 MR. DAVIS: Fantastic. No other questions from
25 me. Thank you, Mr. Sutherlin.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Dr.
2 Wright-McMurray.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Just for my clarification,
4 looking back because I was trying to get back through
5 all my notes, as it relates to LEARNS, is there an
6 expectation that your salaries will comply with the
7 LEARNS Act? I was just trying to get a sense from
8 your description in the application if that was the
9 case?

10 MR. HYKES: Yeah. So I did budget for forward
11 looking knowing that the minimum salary right now
12 under the LEARNS Act I believe is \$50,000. I believe
13 our average was 53,000 knowing that we're not opening
14 a school for another year.

15 The thing that -- in that budget that I think
16 the state is still not clear on is what happens in
17 year two. So right now the state is -- ingested
18 additional dollars to support those districts and
19 charters that have moved from 36,000 to 50,000
20 average, but what happens for a new charter that
21 comes in and the state equalization currently doesn't
22 reflect a new minimum of \$50,000?

23 So that is something that we are hopeful that
24 the state will address which would actually add more
25 revenue to our budget and give us an even larger

1 cushion for our students. But yes, we understand
2 fully that -- that 50,000 plus minimum for bringing
3 in teachers.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And not to -- oh, did you
5 want to --

6 MS. SARACINI: Go ahead.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. And not to totally
8 belabor the topic, but it is the expectation that
9 your counseling model will meet the 90/10 requirement
10 for time spent on counseling related and then non-
11 counseling related activities?

12 MR. HYKES: That is our intention, yes.

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

14 MS. SARACINI: Just one clarifying question. So
15 your teachers in resident -- your teacher of record
16 will be -- also receive the 50,000 or will it stay
17 the 35,000 to 38,000?

18 MR. HYKES: So the TIR program on that we
19 currently institute in Arizona most likely will not
20 work in Arkansas. Arizona has different standards
21 that do -- unfortunately, do not even require a
22 college degree to be in the classroom. So we, again,
23 in the in the spirit of professional development and
24 knowing the educational space, we've developed a TIR
25 program to help staff get from non-college degree to

1 college degree while getting that experience at AMS
2 campus.

3 So we don't think that program will fully
4 materialize here in Arkansas at this point. But we
5 do think it's important to note again the spirit for
6 which we make sure that professional development is
7 important for all our staff and to your point, a
8 teacher of record earns the teacher of record salary.
9 But the TIR in Arizona is lower, but because we don't
10 have those similar standards.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Any other
12 questions from Panel Members?

13 MS. NEWTON: I wonder -- I'd like to hear what
14 your ongoing evaluation process is with teachers in
15 the classroom. I've heard someone mention that every
16 applicant says they love children, but what would you
17 expect? It's all -- and compare it to maybe in
18 thinking about baking a cake and midway through, it's
19 not rising. There's no leveling in it -- leavening.
20 So how do you know whether you have what you're
21 actually looking for and how -- what's your process
22 for saying this isn't working? It's not working for
23 you; it's not working for us and the student.

24 MR. LOWRY: So we have a very robust staff
25 development cycle where teachers sit down with their

1 manager at the beginning of the year. In fact, those
2 are happening this week. They go over their goals.
3 They self-rate on our teacher effectiveness guide,
4 which is going to be -- something we do in Arizona
5 will align to the standards here in Arkansas of
6 course.

7 But every teacher also gets a weekly coaching
8 conversation with their manager whether they're
9 looking at either student work and assessing where
10 kids are doing well, where they're not doing well.
11 They might be watching a videotape of themselves
12 teaching. They might go see an exemplar teacher.
13 But they get that development. If they need even
14 more intensive, there are things that Kate alluded
15 to. We do dress rehearsals in the morning. We'll
16 pull teachers off of duty. We'll say you're going to
17 role-play your lesson with me for the day because we
18 need to make sure that what you're putting in front
19 of kids is actually the right thing. And so we try
20 to individualize it as much as we can.

21 And we tier them; right? So same way that we
22 tier scholars in the special education program; we
23 tier our teachers. But that being said, sometimes
24 things slip through obviously, and when -- we really
25 look for when we're hiring folks is behaviors.

1 Right. We look for how do you behave in the
2 interview? Do you actually want to take feedback
3 well. Do you say things that make me believe you
4 really do care about all of our kids? Right. And
5 then you behave that way.

6 Obviously, when it's not working, we follow
7 standard, you know, personnel/human resources
8 practices, putting folks on improvement plans, if
9 that's what they need. You know, giving folks
10 corrective actions. We don't like to do that. We
11 like to believe the same way that all kids can learn.
12 I believe if someone signed up to work for us that
13 they really do have a passion for the work and they
14 want to be successful. It's our job to help get them
15 there, but obviously in the event that we need to, we
16 are moving very quickly, and we use data really to
17 drive all of that. We do weekly rounds --
18 instructional rounds -- where we're rating teachers
19 and aligning and norming on those practices and
20 really looking at, okay, where do we have teachers,
21 who they're not moving, they're not hitting the trip
22 wires that we would have expected to? And then what
23 is the individualized plan for that teacher to get
24 them back on track.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Thank you. Any other

1 questions?

2 DR. MOORE: Mine is not as much of a question as
3 a statement. I just wanted to point out in your
4 application, I really appreciated your comprehensive
5 professional development and I think that is so
6 critical, the job embedded learning and coaching
7 model; and your identification of ADE is a great
8 resource for providing professional development.
9 They really do have strong content experts that can
10 support teachers, and I just suggest that you do
11 follow through with that as well as the PD provided
12 through APSRC.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Anyone else?

14 MS. SARACINI: I would just like to -- I really
15 looked at your residency model and we have a
16 registered apprenticeship now. So I think you need
17 to look into that. I think that model would quite --
18 marry well and so that's why I was asking so many
19 questions about that. But anyway just reading it,
20 very thorough, so I can't wait to see what the impact
21 is on Arkansas students.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So if there are no further
23 questions, I'll entertain a motion.

24 MR. BALDWIN: I'll make a motion to approve the
25 charter application as presented. And, you know, the

1 one -- the one thing I do believe strongly is that
2 you all will make an impact in Southwest Little Rock
3 and I'm happy to see that opportunity.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Second.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All those in favor?

6 MR. BALDWIN: Aye.

7 MS. SARACINI: Aye.

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Aye.

9 MS. NEWTON: Aye.

10 DR. MOORE: Aye.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? All right. The
12 motion passes. All right. So we'll go to our voting
13 sheets.

14 MR. DAVIS: Mr. Sutherlin?

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes?

16 MR. DAVIS: Mr. Sutherlin?

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

18 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. I -- I'm going to -- I'm
19 going to place in a vote of abstaining from the vote
20 please. Okay.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Oh, okay. Thank you.

22 All right. We'll start with Dr. Wright-McMurray.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. I voted for the
24 application. AMS School has a model that has the
25 potential to improve outcomes for Arkansas students.

1 I encourage the continued evaluation of their
2 counselor to student ratio with assistance from ADE's
3 counseling team. I also encourage them to further
4 explore and expand their middle school CTE course
5 offerings and assistance with -- from the CTE.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini.

7 MS. SARACINI: I support the AMS open enrollment
8 in Little Rock, beginning in the 2024-2025 school
9 year. AMS will provide a much-needed focus on math
10 and science while utilizing (indiscernible) in this
11 area of Little Rock. I cannot wait to see the impact
12 on students in Central Arkansas.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin.

14 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Yes. I was really impressed
15 by your strong history of success and believe that
16 your model is different than what we have seen in the
17 past. And I trust it will be as successful here as
18 it was in Arizona -- or is in Arizona. So I voted
19 for the application as presented.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton.

21 MS. NEWTON: I voted for the AMS charter's
22 approval based on the fact that they have developed a
23 comprehensive plan to move students forward using
24 tested approaching -- tested approaches and also,
25 they plan to engage community, families and students

1 -- for me is also a plus; and their strong history.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Moore.

3 DR. MOORE: So I've voted for -- and as a former
4 math educator, I'm very excited about the opportunity
5 for math and science. But I said that AMS proposes
6 to provide a needed learning environment for students
7 currently not served by effective schools as measured
8 by state accountability data. Please do explore
9 options to lower the ratio of counselors to students.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And Mr. --

11 DR. MOORE: As if you didn't hear that a few
12 times today.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And, Mr. Davis, did you want
14 to speak to your vote?

15 MR. DAVIS: Let -- let me just say I'm excited
16 about the opportunity for families and students and
17 I'll leave it at that.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
19 much. All right. Congratulations. Thank you so
20 much. I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So moved.

22 MS. NEWTON: Second.

23 MS. SARACINI: Second.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All those in favor?

25 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

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CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Meetings adjourn.
(The Action Agenda was concluded at 2:22 p.m.)

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.

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