

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

AUGUST 17, 2023
9:02 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

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Standards Systems Support and Charter
MR. PHIL BALDWIN, Retired Bank Executive
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P R O C E E D I N G S**I. CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Good morning. The August 17th, 2023, 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 into 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.

So good morning, everybody. Good morning to the Panel. Ms. Wagner?

MS. WAGNER: Good morning, Panel Members. Shastady Wagner with ADE legal. I'm going to give you guys our hearing procedures and then we will get started. So the applicant gets 20 minutes to present after the Chair has sworn in everyone who wants to testify, of course. Okay. No. You're okay. There we go. Now everyone can hear me for sure. Okay.

1 So to start again the Chair has to swear
2 everybody in who is going to be testifying. The
3 applicant then will have 20 minutes to present and
4 the Chair, of course, can afford more time if you so
5 wish.

6 We have not received any public comment;
7 correct, Ms. Summons?

8 MS. SUMMONS: (Nods head up and down)

9 MS. WAGNER: Correct. We have not received any
10 public comment. We have also not received any
11 opposition. So after they conclude their
12 presentation, we will do the legal review and then
13 proceed to discussion and deliberation.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then North Little Rock is
15 it being pulled from the --

16 MS. WAGNER: Yes, sorry. So North Little Rock
17 submitted a amendment request, but they actually
18 pulled that amendment request because they can comply
19 and don't need the waiver. So -- perfect.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much.

21 Ms. Summons.

22 **II. ACTION AGENDA**

23 **II.1. CONSIDERATION OF GARFIELD SCHOLARS' ACADEMY NEW OPEN**

24 **ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION**

25 MS. SUMMONS: Good morning. Dorie Summons, DESE

1 charter office. Garfield Scholars' Academy has
2 submitted an application to establish an open
3 enrollment charter beginning in the 2024-2025
4 academic year. The charter will follow a traditional
5 educational model and we have Ms. Joy Sawyer, who
6 will be speaking on behalf of Garfield.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Will all those who
8 plan to testify in -- in support of the charter,
9 please rise and raise your right hand. Do you swear
10 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
11 the truth?

12 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much. You may
14 begin.

15 MS. SAWYER: Good morning. My name is Joy
16 Sawyer. I am a 26-year educator in the state of
17 Arkansas. My -- I have taught in five different
18 school districts, some rural, one in Texas and two in
19 Northwest Arkansas. We have with us today, Melanie
20 Kennon, who has 35 years in education, teaching,
21 training teachers. Her credentials go far beyond
22 that. We have our PTA President here today, Jenny
23 Setzer. Will Neighbors is our CFO, our mayor of
24 Garfield, Gary Blackburn; and then also Senator
25 Joshua Bryant is here today in support.

1 I am very excited to bring to you today an
2 overview of an amazing opportunity that we would like
3 to provide in the city of Garfield. We -- the --
4 Rogers will be closing the Garfield Elementary School
5 in the 2024-2025 school year, and it is in the middle
6 of an agricultural community. It is the heart of
7 that community. The surrounding areas are Avoca,
8 Gateway, Little Flock and Pea Ridge. So we have
9 several farming/agriculture communities right there
10 in that spot.

11 Sorry the clicker --

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: It may -- the switch may need
13 to be turned on.

14 MS. SAWYER: Sorry. Yeah. Oh, okay.

15 MR. WILLIAMS-WESLEY: That's what it is. There
16 you go.

17 MS. SAWYER: Okay. Thank you.

18 Okay. Once Rogers does close Garfield Elementary
19 School, there will be no elementary school in that --
20 no neighborhood school in Garfield. The closest
21 school will be about ten to 12 miles away depending
22 on where you live in the Garfield school zone.

23 The Garfield Scholars Academy will exist to
24 empower our scholars to be purposeful learners,
25 critical and creative thinkers, motivated citizens

1 and leaders and determined lifelong learners through
2 our innovative emphasis in the areas of economics and
3 agriculture. These are the members of our founding
4 board and they have committed their time and support
5 to see this mission come to fruition.

6 To carry out our mission. We will capitalize on
7 innovative methods such as innovate -- individual
8 goal setting, providing opportunities to think
9 critically and creatively, multi-age grouping, hands
10 on authentic experiences, multisensory learning for
11 neurodiverse learners, involving parents and
12 community all aspects of education and creating a
13 community where learning is valued, and differences
14 are respected. We are committed to creating strong
15 relationships with families and partnerships with
16 community members to ensure each scholar reaches
17 their full potential. We are committed to creating
18 an equitable, inclusive learning environment for
19 scholars that is character focused and addresses the
20 unique skills and needs of our students. Small group
21 and multisensory learning that tap into students'
22 best learning styles and strategies will be used in
23 delivery of traditional curriculum. This is a
24 strength-based model which capitalizes on each
25 student's best way to learn rather than how they are

1 deficient or don't fit the norm.

2 At GSA, we will seek to be innovative in our
3 curriculum by providing relevant learning experiences
4 and authentic settings for our scholars. With a
5 focus on economics and agriculture, scholars will
6 collaborate in multi-age teams to complete projects.
7 Problem-based and project-based learning experiences
8 will have high -- students highly engaged in their
9 own learning. Scholars will have the opportunity to
10 show their learning by participating in real-life
11 application activities. GSA will also provide a
12 focus on self-awareness, strong character, leadership
13 skills and what it means to be part of a community.
14 Our programmatic features include a naturalistic
15 hands-on approach in learning, family and community
16 involvement for learning, strength based
17 individualized approach to learning and an
18 interdisciplinary curriculum. These features serve
19 to engage learners with high interest, highly
20 engaging experiences.

21 As we grow and progress, our curriculum will
22 become more and more interwoven with our TEAMS
23 initiatives while still providing the essential
24 skills to -- for learning success. Scholars will
25 also receive targeted lessons in character building

1 and be given ample opportunities to practice these
2 skills on the -- throughout the school day as strong
3 character and civic mindedness will be part of our
4 school culture. Our unique TEAMS initiative will
5 have students out of their seats and into learning
6 labs where they will collaborate with both grade
7 level and multi-age groups to complete projects and
8 solve problems related to economics and agriculture
9 in creative ways.

10 GSA will partner with Economics Arkansas to
11 provide training for teachers in economics education.
12 Scholars will become entrepreneurs as they apply
13 these lessons to the engineering design process to
14 create and produce real items that can be sold at
15 their makers market. As we build our program,
16 scholars will learn how to produce, prepare and
17 preserve fresh foods that they grow themselves. We
18 will provide opportunities for our community to
19 partner in the work of our gardens and greenhouses to
20 provide fresh food for their families at home.
21 Community partnerships with local farms will serve as
22 field experiences in gardening -- gardening and
23 animal care. Garfield Scholars Academy will serve to
24 provide scholars with a strong foundation in 21st
25 century skills that they will use whether they return

1 to the family farm after graduation, go on to run a
2 large corporation, or anywhere -- anything in
3 between.

4 Math and science are at the heart of our TEAMS
5 initiative. GSA will strive to build foundational
6 skills in math and science so that scholars have the
7 knowledge and understanding they need to apply these
8 skills in real-world situations and develop a strong
9 self-efficacy that will carry them into junior high,
10 high school and beyond. GSA's TEAM approach -- TEAMS
11 approach will foster individual ability, create an
12 appreciation for individual differences and strengths
13 through collaborative multi-age groupings, teach
14 perseverance and the importance of seeing a project
15 through to the end and develop self-efficacy to
16 ensure scholar success. Scholars will cultivate a
17 strong self-image in themselves and others and grow
18 to be collaborative team players with the ability to
19 think critically and creatively when solving
20 problems.

21 Our teachers will use individual learning plans
22 to help scholars set realistic educational goals.
23 Leadership will ensure that scholars have the support
24 they need to reach those goals. Garfield Scholars
25 Academy realizes the importance of family involvement

1 in the child's education. We will seek to involve
2 families by providing opportunities as -- such as
3 parent universities where parents can learn how to
4 support their students at home. Parents will be
5 encouraged to participate in volunteer opportunities
6 through our PTA, school events and shared decision
7 making.

8 We also understand the importance of engaging
9 our community as volunteers, mentors and school
10 committee members. We will hold the highest of
11 expectations for our faculty and staff to be
12 committed to student achievement and growth, and to
13 engage frequently with our parents and our community.
14 Our faculty and staff will also be part of the
15 decision-making team as we grow our school and our
16 programs. GSA will work to develop positive and
17 long-lasting relationships within the communities it
18 serves with students, parents and other stakeholders.

19 In year one, our plan is to serve K-5; in year
20 two, we plan to add both pre-K and 6th grade; and 7th
21 and 8th grades will be added the next two years,
22 respectively. Our core curriculum has been selected
23 from the state approved curriculum lists. You will
24 find a proposed list of curriculum selections at the
25 back of your packet.

1 We've included a sample of a daily schedule.
2 Sorry. In our presentation, please note that there
3 is protected time for English language arts, math and
4 interventions and extensions across grade levels.
5 All students will participate in our TEAMS initiative
6 daily as a school-wide activity. TEAMS stands for
7 technology, economics, agriculture, math and science.
8 It is also reflective of the culture and community
9 within Garfield and the surrounding community. TEAMS
10 focus lies within the economics and agriculture
11 curriculums which will directly address the needs of
12 the students in these agricultural communities. Core
13 content is woven into our TEAMS curriculum.

14 Scholars will use all types of technology as
15 they engage in learning lab activities. Use of
16 electronic and non-electronic technologies is
17 embedded in our unique approach. Students will
18 experience entrepreneurial opportunities through a
19 farmers market and a makers market. This includes
20 learning how to write business plans, budgets,
21 strategic goal plannings, et cetera. All of the
22 things that go along with starting a business.

23 Students will participate in our farm-to-table
24 initiative to support both our cafeteria and their
25 families. Scholars will be involved in the

1 development of gardens, greenhouses and pollinator
2 gardens. Students will develop a strong efficacy in
3 mathematics by applying their learning to real-world
4 problems. Indoor and outdoor labs will support
5 science learning and provide hands-on project-based
6 experiences.

7 TEAMS is what makes Garfield Scholars Academy
8 special. TEAMS creates opportunities for critical
9 and creative thinking and problem solving by
10 partnering multi-age scholars and collaborative
11 teams. All these components are driven by our
12 mission to empower purposeful learners, critical and
13 creative thinkers, motivated citizens and leaders and
14 determined lifelong learners. Committed educators,
15 supportive families and an engaged community all work
16 together to ensure the success of Garfield Scholars.
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

19 MS. SAWYER: Melanie Kennon will address our
20 budget.

21 MS. KENNON: Hello. I'm Dr. Melanie Kennon. As
22 Joy said, I have over 30 years of experience in
23 education having training teachers in three colleges
24 in Arkansas, as well as been a classroom teacher and
25 worked here at the State Department in Pathwise and

1 Praxis III in that program. So I was very excited
2 when I had the opportunity to join -- come alongside
3 Ms. Sawyer in her vision of what -- or Garfield could
4 be.

5 In your packets your packets that you've just
6 been giving -- given, you'll notice that we have a
7 new address for our facility as well as new budget
8 estimation based on the acquisition of this new space
9 and the recommendation of the APSRC to lower the
10 student enrollment to a more realistic number in the
11 first year. We've lowered enrollment numbers for the
12 first year to -- from 200 to 150 based on the
13 numbers, Garfield Elementary School has said in the
14 past years. In examining the Rogers Public School
15 zoning map, there are 116 students in the Garfield
16 school zone in the 2022-2023 school year. 105 of
17 those students attended school in Garfield in 2022-
18 2023.

19 We anticipate that some number of those missing
20 students will return to the charter due to our
21 curricular focus. Additionally, because both
22 Garfield and the surrounding rural communities of
23 Little Flock, Avoca, Lost Springs, Pea Ridge and
24 Gateway are primarily agricultural communities, we
25 think -- we have seen a lot of interest from the

1 families that live in those -- in those communities
2 because -- particularly because of the agricultural
3 and economic model of the school. We plan to
4 actively recruit and draw from -- a number of
5 students who are currently being bussed into Rogers
6 or Pea Ridge for -- from these nearby communities.

7 There has also been a lot of interest expressed
8 by families of current homeschool students. As well
9 as -- while we didn't anticipate drama students from
10 Eureka Springs, we've had some families reach out to
11 -- that work in Rogers and would be passing the
12 school on the way.

13 Our new budget reflects both the change in
14 student enrollment and the budget to support it. It
15 will -- if you'll turn in your packet to this budget,
16 several changes are worth noting. Because we're
17 partnering with First Baptist Church in Garfield many
18 of the start-up costs would be shaved -- could be
19 shaved or reallocated to fit this space. The church
20 held -- called a meeting and voted to lease use of
21 the facilities and grounds to us for a \$1 a month
22 plus any extra utilities or insurance expenses that
23 may -- that we may have. You have a copy of this
24 lease agreement in your packet at the -- at the back
25 of your packet. This shows an incredible commitment

1 that the community of Garfield has to provide a local
2 school for its students.

3 You may also notice, on page five of the budget
4 short -- a budget shortfall of \$89,173.25 for year
5 one. While we wish that was not the case, we also
6 realize that this doesn't paint the whole picture.
7 We have private community donors who are ready to
8 donate to Garfield Scholars Academy the minute that
9 we are approved as a charter.

10 In your packet you will also notice that we have
11 \$54,000 in pledges already -- they were -- that
12 happened just in this past week. So we have folks
13 ready and willing to support the school. We will be
14 seeking federal nutrition reimbursements that may be
15 as much as \$40,000 back to us, IDEA Part B funding
16 and we hope to tap into the Rural Education
17 Initiative which we -- which we qualify for. We have
18 applied for the APSRC grant which could net
19 \$1,250,000 should we be awarded that to handle
20 planning and start-up costs. We've reached out about
21 funding to representatives of the -- Jim Walton's
22 Personal Philanthropy Group regarding the start-up
23 funding should we not receive the APSRC grant. We
24 understand that there's program funding also
25 available through The Walton Family Foundation as

1 well. We are exploring federal grants supporting
2 farm-to-table and greenhouse programs; and have --
3 and are also looking into agricultural industry
4 partners to come along side us.

5 Year two shows surplus of \$58,531.88 without
6 adding any of the other funding that -- the funding
7 sources that we anticipate we will have. While the
8 deficit in year one and the surplus in year two are
9 not in and of themselves huge amounts, we are
10 confident that the community is ready and willing to
11 support a charter school in Garfield, Arkansas that
12 meets the needs of their students in an agricultural
13 setting.

14 Our -- our model makes us different from any
15 other school in the area. Our focus on multi-age
16 grouping, on students having the opportunity to
17 explore, green -- to build a greenhouse to explore
18 farming further and to also be -- be schooled in
19 economics principles so that when they graduate, they
20 are able to make good choices about going into a
21 business, starting a business or going into the
22 family farm.

23 So with that being said, are -- do you have any
24 questions for us?

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I think we may have public

1 comment at this time.

2 MS. SAWYER: Oh.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And we'll come back and --

4 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right.

6 MS. SAWYER: Thank you.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do we public comment at this
8 time? Yes?

9 MR. BRYANT: Good morning. Excuse me. My
10 name is Joshua Bryant. I'm a state senator for this
11 district of Eastern Benton County. I'll try to be
12 brief. It's not common that state politicians
13 sometimes can be brief, but brevity is what I'm after
14 here.

15 And first I want to say that I -- I have been a
16 justice of the peace for this part of the county;
17 I've been in the statehouse and now in the state
18 senate. So I've got a good gauge of what the
19 communities are and what type of involvement that
20 they see from their -- from their community. And out
21 of the numerous town halls that I've conducted on
22 different issues from taxation to even the LEARNS
23 Act, when Garfield schools this idea came up -- and
24 in conjunction with the decision that Rogers Public
25 Schools had to make to fold this facility in it by

1 far exceeded anything I've ever seen. I think every
2 member of the Garfield community showed up in that
3 gymnasium to visit about this. So I know the
4 community engagement is large there.

5 Some of the common things that you may not know
6 is Benton County is -- is the number one Ag producer
7 of the county -- of the state. As our population
8 grows -- and we just broke top 100 metropolitan
9 statistical areas with 1,000,000 people planning to
10 be in there by 2045, obviously, agriculture is going
11 to start to dwindle down as the -- as urban sprawl
12 takes over. This concept will be embraced because
13 you've got still generations of people there that --
14 that want to see this. They want to have the
15 community in this area from Pea Ridge over to the
16 lake and down towards -- into the urban sprawl areas,
17 is -- is agriculture. And so I know that they will
18 have active engagement into this as they have with
19 Garfield schools for the last 80 to 100 years.

20 Another thing that they probably didn't mention
21 is -- is Rogers Public Schools seeks to decommission
22 the facility out there in Garfield. I hope this
23 charter system or another private school system
24 engages that because the level of support that this
25 community wants to have a school out there -- because

1 even though the schools are ten to twelve miles into
2 town, what they don't tell you is the roads up there
3 aren't quick and access -- it's not interstate travel,
4 and some of those students will be up to an hour on
5 the bus one way.

6 So I think this -- in summary, this -- this --
7 even though we have great schools in Benton County
8 and that they're -- they're -- with the mass of
9 people coming in, school districts are increasing in
10 growth and size; they're building and expanding their
11 footprints. This -- this charter school will
12 absolutely be adopted and supported amongst the
13 community. Thank you.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you so much. Okay. All
15 right. Ms. Wagner.

16 MS. WAGNER: Okay. If you guys will look at
17 that final legal review, you will notice on No. one
18 for ALE, I didn't have any legal concerns. It is a
19 fully effectuated waiver. I did ask that they
20 provide additional rationale just because there was
21 not a ton in the application. So if you want to ask
22 those questions when you guys get to deliberations.
23 You'll notice I put the same thing on all of them.
24 Superintendent, they -- I believe Ms. Sawyer is going
25 to actually serve as superintendent; is that correct,

1 Ms. Sawyer?

2 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

3 MS. WAGNER: And she is a fully-licensed
4 principal. So she just has the -- so it's fully
5 effectuated for all the waivers for superintendent.
6 I had no legal concerns there. Board of directors,
7 no legal concerns.

8 For four, five and six they kind of all go
9 together. For curriculum, visual arts, music and
10 fine arts, they are going to offer those pieces just
11 were not aware if they can get someone who is
12 licensed in that area which is why they have the
13 teacher licensure waiver. So that teacher licensure
14 waiver is actually narrowed specifically to visual
15 arts, music and fine arts -- a licensed teacher in
16 those areas -- library media specialist and then
17 physical education. They are not going to have
18 unlicensed teachers in their core areas. They've
19 narrowed their teacher licensure waiver to reflect
20 that. So I have no legal concerns about any of that.
21 And they will have a media center just don't have the
22 library/media specialist unless, of course, they can
23 find someone hire. Because I believe the intention
24 is to hire if they can find someone -- because it's
25 hire, not contract; right? You're going to hire?

1 DR. KENNON: Hire, yes.

2 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

3 MS. WAGNER: All right. Perfect. And then you
4 will see No. 7, the teacher excellence and support
5 system, the TESS system, they fully effectuated this
6 waiver, and they did narrow it to a year. This is
7 not a commonly granted waiver, so that is something
8 to consider going forward.

9 I only have one legal concern. I wanted to ask
10 the applicant to tell you guys the status of their
11 501(c)3 determination is. They must have that in
12 place before students arrive and they begin providing
13 services. So I will let them speak to that.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Thank you very much.

15 MS. SAWYER: Just -- the five -- just real
16 quick, the 501(c)3 is in process; we're waiting on
17 the IRS. We are -- and they don't have anybody in
18 the office. I don't know if y'all know that, but if
19 you try to call there, nobody answers the phone. So
20 -- yeah. We -- so we are working on that.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

22 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh. Now any questions for me
23 or we have --

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: We will in just a minute.

25 MS. SAWYER: Okay. All right.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I did want to find out, is
2 APSRC -- are you supporting this application?

3 MR. SMITH: We have worked with them to provide
4 technical assistance. The application stands on its
5 own merits, but we have worked with them to provide
6 technical assistance. It is where it is. We offer
7 you a chance to review it. They have a good concept,
8 but obviously you will have to look into the details
9 with where you think it stands.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. All right. We'll
11 start with Dr. Wright-McMurray.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Good morning and thank you
13 for your presentation. I appreciate you guys coming
14 in and kind of walking us through your anticipated
15 plan for implementation of your charter school. I do
16 have a couple of questions. So let me get back to --
17 so during your presentation -- and I -- and I hate to
18 have you to kind of walk through a great deal of
19 additional details, but I'm still trying to get a
20 sense of your intended mission of your charter. So I
21 heard TEAMS and then I heard there's an Ag focus.
22 And so I just kind of get a sense of what will be
23 your mission for your charter?

24 MS. SAWYER: Well, our published mission, we
25 want to empower students to become those critical,

1 creative thinkers; we want them to be lifelong
2 learners; we want to -- we want them to be
3 purposeful; we want them to become leaders and, you
4 know, really just productive members of that -- of
5 the community.

6 And agriculture and economics is a growing
7 field, and so we have in -- you know, beyond high
8 school, those things are -- those are growing fields.
9 And so in that area -- we have five communities that
10 are agricultural in that area, and we want to bring
11 that piece along with the traditional curriculum and
12 -- and intertwine them so that students have
13 real-world relevant learning experiences.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So then my next
15 question, when I was looking at your kind of
16 explanation of the amount of individuals that
17 attended their interest meeting --

18 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and you stated that you
20 had 26 and that was -- and it was combined of
21 interested parties and the media as well. And you
22 have a desired enrollment of now 150.

23 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So can you kind of walk us
25 through a little bit how you feel like you'll be able

1 to pull up to that number if we anticipate some of
2 the students that are going to Garfield will go ahead
3 and go to the school --

4 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that is designated for
6 them, how do you like you're going to get to that
7 150?

8 MS. SAWYER: Well, we -- we will implement a
9 pretty heavy campaign for improvement through
10 advertisement. We have -- that meeting was on a
11 Tuesday night at 6:00 and it was hard, you know, it's
12 hard for families that are driving in from Rogers.
13 The traffic is, you know, kind of like Little Rock.
14 And so getting off of work, we just thought that that
15 the turnout was maybe lower than what we thought it
16 would be just based on schedules and people not being
17 able to get there. We have had a lot of interest
18 outside of that meeting. And I have talked -- I
19 actually live in Avoca, and so I've been talking, you
20 know, to neighbors and other folks. And so we -- we
21 will have an active recruiting campaign where we
22 will, you know, target and go out and find those
23 students. We know that -- we know the interest is
24 there. We know the interest is there.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So my next question gets

1 to -- so looking through the waivers that were
2 presented today and then looking through the packet
3 that you submitted, I didn't see a waiver for career
4 technical education. And in your response, you
5 indicate that they're going to embed --

6 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- CTE throughout your
8 curriculum --

9 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- but there are -- so it
11 sounds like that you're going to have the agriculture
12 focus which you feel like that's going to be the
13 embedding piece. But there's also some other
14 courses, especially because of the age range you're
15 looking at up through our middle school, that we have
16 an expectation that are offered to students. And I
17 didn't see that mentioned in your application. So
18 can you speak a little bit more about what your plan
19 is for -- for technical education for your students
20 beyond the farm to table piece -- but what are some
21 of those other pieces that you anticipate for
22 students?

23 MS. SAWYER: Well, we do anticipate hiring and
24 following the -- the standards for CTE. We want to
25 embed all of the technical education. I think the

1 big piece that sticks out to me as a teacher now is
2 that we're testing students on devices, but we are
3 not teaching them to type until 4th or 5th grade.
4 And so we want to start that very early with some
5 keyboarding. And as we move through, we will -- we
6 do intend to hire those, you know, those people to
7 teach those CTE courses. We don't want to seek a
8 waiver on that. We want to add value to their -- the
9 education that they're already getting; we don't want
10 to take, you know, a lot of things away that we know
11 that they can get -- you know, that they would get in
12 -- in town. We don't -- we don't want that. We --
13 we want to add value. So we just -- we plan to fully
14 adhere to those CTE standards. And we'll be coming
15 along with career -- you know, there's a lot of
16 people in our community that we can bring in, you
17 know, to talk about career choices. And there are
18 some grants for Pathways programs that we can have in
19 the summertime, you know, that will also bring people
20 in to, you know, to teach about careers and those
21 kinds of things.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I do have additional, but
23 I'll let others get started and you can come back to
24 me.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Ms. Saracini?

1 MS. SARACINI: Thank you for your presentation
2 today and especially the experience you're bringing
3 here as educators. I just have some questions. Just
4 -- it -- it looks like when Dr. Wright-McMurray was
5 asking you about the budget, you anticipate 150, but
6 what -- do you have anything in place if you do not
7 have 150? Do you have -- in case that you do not
8 have 150, what structures do you have in place if
9 there is a deficit -- you can't -- you don't have --
10 your ending balance is more negative than what it
11 shows and in anticipation you said you had changed
12 the first 200 down to 150 --

13 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

14 MS. SARACINI: -- but do you expect the 250 in
15 2025-2026?

16 MS. SAWYER: We --

17 DR. KENNON: No.

18 MS. SAYWER: Yeah. We expect that we would be
19 able to add a pre-K. There is no pre-K in that area,
20 so I don't think that it's going to be hard to get
21 those twenty kids and maybe more. And -- in 6th
22 grade -- we feel like we'll keep our fifth graders,
23 you know, and they'll move into 6th grade. And we
24 may even gain some more. There are several kids
25 right now that are choice traveling over to Pea Ridge

1 and our facility is directly across the street from
2 where those kids are being picked up for school. So
3 we know that -- we anticipate that some of those
4 students will come back.

5 And I -- we really -- we just combine grade
6 levels where we needed to. We are going to -- we
7 have a multi-age philosophy anyway and we feel like
8 there's plenty of research that backs that up to --
9 for social/emotional learning. And so I think what
10 we would do, we would -- we just, you know, wherever
11 the shortfall was, we may have a K-1 classroom; we
12 may have a, you know, a 1-2 classroom, but that's
13 where it would -- that's where we would have to, you
14 know, take the budget is we would have to move a
15 teacher.

16 MS. SARACINI: In your pre-K, are you looking at
17 -- looking at maybe an ABC program and going after
18 those funds as you add that?

19 MS. SAWYER: We will and that was part of the
20 reason that we didn't add it in the beginning. We
21 know that pre-K has been moved to DESE.

22 MS. SARACINI: Yes.

23 MS. SAWYER: And we know that all of the rules
24 are not written. And so we didn't want to spend a
25 lot of money because pre-K's, you know, they have a

1 lot of rules. And we -- and we didn't know what
2 would change and so that's the only reason that we
3 didn't start pre-K in the first year was just because
4 we knew those rules were changing, and we would need
5 to see what those were before we could.

6 MS. SARACINI: So you are looking at seeking
7 funding for ABC once you start that which will --

8 MS. SAWYER: Oh --

9 MS. SARACINI: -- bring --

10 MS. SAWYER: -- absolutely.

11 MS. SARACINI: -- in even more --

12 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

13 MS. SARACINI: -- for your budget.

14 MS. SAWYER: Absolutely.

15 MS. SARACINI: I'm just asking --

16 MS. SAWYER: Yeah.

17 MS. SARACINI: -- details so --

18 MS. SAWYER: No. I get it.

19 MS. SARACINI: -- that we can get that whole
20 picture.

21 MS. SAWYER: Yes, yes. No, I'm -- we are aware
22 of ABC grants, and we know -- but again, we just --

23 MS. SARACINI: Okay. I just have a couple of
24 more questions.

25 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

1 MS. SARACINI: Thank you for narrowing your
2 licensure and knowing and putting in there that you
3 want them to be a AQT. I thank you.

4 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

5 MS. SARACINI: I appreciate that. I also --
6 looking at your TESS evaluation that it's going to
7 expire. I just want you to be aware of merit pay
8 without a current evaluation --

9 MS. SAWYER: Right.

10 MS. SARACINI: -- under --

11 MS. SAWYER: Right.

12 MS. SARACINI: -- our TESS system, your teachers
13 will not be eligible.

14 MS. SAYWER: Right.

15 MS. SARACINI: So I just caution you when you
16 are asking for that waiver.

17 MS. SAWYER: Well, we asked for that waiver
18 because we are going to be a very small staff and the
19 PLC process is very, very big on those -- that trust
20 and that, you know, those relationships; and we just
21 felt like if we could waive it for one year, it would
22 give -- and we are a brand new curriculum and, you
23 know, all of that -- we would be able to really form
24 that bond that we need to form to be the team we need
25 to be. However, we would want to take that to staff.

1 And say, this is what we've asked for; they've
2 granted it; we -- but we feel like, you know, it's
3 your base, so we need to ask you. So that may
4 actually be something we would come back and ask for
5 an amendment to reinstate that. We just want to have
6 the option to build that, you know, in the spirit of
7 the PLC to really build that that relationship and
8 that program.

9 MS. SARACINI: Thank you. I just wanted you --

10 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

11 MS. SARACINI: -- to be aware --

12 MS. SAWYER: Yeah. We're -- we're aware. Yes.

13 MS. SARACINI: -- because I am writing those
14 rules.

15 MS. SAWYER: Absolutely. It's -- it's a hot
16 topic.

17 MS. SARACINI: Yes, it is. Also one other thing
18 you said that you are -- already collected around
19 54,000 in pledges already?

20 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

21 MS. SARACINI: Is that within the budget you
22 gave us today or was that not --

23 MS. SAWYER: No.

24 MS. SARACINI: -- put in there?

25 MS. SAWYER: Those --

1 MS. SARACINI: That's extra?

2 MS. SAWYER: Yes. Those were -- yes. Those
3 were just collected in the -- in the last week.

4 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

5 MS. SAWYER: And we believe that with our
6 reimbursement for our food funding and just that show
7 of support, we are actually a couple thousand dollars
8 in the black. So --

9 MS. SARACINI: Well, that's -- I just wanted to
10 make sure --

11 MS. SAWYER: Right.

12 MS. SARACINI: -- it wasn't reflected in what
13 you gave this morning?

14 MS. SAWYER: Oh no, ma'am.

15 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

16 MS. SAWYER: That's -- we -- that's just calling
17 a few people and saying, hey, can you just pledge
18 your support?

19 MS. SARACINI: Okay. Thank you. I may ask a
20 few later.

21 MS. SAWYER: Okay. Thank you.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I just want to build on one of
23 these questions and ask, I assume that you're still
24 going to do evaluations, you're just not going to do
25 them in the TESS system?

1 MS. SAWYER: Right. We will because we will be
2 -- I will be in classrooms every day all day. I
3 actually had a friend say to me, don't put a desk in
4 your office. The first year just don't even put the
5 desk in your office and that way you won't go in
6 there and sit down. You'll have to find a place, and
7 that place will be in the classroom. And so we just
8 felt like that would be a really helpful piece and
9 our teachers may say, oh, no, evaluate us; we -- we
10 want the money.

11 But we want to, you know, just -- we wanted to
12 have it just in case because we do feel like the
13 spirit of the PLC process is that building
14 relationships and that trust among your, you know,
15 educational community. And because we're going to be
16 so small, we want -- and because we're developing,
17 you know, curriculum kind of as we go -- we want them
18 to be able to freely without, you know, concern or
19 repercussions to be able to express their thoughts.
20 So --

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you.

22 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

24 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you. The decision by Rogers
25 to close the school, can you walk us through your

1 knowledge of why they did that? I mean, it seems,
2 you know, that the school is doing well. It's a
3 B-rated school. I guess, I'm wondering how many
4 students are currently attending the school and just
5 why -- why do you think they did this?

6 MS. SAWYER: Well, they -- what they have said
7 is for the financial liability. I -- and I don't
8 know. Mayor Blackburn, you may be able to speak
9 better to that. You were at all of those meetings.

10 MR. BLACKBURN: Gary Blackburn. I've been mayor
11 of Garfield for nine years and moved there in 1980.
12 I Served on the city council for two years before
13 becoming mayor. All my kids went to that campus that
14 you're asking about. I was night custodian there
15 after I retired from Postal Service for a while. I
16 am really involved in what goes on in those
17 buildings.

18 Bear with me a minute. 1997, three of us in
19 town, borrowed \$150,000 to reconstruct the Dorothy
20 Ross Building which houses the 3rd, 4th and 5th
21 graders right now. And we didn't have to make that
22 payment on the note; it got paid by the community in
23 donations. We started with a caved in building and
24 built it during the summer.

25 Over the years, the public school -- Rogers

1 Public Schools maintenance people really haven't kept
2 the historic building in the condition that it needs
3 to be in. And because the state senate passed some
4 rules I believe in '19 -- 2019, that ADA is more
5 important. The Rogers School system didn't deem it a
6 good investment to take that historic facility where
7 it would comply with all the ADA requirements. So in
8 the end -- at the end of the day it was a money
9 decision. Did I answer your question?

10 MR. BALDWIN: Yes, sir. Thank you. And I -- my
11 next question is going to be, is there a chance that
12 in the future you all might be able to acquire that
13 building and use it for your school, but it sounds
14 like there's going to be a lot of cost to rehab the
15 building for ADA compliance.

16 MR. BLACKBURN: I'm in conversation with them
17 almost daily. The superintendent lives in Garfield
18 and has to drive by my office every day. I go -- go
19 out to his house and we talk about these very issues.
20 I talked to Raymond Burns yesterday, the president of
21 the chamber of commerce, who they -- they have a
22 stake in one of the properties there on the campus.
23 And yes, they do want the community to end up with
24 that facility and they're going to work with us and
25 we're going to work with them because we're turning

1 out 5th graders that are quality students when they
2 go to Rogers.

3 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

4 MR. BLACKBURN: Thank you.

5 MR. BALDWIN: So it looks like we have a deal
6 with the church --

7 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

8 MR. BALDWIN: -- to use their facility at \$1 a
9 year. Very nice for the church to do that.

10 MS. SAWYER: Absolutely.

11 MR. BALDWIN: Describe for us their facilities
12 and -- you're saying you're going to have 150
13 students a day. Walk through the -- the rooms, the
14 -- the way the church will be configured for the
15 school. Does it have a cafeteria? It sounds like it
16 has a kitchen, but -- just walk us through what that
17 looks like operationally when you -- when you start
18 up.

19 MS. SAWYER: Okay. It does have plenty of
20 classrooms. We have plenty of space for
21 intervention, you know, people to do interventions;
22 we have classrooms large enough to handle the
23 population they have. I think the biggest thrill for
24 me is as we walk through is they have their old
25 fellowship hall which has a full -- a fully

1 functioning kitchen in it which -- when we started
2 talking about preparing and preserving our food, we
3 were like, ooh, an extra kitchen because, you know,
4 we can't really use the -- the commercial kitchen
5 because of the rules of, you know, mixing and all
6 that. But -- wo we really -- we were super excited
7 to see that and of course it comes with a very, you
8 know, large space where we hold art classes and music
9 classes, and it could really give great flex space
10 for our indoor labs that -- that we want to have.
11 The cafeteria -- there is a very large cafeteria that
12 can seat our students without any problem. There is
13 a commercial kitchen in that building also. The
14 cafeteria -- they have some portable basketball goals
15 that you could move the tables out of the way and
16 bring those in and it becomes a gym. There's a stage
17 in that building and there's also a recreation room
18 in that building where our older students, you know,
19 can go and play ping pong and pool and -- and things
20 like that if we have indoor recess, you know. And
21 then outside, they have a playground; they have
22 volleyball court, and they have a large pavilion that
23 is already -- already has the picnic tables in it
24 that we would need to have an outdoor classroom or,
25 you know, any kinds of -- or outdoor labs, it's all

1 -- it's all there. So we -- as -- the farther we
2 went into that campus, actually the more excited I
3 got. This would be great for this; this would be
4 great for this. And they're letting us use their
5 furniture. They -- we won't have to buy a lot of
6 furniture; we may have to supplement some, but there
7 won't be a lot of that that is needed, and they also
8 have TV screens in every classroom that we can use to
9 plug our document cameras in and, you know, work that
10 way. And they also have whiteboards already.

11 They're not as large as probably -- as what we need,
12 but it -- it's, you know, we would start and we could
13 add another five foot, you know, in each one. So --

14 MR. BALDWIN: So you can -- it sounds like you
15 can walk in and begin to operate substantially with
16 what --

17 MS. SAWYER: We can --

18 MR. BALDWIN: -- is already there.

19 DR. KENNON: Absolutely.

20 MS. SAWYER: Yes. We have to cover a couple of
21 pictures of some crosses and other than that we're --
22 we are good to go.

23 DR. KENNON: (INDISCERNIBLE)

24 MS. SAWYER: Yes, yes. The only religious
25 symbols I saw actually in the building where they

1 have their little logo that you see on their
2 classroom placards outside, you know, say like first
3 grade and we -- we were told we could just cover
4 those up. Not a problem. So --

5 MR. BALDWIN: The -- the lease is it -- describe
6 the lease. Is it a one-year lease or multi-year
7 lease?

8 MS. SAWYER: I believe that our agreement for
9 two years.

10 DR. KENNON: You have a copy of it in your
11 packet in the back.

12 MS. SAWYER: Right, Mayor? Yes. I -- it is --
13 they have -- they have signed on for at least two
14 years.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

16 MS. SAYWER: Yes. They -- it's -- it's very
17 important to them. And I want to direct you -- I'm
18 sorry. I forgot. We do have a sample of our
19 curriculum in the back of your packet, and it goes
20 all the way through 8th grade. So all of our --
21 yeah. Everything is in there. Sorry about that. I
22 forgot we snuck it in there.

23 MR. BALDWIN: So kind of coming back to the
24 number of students. 150 that you have now. And, you
25 know, the first year is always -- it's always a

1 question mark about what will actually happen.

2 MS. SAWYER: Right.

3 MR. BALDWIN: How many students currently go to
4 this school?

5 MS. SAWYER: Last year -- so last year there
6 were 104 in -- in the school. This year there are
7 94.

8 MR. BALDWIN: I think it would be --

9 MS. SAWYER: Right now. Yeah.

10 MR. BALDWIN: It would probably be smart to kind
11 of do a plan A, plan B and plan C --

12 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

13 MR. BALDWIN: -- with the -- just assume the
14 different number of students and maybe you have, you
15 know, 150, 125, 100 and some --

16 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

17 MR. BALDWIN: -- some increment down and that
18 way you can see what the financial position would
19 look like going back to Ms. Saracini's comment about
20 your deficit in the first year. And I actually
21 appreciate the fact you showed the deficit because a
22 lot of people would have just kind of made stuff up
23 to make that go away.

24 MS. SAWYER: Yeah.

25 MR. BALDWIN: And so I think it's -- I think

1 it's a good thing that you all just acknowledge that.
2 I think you should plan for different options because
3 you really don't know what the future holds. It does
4 sound like you've got some good ability to raise
5 money from educationally focused foundations, and so
6 that would probably help if that does come about, and
7 you may -- might put that in some of your plan A,
8 plan B and plan C. I just have my CPA hat on right
9 --

10 MS. SAWYER: Yeah.

11 MR. BALDWIN: -- now.

12 MS. SAWYER: And we are very -- we are very
13 fortunate to be in that part of the state where we
14 have, you know, many large corporations that we feel
15 like we --

16 DR. KENNON: That support --

17 MS. SAYWER: -- can --

18 DR. KENNON: -- education.

19 MS. SAWYER: And they are all very supportive,
20 you know, of education.

21 MR. BALDWIN: I -- I think that as you do your
22 scenarios -- and I'm looking at the CFO now -- it
23 might be good to figure out what the breakeven is for
24 number of students. And then to see how long it
25 would --

1 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

2 MR. BALDWIN: -- take me to get to that
3 breakeven. Have you talked to any school staff and
4 will they -- the staff at the school now -- talk to
5 us about how many of those will stay with the charter
6 as opposed to go to the Rogers school.

7 MS. SAWYER: Well, so at the end of last year,
8 Rogers did move the current staff into town. So they
9 have a new staff out there, but I can tell you I've
10 worked in the school and I -- we have talked to those
11 teachers, and I believe they'll all come back -- the
12 ones that were there last year. They already have
13 long standing relationships. We have one teacher
14 that's been in that school for 30 years. He's
15 teaching grandkids of people he taught. And you
16 know, he wants to come back and I -- several of these
17 teachers have come to these meetings or they've
18 reached out to me and said, hey, will I be able to
19 come back? And -- we don't want to get rid of the
20 relationships; right? We want -- we have --
21 absolutely want them to come back. So --

22 MR. BALDWIN: I live in West Fork, so I
23 understand --

24 MS. SAWYER: Yeah.

25 MR. BALDWIN: -- small town schools --

1 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

2 MR. BALDWIN: -- and the importance of small-
3 town community. So -- I kind of thought that, but I
4 wanted to --

5 MS. SAWYER: Yes. Yeah. They -- they -- if --
6 the ones that are there now, you know, they may say
7 no, we won't stay too.

8 MR. BALDWIN: So my --

9 MS. SAWYER: So --

10 MR. BALDWIN: -- final -- my final question is,
11 in looking at your staff that's in your budget, it
12 looks like a lot of front office folks. It's what I
13 call front office folks. It's teachers, it's -- it's
14 people that will be face-to-face with students and --
15 and you all know that there's -- there's a big
16 back-office that supports all of that. And it's --
17 it's technology, it's accounting, it's HR, it's
18 technical stuff that happens and I don't see a lot of
19 employees for that. So talk through how you're going
20 to do that and maybe, you know, I'd be interested in
21 knowing who -- who's going to handle your computer
22 systems when the thing crashes. Who pulls it back
23 up? Who's going to do your -- your monthly
24 financials, your books, your accounting support? I
25 know your board -- it looks like they're going to be

1 very hands on, but they can't function in that way as
2 a board in the details of -- so walk us through how
3 you're going to handle all of that?

4 MS. SAWYER: Well, our -- do you want to address
5 that? How we're going to handle --

6 DR. KENNON: Sure.

7 MS. SAWYER: Because you -- yeah -- have that.

8 DR. KENNON: We have -- what we've done is --
9 well, you've got the office manager; we -- we've
10 talked to people. Okay. And we have some specific
11 folks in mind that we want to hire. People that have
12 experience in those areas. The person that is --
13 will be the front office, registrar/bookkeeper --
14 Joy, what was her experience? You know her.

15 MS. SAWYER: Oh, yes. Our -- our bookkeeper is
16 a -- I'm recruiting her away from the district that I
17 serve now. She has served in that district, in the
18 office, for over 20 years. So she has all of that
19 experience in the bookkeeping and all of -- she has
20 all of that experience. So APSCN, eSchool, all the
21 things. So -- yeah.

22 DR. KENNON: And as far as someone to handle
23 computer issues and things like that?

24 MS. SAWYER: I guess, again, that's me.

25 DR. KENNON: That's you.

1 MS. SAWYER: So my son is a network security
2 engineer for a large corporation in our area. And he
3 is willing to donate his time for the first year or
4 two to make sure that our security and everything is
5 in place. It will be his off time, but he said -- he
6 said I have got you; I've got your security; I've got
7 your -- you know, that's what he does is information
8 security. So --

9 DR. KENNON: The larger numbers in this new
10 budget, if you'll notice, are targeted to technology
11 because we knew that that would be a large expense
12 going in. And --

13 MR. BALDWIN: And I think a lot of times charter
14 programs will basically outsource that to, you know,
15 a company that does that for schools -- or does --

16 DR. KENNON: Right.

17 MR. BALDWIN: -- that for people?

18 DR. KENNON: And that may be an option for us so
19 that we've got somebody on a day-to-day basis --

20 MR. BALDWIN: I would just encourage --

21 DR. KENNON: -- that can --

22 MR. BALDWIN: -- you --

23 DR. KENNON: -- handle that.

24 MR. BALDWIN: -- all to think through that too.

25 I know you've got --

1 DR. KENNON: Yeah. We're --

2 MS. SAYWER: Yeah.

3 MR. BALDWIN: I know you've got time before you
4 have to pull those triggers, but --

5 MS. SAWYER: We're -- we really -- we're trying
6 to put our community members to work because we know
7 that first year is going to be tough; and so we're
8 really, you know, we're contacting -- every time we
9 turn around in Garfield, we find somebody else that
10 has some expertise that we need that -- they're
11 willing to help. So our -- Jenny is also an
12 architect, you know, so she -- she's willing -- she's
13 willing to help us out. Our mayor is also -- has
14 also built, you know -- well, he built the Ross
15 building. You know, we just -- we're tapping into
16 all of those resources because this community is very
17 committed. And every time -- I mean every time we
18 turn around, we say we need this, and somebody says
19 -- I said, hey, I need a web designer and I have
20 somebody come up to me after the meeting and she said
21 I'm a web designer.

22 DR. KENNON: I'll do --

23 MS. SAWYER: I'll do it. I have got --

24 DR. KENNON: For free.

25 MS. SAWYER: -- you. I got your social media.

1 I have got your web design. So every time, you know,
2 like I said, it's -- it's a small community, but
3 there's a lot of people there that are willing to --

4 DR. KENNON: There's --

5 MS. SAWYER: -- help.

6 DR. KENNON: -- a lot of talent there.

7 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

8 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton?

10 MS. NEWTON: I gathered from Mr. Baldwin's
11 statement that the campus -- the school would be on
12 the campus of the church?

13 DR. KENNON: Yes.

14 MS. NEWTON: And my concern is maybe there are
15 some people who are not comfortable coming on the
16 campus. You mentioned covering crosses. I don't
17 know if that is sufficient in my mind --

18 DR. KENNON: Right.

19 MS. NEWTON: -- in terms of that, you know,
20 maybe a Methodist and, like, a Baptist or whatever
21 can have an issue attending. I think your concept is
22 good. And also, I want to speak to the Ag focus and
23 post-secondary education. I didn't hear anything
24 that -- the segway to college would be there as well
25 as agriculture because everybody's not going to stay

1 at home on the farm. And what -- how do you address
2 their interests if it's not agriculture? And -- and
3 again the building. I'll stop right there.

4 MS. SAWYER: Well, I feel like -- so we're going
5 through 8th -- we're starting out to build through
6 8th grade. So our -- they -- right now our students
7 would be going to -- into Rogers or Pea Ridge for
8 their high school -- for their high school education.
9 Well, through 8th grade.

10 DR. KENNON: Middle --

11 MS. SAWYER: Well --

12 DR. KENNON: Middle school.

13 MS. SAWYER: -- through 8th grade.

14 DR. KENNON: Yeah.

15 MS. SAWYER: Yeah. And so we will be -- we're
16 -- we're very interest focused. I've taught gifted
17 and talented education for many years and I'm very
18 much into those interest inventories and, you know,
19 things like that.

20 And I feel like just in all of my experience,
21 economics and agriculture can be woven into any
22 interest that they -- you know, they may not want to
23 go out and get their hands dirty, but there's a whole
24 business side, you know, of agriculture that they
25 may, you know, that they may want to tap into. And

1 we will just, I mean, we're -- we're educators.
2 We're very much into individual, you know, learning
3 plans and student success plans. And so those things
4 will just be, you know, I mean, I hate to say we'll
5 deal with them as they come up, but those are the
6 things that we would, you know, that that would
7 become like, okay, well, this student is really into
8 math or really in history, you know, how can we make
9 what we're doing work, you know, with that.

10 MS. NEWTON: You know, I think it's -- it
11 doesn't show to me a balance for the students that
12 are not interested in math as it relates to
13 agriculture or -- or any other thing that doesn't --
14 that -- it may relate -- I mean, you can tie almost
15 anything to it, but maybe some students that that is
16 not their focus; but it seems to be the focus of the
17 school; and it's not problematic, but it's just those
18 that come with the intent to further their education
19 and it may be in arts and --

20 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

21 MS. NEWTON: -- and whatever. But that's -- so
22 that's a concern of mine. Again, the campus and
23 whether or not --

24 MS. SAYWER: I think --

25 MS. NEWTON: -- it's an open charter --

1 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

2 MS. NEWTON: -- and whether it -- everyone feels
3 comfortable coming into a building that's attached to
4 a church that, you know, whether you're a believer or
5 non-believer --

6 MS. SAYWER: Uh-huh. Right.

7 DR. KENNON: Certainly.

8 MS. NEWTON: -- that may be an issue or
9 something that I'm pondering. It will be probably
10 identified as First Baptist Church charter in some
11 minds.

12 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

13 MS. NEWTON: Yeah. And like I say, no offense
14 to --

15 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

16 MS. NEWTON: -- or no connection to any belief
17 or anything, but that --

18 MS. SAYWER: Right.

19 MS. NEWTON: -- is -- yeah.

20 MS. SAWYER: Right. Right. And we do
21 understand that, and we are aware that we may lose
22 some students because of that -- going into that
23 charter. As the mayor said, our -- we would love to
24 have the building. We -- just right now because of
25 some due diligence that we're doing that -- that's

1 not going to be feasible initially. And the work
2 that needs to be done to the building would need to
3 be done probably without the students there. So if
4 we were to acquire the building, we are looking at
5 one year and we're -- we're aware that there are
6 belief systems, and we are very -- Garfield is a very
7 conservative community. But we do realize that we,
8 you know, we may lose some students that first year.
9 I think that when -- okay. I feel like when we get
10 to that -- once kids have been there a year, you
11 know, when people are talking, and they realize that
12 that -- that that's not what we are doing.

13 MS. NEWTON: All right. I think I'd be more
14 comfortable if it invited all that -- you wouldn't
15 have to choose to leave. The whole point is keeping
16 people in Garfield.

17 MS. SAWYER: Right.

18 MS. NEWTON: And if you wouldn't have to leave
19 to go to Rogers to be able to get the focus on
20 something other than agriculture --

21 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

22 MS. NEWTON: So that -- and being a public
23 charter, I think it should open itself to all aspects
24 of careers, you know, with the focus on agriculture,
25 certainly --

1 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

2 MS. NEWTON: -- but not completely.

3 MS. SAWYER: Right. And I think that that comes
4 as we grow and especially as we get into those 6th,
5 7th and 8th grade years where they really are
6 starting to get into the careers and, you know, and
7 those kinds of things, I think those are the, those
8 are the conversations that we have with parents and
9 students; and say hey -- you know, because we want to
10 grow; we don't want to just, you know, be stagnant
11 and we want our kids to grow. That's very important.
12 And I think individual student success plans are
13 important. And I sit down with, you know, with
14 parents every year at the beginning of the year and
15 with kids every year at the beginning in the year and
16 say, you know what are you interested in? What are
17 you focused? What do you want to get out of my
18 class? And I feel like that's a, you know, when
19 you're in a small district or a small school like we
20 will be, I feel like that's going to be, you know,
21 more doable. And I think we're going to be able to
22 listen to our community and provide our community
23 what it needs. And Mr. Walters has a comment.

24 MR. WALTER: Thank you. Mr. Chair, members of
25 the Panel, Tripp Walter, staff attorney, Arkansas

1 Public School Resource Center. Ms. Newton, I just
2 wanted to follow up on your concerns and comments
3 about the church facility. Just as a point of
4 reference, it has not been all that uncommon over the
5 years for especially start-up open enrollments to
6 utilize church facilities. We have several examples
7 in the past that this -- that this panel has
8 approved, and they've utilized those facilities.
9 Currently, the Arkansas Military and First Responders
10 Academy which is -- which is -- literally just opened
11 which you recently approved, is operating a former
12 church facility. So --

13 MS. NEWTON: You know, I think with -- my
14 concern is is that that school as you mentioned has
15 other schools around it, but what if it's the only
16 choice in Garfield? That's my point about it. So
17 you -- I don't have a problem with the church. I
18 don't have a problem, you know, with -- what -- but
19 I'm concerned about those folks that we have another
20 option or would choose not to do it because they
21 don't have an option.

22 MS. SAWYER: I can -- I can speak to that.
23 Rogers schools will still have a bus route. It is
24 still part of their school district, so they will --
25 they would still provide a bus route for any student

1 that, you know, that wanted to go into Rogers and
2 certainly parents could, you know, take their kids
3 and drop them off there. And Pea Ridge is kind of --
4 it's an interesting little -- little setup kind of.
5 Pea Ridge is almost closer to Garfield than Rogers
6 and there is a school bus that picks up right across
7 the street from our church building every day for
8 kids that are school -- that are school choice.
9 About 20 students? K-12?

10 MR. BLACKBURN: Pea Ridge started Monday and
11 actually had two school buses and there was 20 to 25
12 kids got off those buses from Pea Ridge. So -- yeah.
13 That's been going on for the last five years. That's
14 a designated pickup spot --

15 MS. SAWYER: Yeah.

16 MR. BLACKBURN: -- for the Pea Ridge schools.

17 MS. SAWYER: Yeah. So they do that. There are
18 other -- there are other --

19 DR. KENNON: Options.

20 MS. SAWYER: -- options if they choose that they
21 don't want to be in the building. And we know that
22 this is a temporary, you know, this is a temporary
23 building, one to two years, really until we just --
24 we want to secure the old building. It's the longest
25 running elementary school in the state of Arkansas.

1 We really would like to secure that building as soon
2 as possible so.

3 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I just have a couple of
5 questions before we go back down to you. Is that
6 okay?

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Uh-huh. Mr. Davis is
8 online as well.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Oh, he is? Okay.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Mr. Davis?

12 MR. DAVIS: Yes. I'm here.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do you have any --

14 MR. DAVIS: Can everyone hear me?

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

16 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

17 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. I -- so I do have a number of
18 questions. Thank you for the presentation and thank
19 you for the thoughtfulness. As a matter of fact,
20 it's, you know, most of my questions don't come from
21 a place of you not getting the type of response that
22 is necessary and needed, but really is more around
23 some budgetary concerns and execution on kind of what
24 you put on paper. So there are some questions here
25 and I'm going to unfortunately jump around a little

1 bit, but I do kind of want to dig into that. From --
2 I just want to be clear in regards to the 501(c)3
3 there is an understanding that that does not exist at
4 the current moment and will need to be established
5 beforehand before you can move forward?

6 DR. KENNON: Yes.

7 MS. SAWYER: Yes. We have our EIN number from
8 the state. We are just working on the -- the IRS
9 side of that.

10 MR. SMITH: Yeah. And let me just address that
11 if I may. Scott Smith with the APSRC. It is common
12 practice that charter schools usually are in the
13 process of applying when asking for their charter and
14 most charters, unless they're tied to an already
15 existing large organization somewhere, especially
16 Arkansas charters, are in the process of applying
17 Arkansas law is very specific that you don't have to
18 have this 501(c)3 in place at the time. You just
19 have to apply. It just has to be in place by the
20 time the school doors open. So that is common
21 practice in the charter application process.

22 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Yeah. Thank you for that and
23 I was aware of that well and I also know based upon
24 some of the other work that I'm doing, that it takes
25 a ridiculously long time to establish those things.

1 So you know, hopefully those things will be rectified
2 before we move forward.

3 You sort of talked about the first year and you
4 talked about the budgetary concerns or what the
5 budgetary expectations are for the first year. Have
6 you done any sort of -- I didn't see anything in the
7 application beyond the first year; right? So is
8 there an expectation by the second year that you will
9 -- and obviously what I heard earlier if all the
10 pledges come through and you're able to secure
11 funding, you think you'd be in the black this year.
12 But let's say that doesn't happen. Do you feel good
13 based upon the enrollment and enroll -- enrollment
14 projection that you'll be -- you'll be in the black
15 during the second year?

16 MS. SAWYER: Yes. I -- I know you don't have
17 our -- our packet that we handed out with our
18 additional -- with the revisions that we did to the
19 budget. But yes, we do show -- while it's -- it's
20 not large, but we do show a -- a \$58,500 gain --

21 DR. KENNON: Uh-huh.

22 MS. SAWYER: -- in the second year. Sorry. I
23 lost my word.

24 MR. DAVIS: That's okay.

25 DR. KENNON: Yeah.

1 MR. DAVIS: And digging into the budget for this
2 year a little bit more, you mentioned that
3 potentially there is, you know, you think that you
4 might be able to end up in the black. Is that based
5 upon the budget and the \$55,000 worth of pledges or
6 whatever was mentioned there. Will that put you in
7 the black or will there still need to be some
8 additional funds secured in order to put you in the
9 black the first year?

10 DR. KENNON: The additional funding that we
11 anticipate that will take care of part of the
12 shortfall is reimbursement of the food cost which we
13 anticipate will be about \$40,000. We've raised
14 \$54,000 in the first -- well, this past week in donor
15 pledges, and if approved, we have folks additionally
16 that aren't ready to write us a check. So -- and
17 that's -- that's not taking into account any of the
18 grants that we've applied for or things that, you
19 know, we anticipate funding -- other funding streams
20 that we anticipate. So actually that would put us in
21 the black in the first year by about \$2,000 just --
22 just with the donations and the food reimbursement.

23 MS. NEWTON: Mr. Chair, may I ask a budget
24 related --

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

1 MS. NEWTON: -- question? What is the minimal
2 enrollment that supports that that -- that budget?
3 In other words, how many students will you need and
4 -- and that hear the number fluctuating. It's 90
5 some -- 90 plus now, but how many do you need to
6 effectuate a positive outcome based on the
7 information? And not necessarily anticipation of
8 grants or -- or donations --

9 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

10 MS. NEWTON: -- but actually solid, you know, in
11 the bank or as calculated by student enrollment?

12 DR. KENNON: I would say if we have current
13 enrollment from last year of 106 students that
14 probably 115 to 120 students would be a minimum that
15 we could have before we would start -- have to start
16 not hiring a -- an extra teacher, before we have to
17 start combining classes -- so about 115/120 students
18 would be -- probably a good number.

19 MS. SARACINI: Chair, could I kind of elaborate
20 --

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

22 MS. SARACINI: -- on that? So when I'm looking
23 at per student, the 7,771, is that what will -- you
24 will get, or will it be the 7,618?

25 MR. RICH: Can I address --

1 MS. SARACINI: Okay. Because that was my
2 concern.

3 DR. KENNON: Yeah. Okay.

4 MR. RICH: Ken Rich, APSRC. Starting next
5 school year, it will be \$7,771 per student so that
6 would be the new amount. Just a couple of other
7 comments. You know, the staffing model here can be
8 adjusted. So obviously there's -- there's quite a
9 few employees on there. If there are less students
10 that show up on the first day of school or less
11 students that enroll, it is very common for charter
12 schools to change their staffing model between the
13 time they're approved here and when they actually
14 start school based on the number of students that
15 show up. They do have some flexibility there.

16 I know you can't actually put any money that's
17 been pledged into this budget as well. I think that
18 they -- they addressed that. So there are options,
19 as Mr. Baldwin said, the first year or two for
20 charter schools is always the toughest financially
21 without a doubt. And usually after that, it flows
22 quite well based on the number of students and they
23 get their model in place. But they would have to
24 make some adjustments. Obviously, we provided a
25 little bit of technical assistance on this. You

1 know, you don't want to have negative first year
2 budget proposed; they get that. They have a lot of
3 things happening in the last couple of weeks So
4 that's why you see that.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

6 MS. SARACINI: I would like -- can you clarify
7 one more question for me, Ken? Usually, it's based
8 on third quarter -- what you end up getting. So when
9 would they physically get this money?

10 MR. RICH: Yeah. So for a charter school,
11 they're -- they have current year funding in year
12 one. So they -- they're projecting it based on their
13 enrollment projections. July 1st of next year --

14 MS. SARACINI: Uh-huh.

15 MR. RICH: -- they'll be funded on that number
16 --

17 MS. SARACINI: Oh, okay.

18 MR. RICH: -- until the end of the first
19 quarter. Once the first quarter is complete, that
20 would be trued up and adjusted and we'll continue
21 that throughout the year after the second and third
22 quarter of the year; and then the following year,
23 funding will be based on the three-quarter average
24 from the previous year. Yeah.

25 MS. SARACINI: Thank you. That's -- clears that

1 it because I kept thinking how does that work?

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Davis?

3 MR. SMITH: I'm sorry. If I may also -- Scott
4 Smith. I just want to mention this. I think
5 everyone knows about it, but there are charter grant
6 opportunities that's not built into the budget. Two
7 possibilities that often exist out there -- well,
8 one, there is a possibility of Walton start-up grant
9 dollars. I think that would be approximately in the
10 amount of 450,000 if they could be approved. And
11 then we have a federal charter startup grant program
12 called the CSP Grant which if they qualify, can be up
13 to the amount of 1.25 million. But that requires 60
14 percent free and reduced population to get to that
15 full amount. Otherwise it's 650,000. I think,
16 correct me if I'm wrong, there are still grant
17 opportunities available in that area.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: There are, yes.

19 MR. SMITH: And we are obligated to get those
20 funds pushed out so I just want to make sure that --
21 you can't bank that. That's not built into the
22 budget, but those -- those opportunities may exist
23 out there.

24 MR. BALDWIN: About how much would you say on
25 that?

1 MR. SMITH: Well, which one?

2 MR. BALDWIN: On -- on the federal.

3 MR. SMITH: On the federal, if you're 60 percent
4 or more free and reduced population, it can be up to
5 1.25 million or if that's not there, it's usually
6 half of that, so 650,000. That is a reimbursement
7 grant. Okay. So that anticipates the cash flow that
8 will allow that to spend and sometimes we have worked
9 with other folks to make sure there's a cashflow and
10 help those dollars flow in some form or fashion. And
11 there's limits on that reimbursement grant and how
12 the dollars can be used. So that's not as open as
13 maybe other start-up grants are in some ways.
14 There's limits on what those dollars can do. I just
15 want to make sure you understand those potentials as
16 well.

17 MS. NEWTON: Mr. Smith, before you leave, I have
18 a question. These are funds that are anticipated in
19 -- and certainly it could be some variables that come
20 up. So it may or may not be funded, so that's a
21 concern that I have is that; and then the number of
22 free and reduced lunch if you build your budget on
23 that. So I don't know if the budget was built
24 anticipating having met the 60 percent.

25 MR. SMITH: No. I think the budget you see was

1 not built on those dollars at all. So I just want to
2 let you know that that -- those possibilities exist
3 with regards to the CSP funds. I think it's a fair
4 statement to say that we are obligated to get those
5 dollars out and are trying to find -- make sure that
6 there are charges that are approved to move those
7 dollars out to extent they qualify. And so I think
8 those dollars are out there looking to be placed at
9 some place going forward.

10 MS. NEWTON: But does it -- does it -- does your
11 application -- and I think this -- maybe you can
12 answer, does it reflect 60 percent over? That's a
13 substantial amount of money.

14 MR. SMITH: Since they did not build it into the
15 budget, we didn't reflect anything on that. So we --
16 we just gave you a bare bones budget without any of
17 that. I just want you to be aware and just making
18 you aware.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

20 MS. SAWYER: And I can speak to -- Garfield has
21 always fallen in the 68 to about 72 percent
22 free-reduced lunch. I believe the last time, you
23 know, the -- My Info is about three years behind --
24 two or three years behind I believe -- they were at
25 69.2 percent I believe, free-reduced lunch, so we

1 definitely call in that. And that's a historical --
2 is -- I mean, when I taught there it was that. So --

3 MR. SMITH: I should just mention -- I didn't --
4 that does not apply to virtual charter schools, so
5 that grant would not -- so if they're running virtual
6 program or something like that, there's a limitation
7 as well. But just wanted you to be aware.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Thank you.
9 Mr. Davis?

10 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Just a -- just a couple more
11 questions for me. There are some things that are
12 coming to clarity. First of all -- excuse me. I
13 just want to -- just point out that I don't even know
14 if we can go as far as to certain grants are
15 anticipated; right? I think that there's an
16 opportunity to apply, so I don't even to want to lean
17 into thinking that certain things will or anticipate
18 it to happen kind of moving forward. I think we can
19 all speak to the qualifications and those types of
20 things that will allow them to apply, but the idea of
21 anticipating funds I think is something else.

22 I did want to talk about in the application that
23 I think on -- in regards to the board book on page
24 64, it kind of talks about staffing and I'm happy the
25 comment was made around staffing adjustment. So I'm

1 interested from a staff perspective it appears that
2 when I started to calculate the number of potential
3 full-time staff, you're somewhere around 15/16/17
4 people; is that correct? I'm just trying to wrap my
5 head around, you know, from a implementation
6 standpoint, because once again you talked about the
7 GT program. Obviously, when we start talking about
8 special ed students, but there are a number of things
9 that are in your application that you have said that
10 you will deliver on although you're starting very
11 small; and so I'm just wondering, you know, where you
12 think you might land with some of this?

13 Traditionally -- just quickly, traditionally, I
14 think what we've seen, particularly in small public
15 charter spaces, we've seen schools become very
16 focused on a number -- a few things that they feel
17 they can execute well and families are drawn to it
18 versus a broader scale around ensuring that they're
19 meeting all the needs, demands and expectations, so
20 forth of the entire community that may then stretch
21 them from the staffing and recruitment standpoint.
22 So I just want to be clear on how you plan on
23 executing from the staff perspective on all of those
24 things. People wearing multiple hats; is that the
25 expectation?

1 MS. SAWYER: Yeah. I actually -- so the budget
2 you're looking at has a maintenance person. We do
3 not need that maintenance person anymore because we
4 have the church facility, so that person has been
5 removed from the new budget. We do have people
6 serving in multiple areas. For example, our TEAMS
7 coordinator will also be our art teacher and she is
8 also an interventionist; so she will be working in
9 those three jobs. I know that sounds like a lot, but
10 we talked to her and she's willing to put in the
11 extra time and the extra effort to get this school
12 going.

13 I'm my -- I'm Joy by the way. I am -- I would
14 be the director. I will also serve -- I am GT
15 certified; I've taught GT for about 17 years, so I
16 will be the GT specialist on staff; and I'm also
17 willing to commit my time after hours to make sure
18 that all of that happens. We are working with the GT
19 department on the enrichment and -- because we think
20 we're going to be able to do that in a very creative,
21 innovative way and our students will receive their
22 150 minutes each week of specific GT services. So
23 yes, we do plan to utilize people in more than one
24 area.

25 MR. DAVIS: Thank you for that. Something that

1 was mentioned a few moments ago was the idea of a
2 bookkeeper as well. And I may once again not have
3 the right budget in front of me, but the one that's
4 in the board book doesn't mention a bookkeeper
5 listed. And so I'm just wondering if -- is that
6 additional line item that will be added and what does
7 the salary look like in regards to the bookkeeper?
8 Or is that one of these positions where someone would
9 be doing double duty in that sense?

10 MS. SAWYER: No, sir. You're right. We're just
11 noticing that we didn't have that person in there
12 ourselves. That -- however, we do know that that
13 salary will be \$30,000. Oh, sorry. We do have it
14 under fiscal services. We have that salary at
15 \$25,000. It's under -- it's under fiscal services.
16 Okay.

17 MR. RICH: One more thing to add on that. Ken
18 Rich, APSRC. APSRC does provide some
19 back-office/bookkeeping services for start-up
20 charters. So we have not talked to them directly
21 about that at this point, but we could talk to them
22 about providing that service.

23 MR. DAVIS: Fantastic. The other thing I
24 noticed in the application, and I just want to make
25 sure that this is correct -- that there will be --

1 there will be some ADA compliance issues with the
2 building. I think there was a mention of either some
3 ramps or some wheelchair access; is that still the
4 case?

5 MS. SAWYER: Well, the church we -- so we have
6 switched facilities.

7 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

8 MS. SAWYER: Yes. And so we are now going -- we
9 have a lease for \$1 a month from a church in Garfield
10 --

11 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

12 MS. SAWYER: -- and it is completely ADA
13 compliant, so we no longer have that issue.

14 MR. DAVIS: Fantastic. I don't have any
15 additional questions for now. Thank you so much for
16 answering my questions.

17 MS. SAWYER: Absolutely.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then I have just a couple
19 of questions and then we'll go right down to
20 Dr. Wright-McMurray.

21 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I was -- I was looking at
23 your goals and seeing as you have a lot of the same
24 students -- or are anticipating a lot of the same
25 students -- what data did you look at to establish

1 your goals?

2 MS. SAWYER: We looked at the My Info data
3 that's online to establish those goals. Garfield is
4 right now a high-performing school. They are rated
5 at grade of B, and I think that it's because they're
6 small and because those teachers are in there and
7 have those relationships that we -- Garfield doesn't
8 have that great support for their students. So
9 that's where our goals are based from.

10 And also just talking to teachers, like I said,
11 I used to work there. So I have friends that are
12 there, and I've talked to them and said, hey, where
13 are your -- where are your kids right now? Like,
14 what do we need to do right now? So I do have that
15 little insight there that I've been able to kind of
16 communicate with some of the educators.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. The other question
18 that I have is around your board structure. It
19 mentions that employees will be part of the board; is
20 that correct?

21 MS. SAWYER: No. Our -- what we did was we --
22 when we wrote that we tried to just attach, like, a
23 qualification. So, for example, Dr. Kennon is the
24 CEO; she is an education consultant. She -- we're
25 not going to pay her to do that; she's going to do

1 that for us for free. So -- and yes. So --

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

3 MS. SAWYER: So we're not going to have -- yeah.
4 That -- that won't be an issue.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray.

6 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I guess a lot of my
7 remaining questions kind of all fall under, like, one
8 umbrella of sustainability.

9 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And because I understand
11 you're starting the charter there are a lot of people
12 that are promising they'll be engaged. You have
13 gotten some of the former teachers to say they'll
14 come back. There's some that -- that even some --
15 you guys are saying, well, we'll be willing to serve
16 two or three and sounds like in some cases four
17 roles. But just how sustainable is that going to be
18 going forward? You know, what plan do you have in
19 place to be in a position to where you don't have to
20 stretch so many of the people, so then you don't have
21 to be dependent upon people that are saying today
22 they'll be willing to come back.

23 But you know they may decide, you know, I'm
24 grateful where I am. I just want to stay in the
25 school district that I've been reassigned to. Just

1 looking at the number of students that you would need
2 to be able to sustain your -- your plan, do we
3 anticipate that's going to be a continual a number of
4 students that we'll be able to see each year and grow
5 over? Or do we anticipate that eventually we're
6 going to hit a point to where we're going to just
7 kind of have a stall and not be able to continue to
8 enroll the numbers of students that it's going to
9 take to be able to get to that point?

10 And I -- and I will say I'm just the kind of --
11 just me personally I'm just the kind of person I like
12 to be able to sit with some things and that's why I
13 know the charter team knows that I usually ask for
14 all applications well in advance, so I can go make
15 all my notes. So this throwing me a bit that I got
16 the budget this --

17 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- morning --

19 MS. SAWYER: Sorry.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and I'm trying to work
21 through it and understand it --

22 MS. SAWYER: Right.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- because there's, like,
24 a lot of remaining pieces that are still there. But
25 I'm just trying to get my mind wrapped around and be

1 able to understand how this is going to be
2 financially supported.

3 Because I'm looking at -- and I'm sorry to keep
4 -- but it's -- it's all kind of falls under that
5 umbrella of how you are going to sustain this because
6 as one of your -- under purchase -- purchase
7 services, you indicate there's going to be a third-
8 party service provider that's going to assist you
9 with that. Who is that third party service provider?
10 What is their track record for being able to provide
11 the support and resources? Will they be able to be
12 someone that's going to continue through the process
13 or are they just doing it because you're starting?
14 So those are just some questions that I still have.
15 There's just -- once we get past this first initial
16 year, all the people that have, you know, made
17 personal commitments --

18 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- even the finances,
20 there's, like, a lot of pledges of what people would
21 be able to contribute. But we know in some cases
22 people will say on the front end, oh, yeah, I'm going
23 to give you -- I mean --

24 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: You know, you have kids,

1 that will sell cookies, yeah, I'm going to buy ten
2 boxes and you go back around to them and they only
3 buy one or don't buy any. So, you know, how do --
4 how do we get comfort in the fact that your plan is
5 going to be sustainable past this first year
6 implementation?

7 MS. SAWYER: What -- I think that one of the
8 things that I will -- that I will say is that this
9 area is growing and it's growing fast. Rogers, the
10 city of Rogers, is landlocked; and so this is now how
11 they have to come. There are 175 homes that have
12 been approved to be built in Avoca right now. I've
13 talked to some of their city council members; they
14 are -- you know, it's -- it's just growing. I know
15 there's building going on in Garfield, you know, so
16 we're -- it is a growing area. And I just feel like
17 that will help us sustain. I feel like people are
18 looking for, you know, these charter opportunities to
19 come. And I feel like our -- we are going to have --
20 we will always have community support and I know, you
21 know don't live in Garfield is so you don't know
22 that, but I have -- if I could just give a quick
23 personal -- we had a teacher when I worked there that
24 was diagnosed with cancer. And so we decided at the
25 fundraiser we sell hot dogs and chips in the car

1 rider line as people left. We have about 150
2 students at that time, and we raised \$6,000 that day.
3 So -- you know, for -- for her family. This -- this
4 community is -- is a special place and they want
5 their kids educated there and I think Senator Bryant
6 spoke to that earlier also. So I do think that this
7 is a sustainable charter. I wouldn't be involved
8 with it, you know, if I -- if I wasn't. I -- you
9 know, I've got ten or 15 more years before I retire,
10 and this is -- and this will be my job. And so I
11 think that as we grow, we will lessen the number of,
12 you know, of teachers that are doing multiple things
13 because I know -- I'm very well aware of what burnout
14 looks like and feels like and we want to protect that
15 and if we see it's not working, we will monitor and
16 adjust. But I feel like as we add the grade levels
17 and we gain more students, we will be in a better,
18 you know, place financially to, you know, to untie
19 some of those. We will probably not always need a
20 TEAMS coordinator. That's a job that we need
21 initially, probably for the first three or four years
22 to really get, you know, everybody on board and get
23 our, you know, our curriculum and -- and -- built,
24 you know, and all those kinds of things. And then I
25 think eventually that job will, you know, will go

1 away and we'll have those field experiences and
2 things like that in place. So I feel like we have a
3 really good grasp. The district that I work in now
4 is very proud of the fact that they work on the
5 efficiency model. And I -- and so I know what that
6 looks like, and I know how we, you know, how you have
7 to pare down, you know, some years you have to pare
8 down some years you can -- you can do a little more.
9 And we will just be very conservative in our
10 decisions. Our CFO, Mr. Neighbors is -- is a -- is a
11 conservative minded and I think that he -- we will be
12 very conservative in how we spend our monies.

13 DR. KENNON: Gary, did you want to?

14 MR. BLACKBURN: Do you mind if I speak briefly
15 to the -- the nature of our community and them being
16 willing to step out and make sure that we -- we go
17 the long haul? Garfield has a -- the largest
18 volunteer fire and ambulance department in Benton
19 County -- been in existence for 25 years now. NEBCO
20 Northeast Benton County Volunteer Fire. They have
21 like eight fire stations that they sustain with
22 volunteers and fundraisers and contributions; and
23 then there's God's Pantry that's right across the
24 street from it that serves a -- a really diverse
25 population. We give free food, clothes, all kinds of

1 things. There's a -- Lost -- Lost Bridge Village.
2 It's a retirement community that -- they have to go
3 through Garfield to go anywhere; and have Garfield
4 addresses; and these people love to support the
5 school. My wife worked down at the school for 24
6 years and she said that they had so many volunteers
7 coming from Lost Bridge Village that they'd have to
8 schedule them. They -- they couldn't let them all
9 come when they wanted to come. So the community will
10 reach out. As soon as we have that charter in our
11 hands, the floodgates will open up; and it will be
12 for the long haul; it won't be just for two years.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Would you mind stating your
14 name for the court reporter.

15 MR. BLACKBURN: Gary Blackburn, Garfield.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So to -- to one of my
17 questions, the third-party service provider under
18 purchase services --

19 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

20 DR. KENNON: For fiscal services.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- do you anticipate that
22 be to assisting -- to assist the -- I imagine, the
23 CFO with financial services?

24 MS. SAWYER: We will -- we will seek that person
25 out. We don't have that person, you know, on board

1 right this moment. I have been -- I have talked to a
2 couple of CPAs that are friends of mine that have
3 said yes, we are willing to help. Again, it just,
4 you know, you just put the word out, but they're -- I
5 do have some friends that have said, oh, we want to,
6 you know, we want to be involved with this; we're
7 excited about it. So I do -- I don't think that --
8 but we haven't, you know hired somebody or made the
9 decision as to who that person would be.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So thinking -- and earlier
11 comments from -- so is APSRC, are they assisting with
12 that? I'm trying to figure out because I know that
13 they indicated that they do provide technical
14 assistance in that area.

15 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Is that a commitment from
17 them to assist with that? I'm just trying to -- I'm
18 just trying to get my sense around it who is going to
19 be in that role.

20 MR. RICH: Ken Rich, APSRC. Typically we do try
21 to help any new charter get started in the first year
22 with back-office support. We have not had that
23 conversation with them yet, but we do provide them
24 that service. So -- I'll -- you know, we can do it.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So is that something --

1 seems that you haven't had that conversation --

2 MR. RICH: No.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- at this time?

4 MR. RICH: No.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Not for providing
6 services. No. But we can provide them services.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Ken -- Ken, what back-office
8 support? Kind of break that down for us, what that
9 means.

10 MR. RICH: Well, it's basically full service.
11 So it would be all payroll, cash payable, anything,
12 in eFinance. The school' use eFinance software in
13 the state for all the reporting, all their
14 bookkeeping. So we have staff that provides the
15 entire package or sometimes we split that up and do a
16 portion of the package. So they may have somebody on
17 staff that can handle some of the duties, and then we
18 provide the duties that they can't handle. So we
19 have a team that does that, and we do that for
20 several charters and traditional districts in the
21 state.

22 MR. BALDWIN: So if you did all that, then that
23 would -- that would help us with some of our back-
24 office concerns, I guess.

25 MR. RICH: Yes. Yes, sir.

1 MR. BALDWIN: And I know that's not our
2 decision, that's y'all's decision.

3 MS. SAYWER: Yeah. No.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But is that an additional
5 cost that is not accounted for in the budget?

6 MR. RICH: There is a -- there is a fee and they
7 do have that 25,000- or \$30,000-line item in the
8 budget. So I just -- I wouldn't make a statement
9 today on the record as far as what the fee will be,
10 but yes, we will work with the first-year charter.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any other questions from the
12 panel?

13 DR. KENNON: If I could answer your question
14 little more fully about the DCTE standards in your
15 packet and in the curriculum for sixth through eighth
16 grade.

17 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: In the new packet or the
18 old one?

19 DR. KENNON: The new packet.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

21 MS. KENNON: We've included the curriculum
22 selections that we are looking at and have looked at
23 standards in terms of where we will embed -- be
24 embedding many of those technology standards early.
25 but we also do know that those need to be some

1 standalone classes that we have encoding and career
2 planning and those kinds of things. So I wanted to
3 assure you that we've thought about it and that we
4 know that we've got to offer some -- as we go forward
5 and grow -- we'll have to offer some standalone
6 classes.

7 And Ms. Newton, to your concern also about
8 curriculum and our focus on agriculture, while
9 agriculture and economics will be a hallmark of the
10 school, we also realize the importance of our
11 traditional curriculum, basic skills, making sure
12 that the students have everything that they would
13 have in a public school in terms of their learning;
14 and then going forward, adjusting and focusing and
15 adding to if we need to, those interests of students
16 that -- that we see. If we obviously -- if we see a
17 big population of students that are inclined towards
18 the arts, then that -- those are conversations we
19 need to have about how can we provide some additional
20 curricular offerings in those areas. So they'll
21 still be getting the good basic skills, the things
22 that they need, that traditional curriculum, but
23 we're going to try to focus in on the areas that we
24 feel are specific to this agricultural community that
25 -- that these kids are living in. But equipping them

1 for whatever they decide to do. Does that --

2 MS. NEWTON: Yes.

3 DR. KENNON: -- help?

4 MS. NEWTON: Thank you.

5 MS. SAWYER: And then, of course, the -- the CTE
6 office is there, and we've reached out to them a
7 couple of times already and we will continue our
8 relationship with them and make sure that we're doing
9 everything just like we are supposed to do. And we
10 also will have -- just going back to the -- to the
11 population, there will be many outreaches. I have
12 said, hey, I'll go door to door. You know, I'm -- I
13 will -- I'll work -- I'll go door to door and talk to
14 parents if they have questions.

15 But we have had -- we have a -- a local food
16 truck there that is very popular, and she has offered
17 to, you know, have a fundraiser for us. And when we
18 do that, it will obviously be, you know, in a setting
19 where we would be available to talk to people who
20 were coming by, you know, getting things like that.
21 So we do have several -- several ways, you know, that
22 we've been reach out.

23 Gateway** is its own city. It has its own, you
24 know, monthly city council meetings. Avoca also has
25 their own city council meetings. Little Flock has

1 there -- you know, so we will be -- there will be a
2 large outreach from -- from us personally going into
3 these communities and -- and talking to parents to
4 garner support for our school. So --

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So -- and I will say that
6 I greatly appreciate your passion for what you guys
7 would like to see happen here and the amount of
8 support that came with you today with the mayor's
9 office and -- and your, you know, local delegation.
10 That to me is not lost. I'm just wanting to be
11 comfortable with your plan, not only for
12 implementation, but down the road --

13 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- because when we get
15 kids excited about being in this environment and then
16 they get started in this environment --

17 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- then the disappointing
19 -- disappointing piece is when that environment can't
20 continue for them.

21 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh. Right.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So that's where my
23 thoughts and --

24 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that's where my

1 questions. It is not in any way on your passion or
2 the --

3 DR. KENNON: Certainly.

4 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- intent of the community
6 to be able to support, but just --

7 MS. SAWYER: Well, we've had those same
8 conversations.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Just wanted to make sure
10 if we provide --

11 DR. SAWYER: Yeah.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- everything to kids --

13 MS. SAWYER: Right.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and they're able to
15 have that for the time that they would like to be
16 involved in it.

17 MS. SAWYER: Right.

18 DR. KENNON: I think the growth that we're
19 seeing in those communities that as they -- they the
20 building moves out from Rogers; they are landlocked
21 so it's moving in that direction. So I think that --
22 that the part of the sustainability of this will come
23 from the fact that more and more families and -- are
24 -- will be moving out in this direction. It's kind
25 of like the growth that we saw in Benton and Bryant

1 out of Little Rock and now into Haskell. It's
2 tremendous as people bring their families and move
3 into Northwest Arkansas and start working in -- in
4 areas of these big corporations that are out there, I
5 think we will -- I think that's where our -- our
6 student enrollment will be solidified and --

7 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

8 DR. KENNON: -- and grow. So --

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Other questions?

10 If there are no other questions, I'll entertain a
11 motion.

12 MR. BALDWIN: So let me -- let me make the
13 motion to approve your -- your application and I
14 don't know the sense of the committee, but I'll --
15 I'll put this out here. You know, I -- I think
16 you're -- in corporate America, we call it blue sky
17 when there's, you know, there's kind of some stuff
18 out there that's not really nailed down yet.

19 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

20 MR. BALDWIN: And I know it's -- in a new -- in
21 new school that always exists in some degree.

22 DR. KENNON: Sure.

23 MR. BALDWIN: And I think there are some things
24 that you could do that would make us probably more
25 comfortable.

1 DR. KENNON: Okay.

2 MR. BALDWIN: Especially with the back-office
3 support --

4 DR. KENNON: Okay.

5 MR. BALDWIN: -- and contracts that you should
6 be engaging with that. And I'm probably -- I'm
7 probably okay on your financial plan. I think -- I
8 feel that you're going to get there both -- both in
9 year one and after that which is that's why I'm
10 making the motion. Plus, I understand what you're
11 trying to do for your town being a small-town guy, I
12 -- I get that. So let me make a motion to approve
13 this based on those reasons at this time.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. I have a motion from
15 Mr. Baldwin to approve. Do I have a second?

16 MR. DAVIS: Second.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. All those in
18 favor?

19 MS. SARACINI: Aye.

20 MR. DAVIS: Aye.

21 MR. BALDWIN: Aye.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All those opposed?

23 MS. NEWTON: Aye.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any abstentions? Okay. I
25 didn't get the count on that. So that was three to

1 approve? Did you abstain?

2 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I did.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. So -- Shasta?

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And I guess I would like a
5 little bit more discussion on the motion. So --

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But go ahead.

8 MS. WAGNER: Okay. So how many approved?

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Three.

10 MS. WAGNER: So this motion is deadlocked. It's
11 done.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

13 MS. WAGNER: Did you vote?

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Huh-uh.

15 MS. WAGNER: You're the tiebreaker. So, Mr.
16 Chair, you have to vote to break a tie.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I -- I think I'm sitting
18 where -- where Dr. Wright-McMurray is right now, and
19 I think it's because I just really need more
20 information and -- and so I'm going to vote to deny.

21 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Is there any discussion
23 that we can have at this point?

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

25 MS. WAGNER: So you're saying you need more

1 information? Would you like to change that to a vote
2 to defer potentially?

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: But I did -- I think -- don't
4 we have to do a whole other motion for that?

5 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

7 MS. WAGNER: So is that on the table? If it is,
8 the applicants might like to know that instead of
9 just an outright denial.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Well, that was my intent was
11 to deny that particular motion, but not necessarily
12 --

13 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- the application.

15 MS. WAGNER: So really, it's a nay? You're
16 voting nay?

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. There we go. I'm
18 voting nay.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So is this where we can
20 have the -- more discussion?

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I go back to and -- and
23 just -- short personal story. So I'm married to
24 somebody who is from a small town and greatly
25 appreciated and greatly benefited from having a

1 school that was not far from them and grew up in a
2 farming family. So agriculture is hugely important
3 to -- to us, so I am there with you. As relates to
4 the application, there are some remaining questions
5 that I do have. And I think if given just a little
6 bit more time, you probably could come back to us
7 with those responses and provide a little bit more
8 comfort in going forward --

9 MS. SAWYER: Okay.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- because I go back to my
11 previous -- again, you know, married to a small-town
12 person. I understand it, you know, grew up in the
13 city, but greatly appreciated being able to go pick
14 my own salad when I wanted it. So I do understand
15 that, but I just go back to that -- I don't want to
16 get our students in limbo of okay, we're
17 transitioning to this school. Okay, no, we're going
18 to this school and then something happens a couple of
19 years because we just weren't as diligent on the
20 front end to where now they don't have that
21 opportunity. Now there's not -- I just don't want to
22 put our kids in that limbo.

23 DR. KENNON: Sure.

24 MS. SAWYER: Right.

25 DR. KENNON: We don't either.

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And I know you guys don't
2 either.

3 MS. SAWYER: We appreciate that.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And so that's just where I
5 just want us to be very careful and intentional on
6 how we get this started, so that we are in the best
7 place for it to be successful, so that our kiddos
8 have the best opportunity to enjoy the experience.

9 MS. SAWYER: Right.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So my desire would be that
11 we give you an opportunity to go back, massage this a
12 little bit more, come back with some responses to
13 some of the questions that were posed here, and then
14 allow us to be able to make a decision based off of
15 that. That's where I would like to go.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: That's where I would like to
17 go as well. Especially with the possibilities that
18 are out there and the recent developments for you
19 all. I mean, it's -- it's something that you know
20 you could come back in a month or two months and be
21 able to provide us all the information that we need
22 --

23 MS. SAWYER: Uh-huh.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- to really feel confident
25 about the decision and I think that's just where I'm

1 sitting right now.

2 MS. SAYWER: Okay.

3 DR. KENNON: Okay.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I know it's unfortunate
5 circumstances, but at the same time, if we had that
6 information --

7 MS. SAWYER: Right.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- it would be helpful.

9 DR. KENNON: Certainly.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I'll entertain another
11 motion.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I would like to make a
13 motion to defer a vote on Garfield Elementary Charter
14 application.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: For how long?

16 MS. SARACINI: Garfield Scholar --

17 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Garfield -- sorry.
18 Garfield Scholars. Garfield Scholars Academy.

19 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: GSA. Okay. I kept
21 getting confused with the other GSA. For 60 days.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: That's fine.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Sixty days. That will
24 give you plenty of time to --

25 MS. SAWYER: Yes.

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- go and come back --

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and still have ample
4 time to prepare for the next school year.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I guess my -- just one
6 question about the -- the motion. Would that give --
7 give them time to enter any agreement with APSRC?

8 MR. SMITH: You're talking about the with
9 regards to, like, back-office support and things of
10 that nature, yes.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Things of that nature.

12 MR. SMITH: Obviously, they have got to exist
13 before they can enter an agreement.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

15 MR. SMITH: So they have to be --

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

17 MR. SMITH: -- a true entity --

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

19 MR. SMITH: -- before they can do anything. So
20 -- but we're -- if it's charter school out there,
21 we're going to try work with them and try to make
22 something happen. So --

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

24 MR. SMITH: So we will try and support if this
25 Panel deems it, you know, deems it approved, we'll

1 try to work with them going forward.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

3 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. I have a motion by
5 Ms. -- by Dr. Wright-McMurray. Do I have a second?

6 MS. NEWTON: Second.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. All those in favor?

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Aye.

9 MS. NEWTON: Aye.

10 MR. BALDWIN: Aye.

11 MS. SARACINI: Aye.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

13 MR. DAVIS: Opposed.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

15 And of course, there's no abstentions, so the motion
16 passes. We'll see you in 60 days.

17 MS. SAWYER: I'll see you in 60 days. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: What's the pleasure of the
20 panel? Do we want to take a ten-minute break? Okay.
21 We'll take a ten-minute break and we'll come back at.
22 11:06.

23 MR. DAVIS: Mr. Chair?

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

25 MR. DAVIS: With regards to the voting sheet, is

1 there anything that we need to do there?

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: No. We don't need to do
3 anything with the voting sheet yet.

4 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

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

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: We'll call the meeting back to
8 order. Ms. Wagner.

9 MS. WAGNER: For the last time. Okay. For the
10 last time I'll give you guys the hearing procedure.
11 So after the Chair swears everybody who will be
12 testifying in, the applicant gets 20 minutes to
13 present unless, of course, you'd like to elect to
14 award them more time. I do not believe we've
15 received any public comments; correct? We have not
16 received any public comments for this applicant, and
17 we also received no opposition, so after you swear
18 them in, they will present and then we will get to
19 the legal review.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much. Ms.
21 Summons.

22 **II.2. CONSIDERATION OF FREEDOM LEARNING ACADEMY NEW OPEN**
23 **ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION**

24 MS. SUMMONS: Dorie Summons. DESE Charter
25 Office. Freedom Learning Academy has submitted an

1 application to establish an open enrollment charter
2 school beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year. The
3 charter will follow a blended education model. Mr.
4 Andrew Curry will be speaking on behalf of Freedom
5 Learning Academy.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Dr. Curry, if
7 please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear
8 the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the
9 whole truth and nothing but the truth?

10 DR. CURRY: I do.

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

13 DR. CURRY: Well, good morning.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Good morning.

15 DR. CURRY: I'm honored to be here with you
16 today. I look forward to explaining our idea that --
17 and concept that myself and Ms. Lindsey Graham, who
18 is on Zoom -- she's up in the mountains today
19 corralling kids in her principalship that she's with.
20 And, you know, basically, the two of us together are
21 kind of the ones that got this concept going and
22 hopefully can bring it to Arkansas. So -- wrong way.

23 Basically, this is who I am. This is the past
24 career. I've got 28 years of service in Arkansas
25 Public Schools. I served as a high school principal;

1 I've been a superintendent at four different
2 districts across the state; I'm a veteran.; director
3 of Governmental Affairs for a thriving Arkansas
4 business currently.

5 And I also had to give a big shout-out to my
6 wife who's with me today, Katie. She is a principal
7 at Fountain Lake Elementary School. She was kind
8 enough to come and support me today and I really
9 appreciate her for that. She's one of the hardest-
10 working people I know in the education business. I'm
11 very proud to be with her.

12 Lindsey Graham is a young lady that I met while
13 I was Superintendent at Deer-Mt. Judea. If you're
14 not familiar with that part of the state, it's
15 basically half-way between Russellville and Harrison
16 on Highway 7. Probably the most isolated school
17 district in the state. Ms. Graham is a former
18 elementary school teacher. Served as a career coach
19 for Northark Community College, digital learning
20 instructor and the director of the digital learning
21 program that we had at Deer-Mt. Judea School
22 District. She's also a homeschool mother and,
23 basically, operated in that world, as well, and is
24 currently serving as principal at the Mt. Judea
25 school.

1 Our purpose and what we plan on doing if so
2 granted the opportunity is simple. We support the
3 Arkansas taxpayers; we believe and advocate for
4 parents to choose their child's educational path; we
5 plan to offer support in multiple curricular choices.
6 They can learn at any time anywhere by fulfilling
7 every student's individual potential. We will
8 personalize an education plan that focuses on
9 creating a dynamic school and family partnership.

10 What we are not: We are not an enemy of the
11 public school system. I have four children that are
12 all public-school graduates. I've got one that just
13 completed medical school at UAMS and she's over in
14 Nashville doing her residency right now. We're very
15 proud of her. I've got another one over at UCA
16 that's working on his prerequisites for physician's
17 assistant and then two more that are in the public
18 school system right now.

19 So our goal is to reach out to students that are
20 not currently in the public school system, and we
21 don't want to be a landing place either for students
22 that have no motivation and desire to learn. Now,
23 with that said, there's some of that in every time
24 that you deal with children, you know, and that's
25 something that all would have to deal with.

1 Our students to be required to take the same
2 standardized testing as any Arkansas public school
3 student. This will allow for significant data to be
4 studied for -- that could further help shape the
5 future of education in Arkansas. I've had the
6 opportunity to be involved in consolidation of two
7 small school districts in the past. I've been in the
8 career field long enough to live through the Lakeview
9 era and kind of understand -- Ms. Newton kind knows
10 all about kind of where that came from and kind of
11 how those things have developed in Arkansas over
12 time. But the goal of our idea is to basically be --
13 be a catalyst, you know, for change but to also, you
14 know, help those parents that are looking for
15 options.

16 The first place that we would ask, if granted
17 and to have blended learning center, is in Springdale
18 in Northwest Arkansas. That would be where the large
19 majority of homeschool students are currently.
20 Again, whenever I was at Deer-Mt. Judea as
21 superintendent, I found out there was a large pocket
22 of these students that are located mostly throughout
23 Northwest Arkansas. But there's different models
24 that we could do for that. I believe that the first
25 one would be a blended schoolhouse model where these

1 students could come to the learning center at least
2 two days a week. They could come five days a week if
3 they wanted, but it would be our hope that they would
4 at least show up to the blended learning center two
5 days a week to have that face-to-face instruction and
6 interaction with the teacher.

7 The rest of the time we would have teachers that
8 would go out and meet with students to make sure that
9 they are staying on-task and doing the things they
10 need to be doing. Learning centers would be open
11 daily for extra teaching and support. We would have
12 IDEA services through special education that would be
13 addressed in these -- in the blended learning centers
14 to include speech; OT (occupational therapy);
15 physical therapy.

16 All of those different elements would be offered
17 at that blended learning center and then we would
18 also have the career college advising. I think this
19 is probably the biggest component and area that we
20 could be of help to the students. I think -- I'm a
21 huge proponent of the trades. My father was a
22 carpenter. I grew up on jobsites, you know. I say
23 my first job is -- was bending out 10-penny nails,
24 you know, that were left on the jobsite.

25 I think that we've -- we've got a big gap in the

1 trades area. I believe that we've got an opportunity
2 to work with students in this area and to help them
3 seek their potential in the trades. We also have, I
4 think, a good opportunity here with the amount of
5 jobs that are available in Northwest Arkansas in the
6 trades -- in the industries that are in that area to
7 form partnerships with those companies.

8 Again, working for -- with business for the last
9 year, I know that Arkansas businesses are struggling
10 right now to find qualified applicants and those
11 applicants are around us every day. They're the kids
12 that are growing up, you know, today and I think
13 we've got a real opportunity here for some
14 partnerships with these businesses; and to have
15 different areas where they can go work as soon as
16 they graduate. I think, again, that we need to
17 concentrate on the trades industry, manufacturing and
18 the STEM related careers, but we're also -- we will
19 offer academic opportunities for dual-enrollment
20 courses in local community colleges and universities.

21 And then we'll do tutoring and mentoring with a
22 strong focus on financial literacy. I'm a big
23 proponent of financial literacy for our students. I
24 think a lot of them make poor financial choices even
25 before they get to the place in life where they have

1 to understand about, you know, I'm 51 and I'm still
2 learning about financial choices myself. So I think
3 it's a very -- it needs to be a big component of
4 learning that any student goes through, especially
5 with the students with our -- our model.

6 And then to have partnerships with career
7 professionals in a work study program. I think the
8 last couple years of a student's training, or their
9 high school experience should be something that is
10 relevant and should be something that's preparing
11 them for the workforce. Each and every one of us,
12 you know, is going to leave the workforce at some
13 point in time and we want others -- we want those
14 kids to come along the line for that.

15 There are -- according to ADE there's now 30,205
16 homeschool students in the state and that would make
17 them the largest school district in the state if they
18 were all together. '17 and '18, you know, there were
19 about 20,000 and that's grown now 10,000 over that
20 time period. If you look at trends and data, it
21 leads you to believe that that number is going to
22 continue to increase.

23 And I know the state has the accounts that
24 they're going to be supporting in the future and I
25 think that what -- the concept that we're talking

1 about here is basically doing something in between;
2 and doing something that we could be a support to
3 parents that are wanting to homeschool their students
4 but, at the same time, still provide a structure for
5 them to be able to do the things that they want to do
6 with their children. And, also, I think that, you
7 know, Freedom Learning Academy, we use the long term
8 as a research study to help shape the future of
9 education in Arkansas. You know, there's not been
10 very much comparison testing, you know, in students
11 that are homeschooled in an environment or in a
12 different setting of this nature.

13 And what sets us apart, I think, again, we want
14 to be the bridge between the solely virtual and a
15 regular public school. We want to have an
16 environment that's full of library books for parents
17 where they could come and check those out. They
18 could have clubs; operations there; different areas.
19 I know that working with and meeting some of the
20 folks in Northwest Arkansas, for example, you know,
21 the Fayetteville Boys and Girls Club spread it out
22 two days a week for students to come in that are
23 homeschool students.

24 Those students, you know, are coming together on
25 a weekly basis to have that social interaction that's

1 sometimes talked about with homeschool students
2 that's difficult. And at the same time, we believe
3 that the learning center could be a place where these
4 students are coming to and making those connections
5 socially, as well. This concept -- you know, is in
6 other states, as well, and I believe it is something
7 that I think could work here in Arkansas.

8 Again, it provides parental choice. It gives
9 those parents the options, you know, of, maybe, not
10 having their student in a regular public school but
11 yet, you know, they have that connection and that
12 ability to do what they think is best for their own
13 children. Individualized learning, that gives us --
14 it would give us an opportunity to work with those
15 kids, again, to develop a career and college pathway
16 for them; and then, also, to be able to work with
17 them individually on a daily basis in order to find
18 out exactly what they -- what they need. You know,
19 many homeschool families would appreciate a
20 partnership that would help their children reach
21 their full potential and achieve their educational
22 goals.

23 A lot of the things that I've found in the past
24 working with homeschool students whenever we were
25 offering the ACT Aspire, 90 percent of those parents

1 wanted their students to go to college or have a
2 further path for education -- for their education and
3 in order to offer them an opportunity to participate
4 in the ACT Aspire, that led to those parents then
5 coming back and asking, okay, how do we get our
6 students to perform better on the standardized test?
7 Which led to a conversation, then, about, okay, we
8 can do these things in literacy and math and science
9 -- social studies. So it was more of a way to -- to
10 lead, you know, parents into the conversation about,
11 you know, the different curriculums that are out
12 there.

13 We -- we plan on using the Department of
14 Education's already approved digital learning
15 programs that are out there. And we would offer them
16 the opportunity to choose from those different
17 programs of curriculum. And we would have a meeting
18 at the beginning of every year with a parent where we
19 would basically be sitting them down and, you know,
20 letting them choose what curriculum they want for the
21 year for their student. We'd also be providing them
22 then with the means to do so.

23 And we would be focusing on individual learning,
24 you know, using certified Arkansas teachers. That's
25 the goal. As everybody knows, that's sometimes

1 difficult and there are alternative pathways, and we
2 hope to follow that if needed.

3 Here are the resources that we'd be offering to
4 the students. One's a learning fund. You know, we
5 would get that to the students' parents. That would
6 follow the same guidelines for the Freedom Accounts
7 that are out there now -- or recently that have been
8 approved. They would have those similar guidelines
9 to have to follow in order to qualify for the
10 learning fund.

11 Again, they would have the Department of
12 Education-approved digital learning curriculum. We
13 would provide the Science of Reading assessors that's
14 so important right now with the literacy. Dyslexia
15 screening. The resource center would also provide
16 tutoring, one-on-one help and the socialization
17 opportunities. We'd have technologies; the
18 textbooks; the supplies. We would do internet
19 reimbursement for families. We would have guest
20 speakers and field trips to different places for
21 those students. They would have both opportunities
22 for them to see what's going on in business and
23 industry and it also would have socialization
24 opportunities, as well, and we'd have clubs and focus
25 on career exploration and college planning. We'd

1 also have counseling services for those students,
2 again, to help them with their future plans and have
3 that connection.

4 Again, what we're wanting to do is basically
5 bridge that gap between public school and homeschool
6 students and getting that combined effort there
7 that's basically the bridge. And to sum it all up,
8 there are many families across our state that do an
9 excellent job every day educating their own children
10 and that would like help to continue doing so, you
11 know, without the state's help. However, there are
12 many that would appreciate a partnership to help
13 their child reach their full potential and achieve
14 greater educational goals and that's where Freedom
15 Learning Academy would be. It is best to try and be
16 the bridge in between those two, and that's -- that's
17 basically where we're at right now. I appreciate
18 your time. I'm willing to answer any questions you
19 might have.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much.

21 DR. CURRY: Thanks.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. -- Ms. Wagner, the legal
23 review, please.

24 MS. WAGNER: So if you guys will see the legal
25 review. You will see it is very short and the

1 charter did not ask, but for the four waivers that
2 are listed, those four waivers are all fully
3 effectuated. But I did ask that he provide
4 additional rationale to all of you just on those
5 because they are so short.

6 There was one thing, though. When I spoke with
7 Dr. Curry, in order to do a synchronous -- a
8 synchronous model that he's using you would have to
9 waive instructional day or flexible schedule. We
10 kind of used those terms interchangeably which is the
11 six-hour-course day. Because he's not necessarily --
12 if you have a student who is virtual or is working at
13 their own pace, they're not necessarily going to be
14 sitting there for six hours a day. So he would need
15 to add that waiver for this along with, for fully
16 virtual kids -- if he has those kids -- then you
17 would also need a recess waiver because you can't, in
18 fact, have 40 minutes instruction when the child is
19 not actually present with you. So he would need to
20 add those two waivers to do this model.

21 Dr. Curry, I believe it's your intention to add
22 those; correct?

23 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

24 MS. WAGNER: Okay. Would you just confirm that
25 on the record?

1 DR. CURRY: Yes. I confirm on the record.

2 MS. WAGNER: Okay. So those would be added to
3 this, as well. I did have a couple things. So one,
4 same thing with the previous applicant, update on the
5 501(c)(3) status just to see where that's at, and
6 I'll let the applicant respond to let you know.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I just have one question about
8 the library media specialist. It said that -- in the
9 narrative, it said that they might have a contract.
10 Would that require a waiver --

11 MS. WAGNER: So --

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- and is that the intention,
13 I guess?

14 MS. WAGNER: If they hired somebody that had the
15 library media special -- you have to hire someone --

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

17 MS. WAGNER: -- not just contract with.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

19 MS. WAGNER: Dr. Curry?

20 DR. CURRY: Yeah. Sure.

21 MS. WAGNER: Would you like to --

22 DR. CURRY: Originally -- originally, I think
23 the thought process was -- is that we would form a
24 local libraries in the area and work with the public
25 libraries. I think now, you know, probably the

1 thought process is is that we would try to hire
2 somebody -- the library media specialist -- you know,
3 and have them at the learning center where we would
4 also have, you know, the access to the media, as
5 well.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then --

7 DR. CURRY: And back to the 501(c)(3) status.
8 We have that. I think I forwarded it to you. Did
9 you see that?

10 MS. WAGNER: I didn't.

11 DR. CURRY: Okay.

12 MS. WAGNER: Honestly

13 DR. CURRY: I'm so sorry. We do have the
14 501(c)(3) status now completed and I'll make sure I
15 get that to you as well.

16 MS. WAGNER: Perfect.

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then the next question was
18 would there need to be one for nutrition?

19 MS. WAGNER: Yes. He will have to hire somebody
20 for nutrition to cover those.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

22 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

24 MS. WAGNER: Which he didn't ask for a waiver of
25 that, so that -- so anything he did not ask for a

1 waiver for --

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

3 MS. WAGNER: -- he is fully -- because he -- he
4 signed the statement of assurance that was in the
5 back of his packet.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

7 MS. WAGNER: So that in and of itself states
8 that if the charter applicant is not waiving, then
9 the charter applicant is assuring them they will
10 comply.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

12 MS. WAGNER: So he will have to comply with
13 everything that is not asked to waive here besides
14 the two initial waivers that -- the instructional day
15 flexible schedule which is Arkansas Code § 6-16-102,
16 except (a) (5) and Standard 1-A.4.3; and then recess
17 is Arkansas Code § 6-16-102A5 and Standard 1-A.4.3
18 along with DESE governing nutrition, Section 7. And
19 I would ask that the charter -- the applicant --
20 narrow that recess waiver to fully virtual students
21 only, but I will let him respond.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

23 DR. CURRY: Yes. I would like to amend that,
24 yes. Thank you.

25 MS. WAGNER: Yes, sir.

1 MS. NEWTON: I have a question.

2 MS. WAGNER: Yes, ma'am.

3 MS. NEWTON: Taking into account the mandatory
4 days of attendance, does he fall under -- which
5 category does he fall under? Clearly, it's not
6 virtual, so would he be obligated -- or would he be
7 -- I'll ask you, would he be obligated to the same
8 numbers or some numbers? Or do -- I don't know. Can
9 we -- and can that be negotiated? Is that the policy
10 or -- certainly, it could be requested as a waiver.
11 I'm not sure. I'm just confused about that.

12 MS. WAGNER: Okay. So the number of days that
13 they have to attend: 178 days or 1,068 hours of
14 instructional time. That has not been asked to
15 waive. What he waives is the six hours sitting in
16 front of a teacher teaching at the same time. Like,
17 that -- t's for the blended synchronous. So you have
18 to comply with one of those two standards whether it
19 be 178 days or 1,068 hours in order to qualify under
20 LEARNS. Because he's not asked for a -- he's not
21 asked for a waiver of the minimum teacher salary
22 requirements, so part of that 50,000 will be
23 complying with the 178 or the 1,068 hours.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then as far as course
25 credit, it's 120 hours for a credit --

1 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- for mastery?

3 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- and, so, that's -- that's
5 not being waived. Is that --

6 MS. WAGNER: No, that has not been requested.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Just -- the thing is is
8 with the mastery piece, those have to be approved by
9 Learning Services, so --

10 MS. WAGNER: Correct.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Just -- just putting
12 that on the record.

13 MS. NEWTON: The other question I have is
14 relative to -- as I understand it, the learning
15 center is going to be at least two days a week;
16 correct?

17 MS. WAGNER: I will let him ask -- answer that.

18 MS. NEWTON: Okay. But this is -- well, I want
19 to know and, maybe, both of you -- how you -- that's
20 a situation where someone may show up or they may
21 not. How will you count absenteeism and how will you
22 ensure -- you know, how will the numbers work for you
23 on -- on attendance?

24 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am. This is -- this is,
25 basically, the way that it will operate is, so, for

1 the two days, at least, that are going to be required
2 to come to the learning center, so those will count
3 as the two days for the week; and then the other
4 times they're going to be monitored, you know. I
5 hate the word "monitored", but, you know, they will
6 be monitored by their teacher of record that's online
7 that they are actually completing and working on
8 their assignments. So that will be counted as a day
9 of instruction in the 1,060 minutes of instruction.
10 Does that make sense?

11 MS. NEWTON: That doesn't answer my question.

12 DR. CURRY: Okay.

13 MS. NEWTON: Is -- they meet the requirements
14 for the -- for the online teaching but they miss many
15 more days than they should as it -- as it relates to
16 the two days a week.

17 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am. We'll have a calendar
18 that will reflect 178 days of instruction and the
19 1,000 -- which is -- it'll -- it'll reflect both, but
20 -- and they'll be responsible, and attendance will be
21 taken daily for them to be there, I guess. And I may
22 be misunderstanding you.

23 MS. NEWTON: How will -- how will -- the
24 students that are not virtual: How will they be
25 staffed? The ones that will actually be in the

1 class, I mean, taking courses. How -- how would your
2 program address that -- the staffing?

3 DR. CURRY: The staffing?

4 MS. NEWTON: Uh-huh.

5 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am. So, in APSCN there
6 would be the -- there will be a teacher of record
7 that will be certified for them, and that teacher
8 will be responsible for the amount of students just
9 to follow the standards; and then anything over what
10 the standards met, of course we would pay them above
11 and beyond that.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So, we have some questions
13 from our area specialists.

14 MS. WAGNER: I've got just a couple more things.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

16 MS. WAGNER: And they are things that I
17 discussed with Dr. Curry before we got up here. So
18 on his application, he kind of used the term
19 "superintendent" and "principal" interchangeably when
20 he talked about hiring and firing responsibilities.
21 So when I talked to Dr. Curry, he explained that he
22 is going to serve in that role because he is licensed
23 principal and the superintendent. So, that's why we
24 doesn't need a licensure waiver there, but I'll let
25 him explain what he meant by the hiring process. The

1 superintendent will not have the final decision
2 authority. That will lie with the board. They will
3 make recommendations to the board and then the board
4 will make the final determination. Did I sum that up
5 correctly?

6 DR. CURRY: That's absolutely correct. We -- we
7 are going to have a at large five-member board.
8 Actually, we've got probably the same folks that we
9 stated for our 501(c)(3) and let them start off with
10 staggered terms just like you do normally in -- and
11 monthly board meetings and board reports and -- and
12 all those good things that we would be offering, as
13 well.

14 MS. WAGNER: So I will put one thing on the
15 record. So, in your incorporating documents I
16 noticed you are one of the incorporators. You will
17 not be sitting on your board, correct?

18 DR. CURRY: No. No, ma'am.

19 MS. WAGNER: Okay. Just wanted to clarify that
20 on the record.

21 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Do we not need a waiver of the
22 policies for board election?

23 MS. WAGNER: If -- So as a charter, there's
24 nobody to elect --

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

1 MS. WAGNER: -- but --

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: But typically --

3 MS. WAGNER: Yes. Typically they do waive those
4 board procedures and board policies. That may be
5 something that we have to discuss and, they have to
6 come back and seek an amendment --

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

8 MS. WAGNER: -- for that just so we see how this
9 all works.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

11 MS. WAGNER: But yes. That is something,
12 typically, that -- that we see.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Are we okay to take questions
14 from the specialists at this point?

15 MS. WAGNER: I have one other thing --

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: One more thing. Okay.

17 MS. WAGNER: -- just to bring up. I also just
18 wanted to put on the record -- so I looked through,
19 again, his 501(c)(3) documentation -- Dr. Curry, and
20 I noticed that your 501(c)(3) you have got a major
21 revenue jump from 07/01/23 to '24. I just want to
22 put on the record in, you know, the 501(c)(3). So
23 your sponsoring entity cannot take foundation
24 funding. That's got to stay with your charter.

25 DR. CURRY: Exactly.

1 MS. WAGNER: Okay, perfect.

2 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

3 MS. WAGNER: Just wanted to put it on the record
4 to make everything clear, but I'm good now.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
6 much. All right.

7 Ms. Dill? Ms. Dill?
8 We'll move on to Ms. Barnett.

9 MS. BARNETT: Thank you. I just want to
10 encourage you to really respectively pursue getting a
11 school librarian. Your model seems to lend itself
12 very well to personalized learning and inquiry
13 motivated by those students, so a school librarian is
14 actually in a perfect position to encourage that and
15 to act as a facilitator and a mentor to those
16 students. So I think that this would be an
17 opportunity you shouldn't miss with working with
18 those students. So again, I encourage you to
19 actively pursue having a school librarian at your
20 facility.

21 DR. CURRY: And thank you for that, too, and I
22 agree with you. I think that with literacy being the
23 focus not only in the state but also our school, we
24 want to make sure that we have those opportunities
25 there. The other thought process is is that if we

1 get the right person that understands the concept
2 with it, hopefully that person can be a resource to
3 parents, as well, and help them understand
4 technology. You know, sometimes we have a little bit
5 of a harder time with technology, so hopefully our
6 library media specialist would conduct some training
7 for parents, you know, for technology, especially if
8 they're going to be, you know, on campus/off campus.

9 MS. BARNETT: Yes. And what I would hope is
10 that that school librarian wouldn't be just talking
11 about how to use the technology but incorporating our
12 standards which are very much focused on digital
13 literacy which is -- and information literacy which
14 is something our students really dig-in and evaluate
15 information and picking that good information over
16 the bad information; and I don't necessarily always
17 see that built into curriculums. And so again, this
18 is an opportunity for you to have someone who can
19 really push out that -- that kind of teaching.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Ms. Greene?

21 MS. GREENE: Hello. I saw that you addressed
22 special education. I'm Yvonne Greene in the office
23 of Special Education. And I saw that you addressed
24 special ed. I am wondering how in the blended model
25 you are going to ensure that students are receiving

1 their services in the least-restrictive environment
2 and reviewing that -- those service needs as the
3 student demonstrates that might need to be addressed
4 even if that's more of annually? Your plans
5 specifically said annually.

6 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am. And, you know, I think
7 that we had in the application that we would -- we're
8 going to hire a special ed LEA, you know, or the
9 person that would be overall responsible for that.
10 But we would want to also make sure that the LEA had
11 the opportunity to have, I guess, more of a closer
12 interaction with those students that are in special
13 ed so that the least-restrictive environment at their
14 home could also be, you know, where they're at, as
15 well. And it's providing the course accommodations
16 that are going to be needed for those students
17 because, ultimately, you know, that's -- that's how
18 we're going to help those students learn more
19 effectively.

20 MS. BARNETT: I think I was just curious because
21 sometimes the virtual setting is not highly effective
22 for our students with disabilities. Sometimes it's
23 the best situation and sometimes it's not, so it
24 could be very dependent on how that student is in
25 that moment.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then Ms. Dill has put a
2 comment in the chat to me. Her microphone is not
3 working, so she said that on the original application
4 it was stated that meals would be waived. Now it
5 states that meals will be amended through FSMC. This
6 service must be procured properly in order to use
7 federal funds. This does not require a bid process.
8 Also, there's no waivers allowing to -- for virtual
9 meals to be served to students. They must be on
10 campus.

11 DR. CURRY: Right. And that was our -- our goal
12 with the food service was basically -- What we were
13 going to do is -- is provide that option for the
14 parents to come in and pick up those meals or have
15 them onsite, you know, and be -- and we were, you
16 know, hopefully going to have that. The food service
17 management company -- that's what the FSMC stands
18 for. We would have them tailor it to our particular
19 population, you know, to where the students that are
20 there coming in for the two days a week that are
21 mandatory, of course they'll be having their meals
22 there; and anyone else, you know, we could work with
23 them from that point. Now, I understand there's
24 probably some things there we're going to have to
25 work together on it and -- and figure it out and

1 follow all the -- the areas of, you know, that we're
2 supposed to with food service and that's -- that's
3 our plan.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

5 MR. DAVIS: Mr. -- Mr. Chair? I'm sorry.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes?

7 MR. DAVIS: I just keep -- I feel like I'm
8 getting some -- and I think this last response is --
9 is one of those responses in which it feels as if
10 there are, "What we would like to do," or, you know,
11 "What we hope to do," or, "Our plan was to do." I
12 need some specificity, if we could, around some of
13 these answers in order for us to understand that
14 that's what will happen and -- and, you know,
15 understanding that there's always some things that
16 will pivot and change.

17 So, once again, can I just get a clear
18 understanding in regards to the food service aspect
19 what will happen and what the plan is? And, you
20 know, you mentioned the idea of, you know, food
21 service being provided. Has there been a
22 conversation around the execution and what did the
23 supplier say? Like, I need some real specificity
24 here, if you wouldn't mind, and throughout this --
25 throughout this conversation. Sorry if I'm

1 overstepping here.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: No, you're good.

3 DR. CURRY: No. Mr. Davis, I appreciate your --
4 your asking for more information about that and to be
5 completely honest with everybody here, there has not
6 been a conversation yet with a food service
7 management company that would develop a particular
8 program for us and that's, you know, on me. But I do
9 know -- working in the past, different companies that
10 this is an option to be able to do. So then again, I
11 can't give you the specifics that you want there, Mr.
12 Davis, and I apologize for that.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And then, I did want to add
14 Ms. Dill had also put in the chat that federal
15 regulations require that meals are consumed onsite.
16 She said it has changed a little for the summer
17 meals, but not for the meals during the school year.
18 So, just -- so that --

19 DR. CURRY: Yeah.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- you're aware.

21 DR. CURRY: Again, I would -- our plan will be
22 to work with child nutrition, too, to make sure that
23 we're following every bit of that and that's not a,
24 "We're going to." That is, you know, we will follow
25 the child nutrition guidelines for that, you know,

1 for it.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. I guess we'll move
3 to the Panel. I guess we'll move to the Panel.
4 We'll start down here with Ms. Newton. Do you have
5 any questions?

6 MS. NEWTON: Not at this point.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

8 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah. Just a few. So you
9 mentioned -- and I think in the application it
10 mentions a five-member board. Do you have -- do you
11 have a board right now or do you have names that you
12 can share with us?

13 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir. What we have is -- we
14 have -- and Ms. Graham, you may have a little bit
15 more information too about the board. We did have to
16 name a board for our 501(c)(3). Our particular --
17 that's -- those are the five individuals that we
18 planned on, you know, from the beginning.

19 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. We haven't -- I haven't
20 seen -- I haven't seen that --

21 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

22 MR. BALDWIN: -- 501(c)(3) application.

23 DR. CURRY: Right, right. And I'm -- I
24 apologize. I guess, I should have those names here
25 today for that, but I -- I do -- we do already have

1 five members that have agreed, you know, to be
2 supportive and to be our board from the very
3 beginning. And like I said, we planned on -- I mean,
4 we will develop standard terms to both boards just
5 like any other Arkansas board like Academics Plus or
6 Maumelle has, you know, some of the eStem, some of
7 those other charter schools. So we would have --

8 MR. BALDWIN: So are the are the board members
9 listed in the 501(c)3 application intended to be the
10 board for the school, or were they just --

11 DR. CURRY: Yes.

12 MR. BALDWIN: They -- okay.

13 DR. CURRY: Yes.

14 MR. BALDWIN: What are their professional --
15 what is their professional background and experience?

16 DR. CURRY: Ms. Graham, do you have -- can you
17 answer some questions about the board members,
18 please.

19 MS. GRAHAM: Ryan Hartman is a math specialist;
20 he is currently serving in the military, but he has
21 been employed at the Harrison School District as a
22 math specialist. Gina Lackey is a reading specialist
23 and she is currently employed as a healthcare
24 provider for an individual student, but
25 her background is reading. Stephanie Overman is with

1 the Arkansas Extension Agency and then the lady that
2 you have from Watson Chapel.

3 DR. CURRY: So that would be Ms. Kerri McNeal.

4 MS. GRAHAM: Yes.

5 DR. CURRY: She's currently federal programs for
6 that district.

7 MR. BALDWIN: So are the -- is the math
8 specialist and reading specialists, are those
9 designations from a school system? Or is that a --
10 how do you -- I don't know --

11 DR. CURRY: Yes.

12 MR. BALDWIN: -- I guess, what that is.

13 DR. CURRY: Yes. He served as a math specialist
14 for the Harrison School district. Yes, sir.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Who else is involved in
16 your process to come before us? You're -- you're
17 here -- you and your wife, and you always see more
18 folks. And, I guess, I'm wondering about the support
19 structure behind you --

20 DR. CURRY: Yes.

21 MR. BALDWIN: -- and both from a community
22 support perspective and also from a just an
23 educational --

24 DR. CURRY: Right.

25 MR. BALDWIN: -- support perspective.

1 DR. CURRY: I've had lots of conversations with
2 APSRC in the past about this model, not only more
3 recently, but it was my thought process that I will
4 work with APSRC as far as the financial end of things
5 -- the bookkeeping aspect. But the -- the thought
6 process is that I would have APSRC involved. I've
7 also had the conversation with one of our education
8 cooperatives in the state that may be an option as
9 well to help with bookkeeping. I think that -- I
10 know that's going to be very important: make sure
11 taxes are paid, bills are paid and those sorts of
12 things.

13 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Thank you. And then I'm
14 trying to understand -- so I'm not -- I'm not an
15 educator. I'm --

16 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

17 MR. BALDWIN: I'm really what a blended support
18 -- blended model is and I'm learning in the structure
19 in the classroom setting and I read that you're going
20 to seek students from all over the state, it sounds
21 like?

22 DR. CURRY: I think that in the beginning we're
23 going to try to stick to that Northwest Arkansas
24 area, yes. And then we would go from there to having
25 the different learning centers in different parts of

1 the state.

2 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

3 DR. CURRY: So you know, we may look next Hot
4 Springs or Central Arkansas, perhaps that area.
5 Jonesboro would probably be the -- one of the next --
6 and I would, you know, come back to and ask for the
7 opportunity to expand.

8 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. That helps me. I -- I was
9 reading section 28 --

10 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

11 MR. BALDWIN: -- which is the recruitment
12 process, and it says here student recruitment and
13 enrollment would be open to all students statewide.

14 DR. CURRY: Yes.

15 MR. BALDWIN: And I was wondering how that would
16 work if two days a week they need to be in the
17 building in Springdale?

18 DR. CURRY: Right.

19 MR. BALDWIN: And -- so talk to us about how
20 that -- how the being in the building works. Would
21 they be scheduled, and the same students would be
22 there at the same time or is it just whoever comes on
23 that day?

24 DR. CURRY: That would be within the process of
25 working with their teacher to make sure that two days

1 a week they were coming in so we could basically make
2 good contact with them, and it would be from that
3 particular area. You know, and we would have that --
4 that connection there. You know, that -- that's kind
5 of where we were thinking of.

6 MR. BALDWIN: So it would be the same teacher
7 for those kids, or would they vary teachers?

8 DR. CURRY: No. No, we would -- no each -- each
9 one of the students who have a teacher assigned to
10 them based on what their certification level is and
11 based on what they're -- they're certified in.

12 MR. BALDWIN: So you will have 250 students in
13 year one and will -- I'm trying to understand --

14 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

15 MR. BALDWIN: -- the two day a week plan. So
16 will they all be there together on two days or will
17 they be --

18 DR. CURRY: They -- they could be, but it's not
19 necessary that they are. So in other words, we may
20 have -- since we're going to be 5-12, we may have 5,
21 6 and 7 may all meet on Mondays and Tuesdays; and
22 then you know 7, 8, 9 may come in in the next couple
23 of days. But it may be also an opportunity --
24 because what we're going to do is to provide maximum
25 flexibility for the -- for the parents. So it may be

1 an opportunity then to where they work with that
2 teacher and say, okay, this week we're going to be
3 able to come in Thursday and Friday. And the other
4 three days, they may be meeting in a coffee shop with
5 that teacher on-on-one. Of course, they're not going
6 to all meet together at the same time, but that
7 teacher is going to make contact daily with the
8 student either through virtual or that direct
9 connection.

10 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So -- okay. So that's
11 something.

12 DR. CURRY: Yes.

13 MR. BALDWIN: In your budget you have that
14 you're going to do 250 students in year one --

15 DR. CURRY: Yes.

16 MR. BALDWIN: -- and you -- you go up to, I
17 think, 500 the next year and then the cap off at
18 1,000?

19 DR. CURRY: Yes.

20 MR. BALDWIN: Will all of those students be
21 from the -- I mean, you talked about statewide versus
22 Springdale --

23 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

24 MR. BALDWIN: -- and when does the statewide
25 start? Or is this all perceived to be in the

1 Springdale area?

2 DR. CURRY: I think that as time goes and we see
3 success, that we would want to come back and ask for
4 an expansion. You know, this model in other states
5 has -- you know, there's a lot of schools that have,
6 you know, come in and are working with it. So it
7 would seem to me that over time, that you would hope
8 to grow that amount to -- you know, I don't think you
9 want to get into the 30,000 range by any means, but
10 -- but I think that 1,000 students could be
11 manageable both financially; and you could work it
12 out to where you know you may have 250 in Northwest
13 Arkansas, you may have 250 in Central Arkansas; you
14 now, and then have to kind of go from there over the
15 years and kind of expand and see where the need is --
16 would have something to do with it. There's going to
17 be different pockets of state that have larger
18 homeschool populations and that are, you know,
19 basically, you know, those areas are going to, you
20 know, have more in them than you do in other parts of
21 the state.

22 MR. BALDWIN: So maybe this is a question for
23 you all. If we approve this as it's written, are you
24 approving 1,000 student enrollment cap for the
25 Springdale location?

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

2 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Based on the way that it's
4 written now, but it would have to be -- it would be a
5 progressive cap. So --

6 MR. BALDWIN: Right.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Right.

8 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. And then final question is
9 --

10 DR. CURRY: Yes.

11 MR. BALDWIN: -- you've talked a lot about
12 homeschooling and is that -- is that your target
13 market of children that --

14 DR. CURRY: That's --

15 MR. BALDWIN: -- you've --

16 DR. CURRY: That's our target. Yes, but you
17 know, we would be an open enrollment charter school.
18 It would, you know, ultimately, we would have a
19 lottery system like the others do as well. We could
20 -- we could accept anyone -- or we will accept
21 anyone.

22 MR. BALDWIN: Why would a homeschool family be
23 interested in doing this?

24 DR. CURRY: In this program? Ms. Graham, do you
25 have an answer for that?

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I believe you may be muted.

2 MS. GRAHAM: I apologize for that. It's been
3 our experience that there are some homeschool
4 families out there that would love the support.
5 They're not necessarily interested in sending their
6 students for social reasons or for a number of
7 reasons to public school, but they are still looking
8 for the structure and the support system that the
9 public school offers. So we have found some really
10 great partnerships with those families that are --
11 that are looking for a place to bring their students,
12 you know, a couple of days a week, three days a week
13 for those types of services whether it be, you know,
14 speech or a library where they can access and the
15 media. But those are -- those are the things that we
16 have found across the state, and we were actually
17 quite surprised at how many -- how many people are
18 willing to work with the public school system after
19 choosing to homeschool their students.

20 MR. BALDWIN: So if -- if the -- if the
21 homeschool families are interested in this, help me
22 understand how -- how this education would work. So
23 do they continue their homeschool education under
24 their own system and then bring the kids to you two
25 days a week? Or do they walk away from their

1 homeschool education and do the virtual?

2 DR. CURRY: We have -- the requirements that we
3 have are for quarterly assessments. So you know,
4 basically they're going to be looked at on a
5 quarterly basis of completing assignments. So of
6 course, if the parent wants to teach above and beyond
7 the digital, you know, curriculum that -- that they
8 chose, that's up to them. I mean, they have that
9 right to do so. But they will be held to task for
10 the curriculum -- the digital curriculum that they
11 choose in the beginning of the year with their
12 student.

13 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

14 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So the line is still a little
16 blurry for me. So can you kind of describe how is
17 this different from a service provider?

18 DR. CURRY: Say that -- say that again.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So how is this not a service
20 provider, but a school? I'm trying to -- I'm trying
21 to get to that distinction.

22 DR. CURRY: Are you saying with this -- with the
23 public school --

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Or a charter school, you know
25 --

1 DR. CURRY: Right.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- because those are public
3 schools --

4 DR. CURRY: Right.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- as --

6 DR. CURRY: Right.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: -- well.

8 DR. CURRY: Right. You know, basically, it is
9 that learning center I believe that makes it
10 completely different. I think that that's going to
11 be the thing that basically brings people together in
12 a particular area and allows you to have that sense
13 of community that's going to be there for those
14 parents. And I think that's going to be a place that
15 they can come to again to have that interaction and
16 socialization and have that sense of belonging to
17 something, you know, to a bigger group.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Wagner?

19 MS. WAGNER: Just to provide a point of clarity
20 that I think will answer your questions about, Mr.
21 Baldwin. In order to receive -- for this charter
22 applicant if this becomes a school, in order to
23 receive full ADM funding these students must be full-
24 time enrolled students. So they will have to no
25 longer be homeschool students; they will have to be

1 public school students. Now I understand this model
2 look very similar to maybe what they're used to as a
3 homeschool student and maybe that is the attraction.
4 But they will have to be fully enrolled in order for
5 the applicant -- his chartered to receive full ADM
6 funding.

7 DR. CURRY: You know, and in the past -- like I
8 said, whenever I've -- I've dealt with this in the
9 past, that concept gets hard to keep, you know,
10 differentiated because as soon as you sign paperwork
11 like you have to have, as soon as they're enrolled in
12 APSCN, they do become public school students, or you
13 know, from that -- from that point forward. And you
14 know, and again, you say, well, they don't want to be
15 in public school, then why are they homeschool? It
16 is about, you know, helping that taxpayer, you know,
17 get -- you know, get the help they need and -- with
18 their child.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini?

20 MS. SARACINI: I have several questions. One,
21 I'm kind of confused because you keep saying digital.
22 So is it blended or is it totally digital?

23 DR. CURRY: They're going to choose. Right.

24 MS. SARACINI: I'm kind of confused.

25 DR. CURRY: You know, we had the -- there's

1 about 15 of them, I guess, different digital
2 curriculum --

3 MS. SARACINI: Yes.

4 DR. CURRY: -- that are --

5 MS. SARACINI: I've been on a committee to
6 approve them here, so yes, I'm very --

7 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

8 MS. SARACINI: -- aware. So --

9 DR. CURRY: Right.

10 MS. SARACINI: -- is it all digital or --

11 DR. CURRY: They would choose that particular
12 model whichever one they want of those approved
13 programs right now and they would be on that the
14 majority of the time the three days that they're not
15 at the learning center. When they're at the learning
16 center then they would be basically getting the extra
17 help they need or answer mom's questions or, it would
18 -- you know, whoever is there with them.

19 MS. SARACINI: So tell me what does that look
20 like when they're on -- at the learning center or you
21 said at the coffee shop talking with the teacher,
22 what does that look?

23 DR. CURRY: It looks like -- that it's a
24 certified Arkansas teacher that's helping a student
25 just like probably today throughout the state in

1 different classrooms. You know, they're -- they're
2 helping those kids get the -- get the help they need.

3 MS. SARACINI: I'm still a little -- quite
4 unclear, but I'll go on to another question. It says
5 that you're going to have a director and assistant
6 director and a principal and then a while ago
7 Ms. Shasta told us that you were going to be the
8 principal. So who's going to be the director?

9 DR. CURRY: Well, in the beginning, with the low
10 -- you know, depending on what the numbers are --

11 MS. SARACINI: Uh-huh.

12 DR. CURRY: -- and, you know, where we're at, I
13 would serve in those capacities, you know, in the
14 beginning of things. So --

15 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

16 DR. CURRY: Does that make sense?

17 MS. SARACINI: Well, you have put on your budget
18 a line item for a salary for a director, a salary for
19 principal --

20 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

21 MS. SARACINI: -- and so are those going to be
22 stackable salaries? Those are just things that I
23 would ask.

24 DR. CURRY: Right. Everything -- according to
25 the standards, right now we have to have half-time

1 superintendent, we have to have a half-time principal
2 if you're less than 450; isn't that correct?

3 MS. SARACINI: That is correct.

4 DR. CURRY: Right. So then you could serve in
5 both of those capacities in the beginning and then as
6 time to go back, yes, you would have an assistant
7 director, probably. If you had 1,000 students, I
8 would think that it would be necessary to have those
9 positions as time goes by. Yes, ma'am. But it was
10 my understanding within that budget that we were
11 listing the positions, you know, I guess from the
12 very beginning, I probably should have clarified
13 that.

14 MS. SARACINI: Those are things that were
15 unclear. And then you said that you were going to
16 work with -- I just want clarity on bookkeeper,
17 accounts payable -- are -- is -- I know that APSRC is
18 here. Are you going to work with them as that
19 bookkeeper/accounts payable? I mean, is all this
20 unclear? I just want clarity.

21 DR. CURRY: So APSRC -- and I may be wrong on
22 this, but they offer that as a service to public
23 schools right now and also to charter schools. So
24 that would be the first option to go to.

25 MR. WALTER: Dr. Sutherlin, members of the

1 Panel, Tripp Walter, staff attorney APSRC. I guess,
2 a couple points of clarification, one, we do not
3 support the application. Two, if the Panel, as Mr.
4 Smith said earlier -- earlier application -- if the
5 panel sees fit to approve the application, then
6 certainly we would offer assistance to them. As to
7 exactly the form that would look like, we would just
8 have to see if and when it happens. But that -- I
9 think it was mentioned before, those back-office
10 financial services are certainly one of the things
11 that we -- that we do offer in general.

12 MS. SARACINI: Thank you.

13 MR. BALDWIN: Why -- let me ask if I may?

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Why do you not support the
16 application?

17 MR. WALTER: Well, I can't really speak for Mr.
18 Smith, but my understanding is that Dr. Curry had
19 never presented his educational model and plans --
20 plans to him and really didn't have a conversation as
21 to what it was going to be about.

22 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

24 Dr. Wright-McMurray?

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you for your

1 presentation earlier and -- and answering our
2 questions thus far. I do have a couple of questions.

3 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: If we could go back just a
5 little bit. I'm looking -- when it says face-to-
6 face instruction and remote learning. So there's the
7 learning centers --

8 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- are those established
10 locations in Springdale that students will go to? Or
11 are they locations that are most convenient for the
12 family? Can you give me a little --

13 DR. CURRY: Okay.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- bit more detail what
15 those look like.

16 DR. CURRY: So the face-to-face will be in one
17 location in Springdale where students come to the two
18 days a week or more. I mean, they could come five
19 days a week if they want, but that's one location.
20 The other locations will be determined by -- by the
21 teacher of the class and the parent forming that
22 partnership. You know, where they -- they can meet
23 or whether it's online and they make the connection
24 there. But the goal is and that face-to-face
25 interaction daily whether it is through technology or

1 face-to-face in the classroom.

2 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So the one location that
3 they're coming to --

4 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- have -- have we
6 identified what that one location is going to be?

7 DR. CURRY: Have not yet. I was waiting to kind
8 of see where we go from here.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Then also I have
10 questions about your CTE course offerings.

11 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I noticed under
13 curriculum that you indicate there will be 100 plus
14 CTE courses that will be available to students.

15 DR. CURRY: Right.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Can you kind of talk us
17 through a little bit more of what that's going to
18 look like, how that's going to be offered?

19 DR. CURRY: Yes. You know, I think we're going
20 to have different opportunities through virtual
21 programs to offer those opportunities for students.
22 But then we're also going to, you know, incorporate
23 the apprenticeships and the learning, you know,
24 actually going out and working -- working in
25 different business and industries, you know, with

1 those with those students. But the -- the different
2 -- is it the -- the three different opportunities
3 that have to be offered for standards will be offered
4 virtually.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And so do you mind
6 speaking a little bit more on -- is that going to be
7 a partnership through one of our other established
8 online providers maybe like with Arkansas -- or how
9 are you planning --

10 DR. CURRY: Right.

11 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- on doing that?

12 DR. CURRY: All of those opportunities will come
13 from again the already Arkansas approved digital
14 learning curriculum that is out there.

15 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And so then -- so then
16 also thinking about your, like, I saw that you have
17 outlined you have college and career readiness
18 activities that will be included in the process for
19 students. Do you mind giving a little bit more
20 detail or just -- on your comprehensive school
21 counseling plan -- how that looks like for your
22 students that are involved in this learning format?

23 DR. CURRY: Yes. You know, it's going to be
24 basically where -- the parent, the student, the
25 teacher are sitting down developing that plan --

1 career plan for the student when they're -- let's say
2 for example, you know, the student wants to be a
3 welder; right? You know, they're going to develop a
4 way of getting that training for the student so that
5 student can develop and go on to a career, you know,
6 as soon as possible after they graduate. The goal
7 would be -- is to provide them with that training
8 let's say at Northwest Arkansas Technical Center, you
9 know, where they could get that training while
10 they're in high school. You could also have the
11 career center opportunities for those students that
12 are offered through the community colleges as well,
13 you know. But I think the whole goal there is to
14 create a comprehensive plan for that student probably
15 around, you know, of course, in 8th grade those
16 opportunities as well. But to make sure that you're
17 following up on them and making sure that you're
18 giving an opportunity to the student to go to work or
19 go to college or get the extra training that they
20 need or the military, of course.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And a couple of items in
22 the -- well, just a couple items in the budget. So
23 -- so we got the explanation on APSRC and -- and the
24 opportunity is there. And I see that as an inclusion
25 -- as a line item in the potential future. But then

1 I also see an inclusion of a fee for a CMO, so do you
2 anticipate --

3 DR. CURRY: No.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that being something
5 that you're going to --

6 DR. CURRY: No, ma'am.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- going to --

8 DR. CURRY: No.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So you guys are going to
10 remain a standalone or --

11 DR. CURRY: Well, you know, I -- I don't think
12 right now that there is a CMO that is Arkansas based,
13 you know, at this point. I think that's probably
14 something they can develop as time goes by and may be
15 something that, you know, that -- that we can do as
16 time goes by. But I mean, I don't see that a charter
17 management organization at this point would be
18 something that we would be looking -- looking for.

19 DR. CURRY: That's -- I only ask because you did
20 include costs associated -- that's why I was asking
21 --

22 DR. CURRY: Okay.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- if you had something in
24 mind that you --

25 DR. CURRY: Okay.

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- should be thinking
2 about there?

3 DR. CURRY: Yeah. I have a -- a whole lot of
4 respect for the APSRC and Scott and the work that
5 they do as well. I've had a lot of conversations in
6 the past with them about this concept as well. And
7 this concept is very successful in other states and,
8 you know, as far as seeing that we didn't make the
9 connections beforehand as we probably should have.

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any further questions from the
11 Panel? Mr. Davis?

12 MR. DAVIS: Yes, I do. I do. I have -- I have
13 several questions here. On page six of the
14 application, I think you mentioned -- around the
15 goals -- I'm going to quickly -- I have the pleasure
16 of being able to quickly kind of get there. I want
17 to make sure I'm asking the right question. It's on
18 the same -- it's on the correct page. Yeah. In
19 regards to the performance criteria and goals. You
20 have goals that indicate that you hope -- oh, well
21 not that you hope -- that students will meet or
22 exceed state average proficiency rates in math, that
23 they will meet or exceed state average proficiency
24 rates in reading and so forth and so on. Are you
25 suggesting that 100 percent of the students that

1 attend this public-blended school will meet or exceed
2 the average in those categories? Or would you like
3 to say a certain percentage of those students you
4 feel confident about being able to --

5 DR. CURRY: Yeah. I definitely think that --
6 that's -- was probably a misnomer on our part.

7 Ms. Graham, do you have anything to add to that?

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I believe you are muted again.

9 MS. GRAHAM: Sorry. Bells are ringing and doors
10 are slamming. Of course, we would hope that we would
11 have 100 percent and that would be our ultimate goal.
12 But yes, Dr. Curry is right. We would probably need
13 to put a more realistic percentage on that.

14 MR. DAVIS: Okay. The same thing when it comes
15 to apprenticeships and dual enrollment. You know,
16 there may be some more specificity there unless
17 you're suggesting, which I would love to see happen,
18 that 100 percent of students that participate are in
19 some type of apprenticeship and/or dual enrollment
20 courses. So I -- you know, it would be great if we
21 can get some specificity around that. You also
22 mentioned in your presentation that you hope that
23 they would show up two days a week. What if they
24 don't show up?

25 DR. CURRY: Well --

1 MR. DAVIS: Is that -- I mean, if students don't
2 show up at all, is that okay in your mind?

3 DR. CURRY: No. At some point, I guess, you
4 would do the same thing you would for a regular
5 public-school student. You would go to the FINS
6 petition -- The Family In Need of Support -- Services
7 and turn them over to the juvenile system and let
8 that work out the way it does because they are now
9 public-school students. And we have to operate under
10 that particular area. Does that make sense? Okay.

11 MR. DAVIS: It --

12 DR. CURRY: And back to the specificity.

13 MR. DAVIS: -- definitely does. Are you -- are
14 you suggesting that the guidance counselor or someone
15 would be responsible for that whole process?

16 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

17 MR. DAVIS: of contacting family

18 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

19 MR. DAVIS: -- visiting the home, all those
20 things?

21 DR. CURRY: Right. Just like in a normal public
22 school a FINS petition, probably by the principal,
23 would be initiated. It would go to the juvenile
24 office just like it would at any other school. And
25 back to your question about the dual enrollment, I

1 want to talk about that just a little bit more.
2 Those things are, for example, if you have a -- a
3 student that wants to take English Comp I and they
4 have got the ability to go to the community college
5 and do that. That is the dual enrollment that we're
6 talking about there for academically speaking. The
7 other terms, you know, would be if they want to take
8 a career technical ed program offered by -- in this
9 particular circumstance, Northwest Arkansas Technical
10 School or the community college there. They would
11 have that opportunity as well.

12 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. And not that it's needed, but
13 I have you had any conversations with NWACC or NWA
14 Tech about potentially these students enrolling in
15 their courses or that just hasn't happened yet until,
16 you know, you're waiting until if approved with a
17 student who --

18 DR. CURRY: Well --

19 MR. DAVIS: -- you know might be interested?

20 DR. CURRY: I will say that I've had enough
21 interaction with Arkansas career centers to know that
22 they're more than willing to, you know, train
23 students that are enrolled in Arkansas schools. So
24 --

25 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Okay. Getting back to the --

1 getting back to the -- the attendance piece, you sort
2 of mentioned once again, you know, the two days a
3 week and if they're not showing up --

4 DR. CURRY: Right.

5 MR. DAVIS: -- that you would then begin with a
6 FINS petition. When do you begin with a FINS
7 petition? They don't show up for two weeks; is that
8 when you start; they don't show up for a month; is
9 that when you start? Like, what's qualifying? This
10 kind of gets to Ms. Newton's question about --

11 DR. CURRY: Sure.

12 MR. DAVIS: -- attendance.

13 DR. CURRY: Yeah.

14 MR. DAVIS: When do you begin to move on a FINS
15 petition considering that students aren't obligated
16 to come two days?

17 DR. CURRY: Right. I think we would follow a
18 very similar, you know -- as -- as what most public
19 schools do right now. You know, it would be, I would
20 say after two weeks, you know, you can probably be --
21 or after however many days, you can send out a letter
22 to the to the parent notifying them that they've got
23 to be in school doing the things that they're
24 supposed to be doing, monitoring them online. But if
25 they're not doing it after a certain amount of days,

1 and then you move to the next level and eventually
2 follow the process just like at a regular public
3 school.

4 MR. DAVIS: Okay. So with -- whatever the rules
5 and regulations are regarding traditional schools
6 that's what you will be doing. You mentioned the
7 idea -- and I appreciate the financial literacy
8 piece. Have you identified a curriculum for the
9 financial literacy work just yet?

10 DR. CURRY: I have not, Mr. Davis, but I would
11 be more willing to listen to any suggestion you might
12 have for us because I know there are some really good
13 ones out there. I do know there's a Dave Ramsey that
14 tailors to students, you know.

15 MR. DAVIS: Yes. Yeah. Just a couple -- a
16 couple more questions for me. In regards to the
17 outreach to the community, if approved in regards --
18 about, you know, this new public school; right? Have
19 you thought about the marketing or -- or have there
20 been conversations? You mentioned the idea of having
21 some connection with those families that are
22 homeschooling. But what about the community broad --
23 have you thought about how you plan on sort of
24 creating connection with individual entities, those
25 that may not be homeschooled, but may be interested

1 in your model? And what might that look like?

2 DR. CURRY: Ms. Graham, do you have anything you
3 want to add there?

4 MS. GRAHAM: We have -- we have had boots on the
5 ground in Northwest Arkansas and have had many, many
6 families that have had -- have shown interest in this
7 and by word of mouth, we've had more interest in
8 this. I would say our target has been homeschoolers,
9 so above and beyond the homeschool community, we have
10 not thought through how we would address advertising
11 beyond that. I feel like based on the interest that
12 we received thus far, we would have a waiting list.
13 So we haven't thought through the -- the additional
14 advertisement.

15 MR. DAVIS: That -- that's -- that's actually
16 really exciting to hear that with a projected number
17 of 250 students the first year, you anticipate
18 potentially having a waiting list; is that --

19 MS. GRAHAM: Yes.

20 MR. DAVIS: -- correct?

21 MS. GRAHAM: Yes, sir.

22 MR. DAVIS: Okay. And in the budget, it only
23 identifies three teachers of record. If I'm not
24 mistaken? Three classroom teachers of record the
25 first year; is that correct? So 250 students, three

1 classroom teachers rather -- classroom teachers; is
2 that what we're -- am I seeing that correctly?

3 DR. CURRY: I --

4 MR. DAVIS: Am I --

5 DR. CURRY: I don't think so. I think what our
6 thought process was is that in the beginning, we're
7 going to have to hire at least three -- of course,
8 October 1 for APSCN is when you report. We would
9 probably have to hire more depending on the exact
10 number that we have. We don't want to hire more
11 staff than we need in the beginning, of course,
12 because we do want to be fiscally prudent with the --
13 with the funds. So you know, we would want to hire
14 just like regular schools do if they have a big
15 influx of students, they'll -- they'll wait until
16 October 1 -- in between the beginning of school and
17 October 1 to do the -- the optimal hiring.

18 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. I would -- I would suggest
19 considering that there is a wait list on the 250
20 students, I would suggest that you think about
21 potentially revisiting that. And from the department
22 standpoint, is this -- is that from a student/teacher
23 ratio in this blended model, I'm not sure what the
24 regulation requires if anything. Can someone speak
25 to that for me?

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Sure. Class size -- class
2 size would be for 5-6 is 28 and then 30 beyond that
3 so 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, but then you also have
4 teaching load which is 150 students per day.

5 MR. DAVIS: Okay. So in a blended model, they
6 still will be required to sort of focus on the class
7 size as opposed to a full-version model in which
8 those numbers are not as small; is that right?

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: If it were fully virtual, then
10 it would be large-group instruction, but it's -- but
11 since it's blended, there would need to be a
12 different ratio. So it would need to be the same
13 ratio as the state requires.

14 MR. DAVIS: Okay. Okay. And so yeah, my
15 suggestion might be that -- that you revisit that
16 based upon the projected number of students the first
17 year and the idea that there potentially can more
18 students than that because there appears to be some
19 significant interest. And then the other thing in
20 regards to the budget, I mean, I think we talked
21 about the idea of the director; we talked about the
22 idea principal. There appears to be, you know, there
23 -- there's an assistant director or curriculum
24 director, a special education director -- I'm just
25 looking at the number of staff. The -- what appears

1 to be more lead staff compared to classroom teachers
2 on page 94, during that first year. So you have
3 three classroom teachers, but you probably have -- I
4 mean, one, two, three, four, you know, five guidance
5 counselors and so forth on the sort of leadership
6 side. And you know, significant salaries. Have you
7 identified an assistant director just yet?

8 DR. CURRY: We -- we do. Ms. Graham is probably
9 going to be that -- that person for that --

10 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

11 DR. CURRY: -- at that time. Now again, we're
12 not talking about having a principal and
13 superintendent for 250 kids. What we're talking
14 about is, you know, kind of once things take off.
15 You know, like I said, neighboring states have, you
16 know, a larger number of students than this. So I
17 think you would have to accommodate and adjust based
18 on, you know, how many students you actually, you
19 know, did have.

20 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Okay. And, you know, sorry
21 if I, you know, I can only go by what's sort of
22 written in the document. But I appreciate the idea
23 of adjusting based upon, if approved, you know, what
24 the reality on the ground might be I think is
25 critically important to stay -- to stay flexible

1 there.

2 My last question that I have is actually for the
3 Department and -- I'm wondering in regards to --
4 since they have not identified a location for -- for
5 in-person, who -- I mean, is the state responsible
6 when it comes to student safety in a model like this?
7 And is there some concern that there hasn't been a
8 location identified? I'm just trying to wrap my head
9 around, you know, the student safety aspect of this
10 type of work and who ultimately is responsible
11 specifically when we haven't identified a location
12 and what that might look like?

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Wagner?

14 MS. WAGNER: Mr. Davis, to answer your question,
15 the charter applicant, if they are approved, will be
16 responsible for student safety. That's not something
17 that they can waive, so they -- they will be
18 responsible for that when they maintain a site. Now,
19 since this is a blend -- a blended model, I'm going
20 to assume that the site that they use, they're going
21 to have to have a lease for. That lease will have to
22 come to us to be approved which is where we will find
23 out exactly where that location is unless the Panel,
24 of course, puts something in when you approve -- if
25 you approve, that they have to provide that location

1 to you upon receiving that location. We can
2 certainly do that.

3 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. So what I hear you saying --
4 and I just want to -- I want to be clear about this
5 and this helps inform a lot of the work moving
6 forward. Although the institution is a public
7 school, receiving public funds, the entity -- the
8 501(c)(3) -- the sponsoring entity will be
9 responsible for student safety; is that -- is that
10 what I hear you saying?

11 MS. WAGNER: No. The applicant --

12 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

13 MS. WAGNER: So the sponsoring entity just
14 sponsors essentially the application. Okay? The
15 applicant, once approved, becomes a charter; they get
16 their LEA number; they're official at that point;
17 right? They are responsible for school safety. So
18 Dr. Curry -- Freedom Learning Academy will be
19 responsible for the safety of its students. Does
20 that answer your question?

21 MR. DAVIS: It does. It does. Thank you for
22 that. I don't have any other questions at this time.

23 DR. CURRY: Mr. Davis, if I could to --

24 MR. DAVIS: Yeah, please.

25 DR. CURRY: -- kind of follow up on that? You

1 know, we would definitely be following the Arkansas
2 facilities handbook that's out there for facilities
3 and transportation and that would provide at least in
4 the beginning, your framework for what you would look
5 for in a lease in order to make sure you're following
6 those guidelines.

7 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Fantastic. Mr. Chair, I have
8 no more questions.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Any other
10 questions from the Panel? Mr. Baldwin?

11 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you. Is this a -- is --
12 this blended model, is it used already by an another
13 system or is this the first time in Arkansas that
14 this has been used?

15 DR. CURRY: To my knowledge, it would be the
16 first time in Arkansas. Yes, sir.

17 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So there's not an example
18 to go look at as far as how -- how they --

19 DR. CURRY: Oklahoma has a, you know, an
20 example, you know probably one. I know California
21 has a couple models that operate out there as well.
22 I've had conversations with all of those entities.
23 You know --

24 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So we do have one that is a

1 hybrid model which is similar to blended and that's
2 LISA Academy.

3 MR. BALDWIN: Oh, yeah.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And so that's -- that's one
5 that we do have that's an example.

6 Any other questions? Dr. Wright-McMurray?

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I guess, just again for
8 my clarification, the two days a week that a student
9 is expected to go to the learning center --

10 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

11 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- they're not set days
12 for that student; it is just within the Monday
13 through Friday period, they just have to report two
14 days and they're -- I guess, what is -- what is
15 determining what those two days will be and when --
16 when they're there --

17 DR. CURRY: Right.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- is it like a
19 traditional school day where they're there for those
20 two days? I'm just trying to --

21 DR. CURRY: Right.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- get clarification.

23 DR. CURRY: The -- the requirement would be that
24 they were there for those two days, you know, the --
25 whatever the school day is set, which, you know, will

1 probably be somewhere between 8:00 and 3:30 like
2 normal. They would have lunch time in there, breaks,
3 those sort of things and they would be in that
4 learning center and doing -- doing their best, you
5 know, during that time period. Going back to --
6 there will be a normal set day, for example, since
7 we're doing 5-12, 5th grade would meet Tuesdays and
8 Thursdays.

9 I guess, the point that I was trying to make is,
10 is that we're wanting this to be a flexible program
11 for parents. If a Tuesday and Thursday don't -- do
12 not work out well for a particular group or a
13 particular parent, they can make adjustments to that
14 schedule and come in at a different time, you know,
15 or a different day, I guess. But --

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But they would --

17 DR. CURRY: We're trying to accommodate parents
18 and their needs is what we would be trying to do.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But they would -- but they
20 would know that they're coming, like, at 8:00 and
21 staying until --

22 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- 3:30 --

24 DR. CURRY: Yes.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- for those two days that

1 is for that particular child?

2 DR. CURRY: Right.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And there's not, like, 5th
4 graders come on Monday? It's just whatever grade
5 you're in, whatever teacher is there for that grade
6 --

7 DR. CURRY: Right.

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that's -- they're just
9 -- they just go to that teacher?

10 DR. CURRY: That's correct. Yeah.

11 MS. NEWTON: You made mention, as I remember
12 about they could meet at the coffee shop. How would
13 that model work --

14 DR. CURRY: Well --

15 MS. NEWTON: -- with the situation?

16 DR. CURRY: What I'm saying is, the other three
17 days that are out there, that classroom teacher is
18 going to make contact with that parent, let's say
19 through Zoom, you know, in the beginning of the day
20 to answer any questions or to get that student
21 started on their virtual learning. But it may also
22 be that that particular day they may meet, you know,
23 at a Starbucks somewhere to sit down, face-to-face
24 with a teacher or our teachers may -- will plan on
25 having those interactions basically calibrated out

1 throughout the year. So they may only meet four- or
2 five-times face to face in a different environment
3 than the learning center. They may be meeting in a
4 coffee shop where that -- or the teacher may go to
5 the house of the student, and they may sit there and
6 help the mom and the -- and the student while they're
7 doing their virtual learning.

8 MS. NEWTON: What hours would -- been specified
9 if they went to the home or coffee shop?

10 DR. CURRY: Can you say that again.

11 MS. NEWTON: How -- how do you count the hours
12 of instruction at the home or at the coffee shop? I
13 --

14 DR. CURRY: Right. It would be counted in the
15 normal virtual curriculum that they're working on
16 their computers during the day.

17 MS. SARACINI: And you have three teachers
18 slated for 250 students currently in the budget that
19 we saw today, and they would provide not just at the
20 center, but also other instruction at other times --
21 point in time other places; correct?

22 DR. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

23 MS. SARACINI: Okay.

24 DR. CURRY: And the -- the three teachers,
25 again, the -- the numbers would be -- there's a

1 surplus the first year that you needed to adjust
2 salaries to get to the point to whereby that October
3 1 day, you have more than. If you have the complete
4 250, yes, we're going to have more staff in order to
5 accommodate that that's going to have to be certified
6 teachers, you know, to work with those kids. But you
7 may also have high school kids versus 5th and 6th
8 grade which is different numbers; correct? So you
9 may not know your numbers until then. I mean, we've
10 got Arkansas schools today that are going to wait
11 until right up to October 1 to hire. So I mean, from
12 a budgetary standpoint, I would want to make sure
13 that we're addressing those numbers --

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So --

15 DR. CURRY: -- the right way.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray?

17 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I guess, my other
18 clarifying question, so while there are students that
19 are in person at the learning center the two days a
20 week that are not specified, but just -- so the
21 students that are virtual on their computers, are the
22 teachers at the center also responsible for providing
23 support to them, or are there different --

24 DR. CURRY: Right.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- or -- do you see what

1 I'm trying to ask?

2 DR. CURRY: They're -- they --

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: If they're -- if they're
4 -- if they're at the center --

5 DR. CURRY: They would be. Yes.

6 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and they're learning,
7 and then there's kids that are online that are
8 learning --

9 DR. CURRY: Yes.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- as well, are they
11 responsible --

12 DR. CURRY: They would be --

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- for those other --

14 DR. CURRY: They would be responsible for making
15 contact within that day on the three days that
16 they're off. Now, it may just be that they're
17 getting them going in the morning and saying, hey,
18 guys, you know, does anybody need any help? Is there
19 anything we can do? You know, those sorts of things
20 and we may have a runner, you know, that takes things
21 to them if they need it. Let's say for example,
22 they're out of printer cartridges for their printer,
23 maybe they need that, and they make that contact with
24 them through the interaction and to be able to work
25 together that's how it, you know, would -- would play

1 out. But that teacher would make that contact daily
2 with the -- with the student and it may be at the end
3 of the day, but sometime that day they would have
4 contact with that student.

5 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

6 MR. BALDWIN: So just -- yeah. To follow up on
7 Dr. Wright-McMurray's question, so with the 250 kids
8 on -- that are budgeted --

9 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

10 MR. BALDWIN: -- you have three teachers.
11 That's 83 students per teacher. And I think we're
12 having a real hard time, you know, grasping that.

13 DR. CURRY: Yeah.

14 MR. BALDWIN: And then I would just say, I'm --
15 I'm just having a hard time honestly with the
16 business model.

17 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

18 MR. BALDWIN: I'm trying to figure out how you
19 -- how you're going to do this and -- and get the
20 volume of kids. And I hear that you've reached out
21 to homeschoolers, but I -- I think that might be --
22 you may have -- you may have a core group of
23 homeschoolers that would be interested. I'm not sure
24 you're going to have as many -- you know, you're
25 projecting up to 1,000.

1 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

2 MR. BALDWIN: And my family homeschooled --

3 DR. CURRY: Right.

4 MR. BALDWIN: -- so I totally understand the
5 mindset of homeschoolers and they want to a great
6 degree to control --

7 DR. CURRY: Uh-huh.

8 MR. BALDWIN: -- their education and giving that
9 control up to another group is a hard thing. That's
10 just my -- just my --

11 DR. CURRY: Right.

12 MR. BALDWIN: -- thoughts right now.

13 DR. CURRY: And I don't mean to disagree. I
14 just think that there are enough different
15 associations right now -- homeschool associations
16 that have a connection to a program like this. I
17 really do believe that 1,000 is probably not even
18 going to touch, eventually, you know, how many
19 students we would have associated with the program.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: And I do think we have to take
21 into account the educational Freedom Accounts because
22 those will be things that homeschoolers are taking
23 part in. So we -- we know that there is an influx of
24 those applications and that those funds can be used
25 for private school, for homeschool, so -- so it's --

1 it will cut into your population a little bit.

2 DR. CURRY: Oh, sure. And I understand that. I
3 think there's already been what, 5,300, I read and
4 that have applied for it based on the circumstances
5 this year. And, of course, that won't be until three
6 years from now. And I understand, you know, that
7 that's going to give a little opportunity for this
8 concept, you know, to kind of be -- I understand that
9 there are some things that we're going to have to,
10 you know, kind of work out. But I do believe that
11 this model is something that can basically -- you
12 know, if you're going to take 90 percent of the
13 funding and basically give to people, why not have it
14 be in a structured environment where you can at least
15 have some sort of input into what the -- what the
16 students are doing and how they're operating. And
17 that's the thought process.

18 It's a different model than going to the Freedom
19 Accounts to where the parents basically choosing the
20 100 percent what they want to do. You're doing some
21 things then -- in this model, they're still
22 connected, you know, we're using the virtual
23 curriculum from the state. You know, we're doing
24 some things that still make that connection to the
25 state, the testing model of -- those sort of things.

1 I don't believe that's a requirement of the Freedom
2 Accounts. I think that -- I think it's a -- a
3 different way of thinking about it, and it's also
4 something that we don't have that connection to the
5 state still.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Other questions from the
7 Panel? Dr. Wright-McMurray? No?

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I'm sorry. I'm just still
9 trying to -- so -- and I guess I'm just thinking --
10 I'm thinking back to when we first pivoted to the
11 online instruction because of COVID; and we had some
12 students that would be online working with their
13 teachers and that would be -- it was a full class of
14 students that were doing that. So I'm trying to --
15 and I know that -- and not in all cases that didn't
16 work out to be the best delivery. So that's when we
17 said we need to kind of figure out a way to have more
18 of a blended version.

19 So I'm trying to kind of fully understand that
20 that is not anticipated that this would happen with
21 your model? Is that what you're saying? Because the
22 students that are -- I'm sorry -- that are virtual -
23 - sorry. I'm talking with my hands -- that are
24 virtual, they would not hop online when the teacher
25 is in the middle of her specified two-day

1 instruction. So she -- so he or she -- sorry -- he
2 or she would have the opportunity during that time to
3 where students are in front of them to not also have
4 to manage the students that are online?

5 DR. CURRY: That's right. Yes. They're
6 dedicated today when those -- let's say -- let's say
7 for example, 5th grade came in on Tuesdays and
8 Thursdays, then that teacher be dedicated to the
9 face-to-face instruction to those students at the
10 learning center. They will also be responsible then
11 if they have other students that were made different
12 accommodations --

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So they would not
14 responsible?

15 DR. CURRY: That's right. That's right.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So if I'm a student during
17 the class -- during the traditional class day and I
18 have a need for the teacher, I wouldn't have access
19 to them during that time period because they're in
20 class?

21 DR. CURRY: That's right. Yes. But we would
22 have perhaps a paraprofessional or someone else that
23 -- let's say, for example that student sent a message
24 somehow, a text message or online through their
25 digital learning, we would have a way of getting that

1 student help they need during that time. Yes. And
2 like I said, it may not be their specific teacher at
3 that time because their teacher is going to be doing
4 the face-to-face with the students. The rest of the
5 time, you know, it may be somebody else; it may be me
6 that jumps online says, hey, can I help you if you're
7 having issues? You know, that -- that sort of thing,
8 but the teacher themselves will not be responsible
9 for maintaining the contact with the kid and with the
10 other at the same time.

11 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So there would be subject
12 matter experts that will be available during the time
13 period to where the teacher is teaching? I'm just
14 thinking for example --

15 DR. CURRY: There was mostly --

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- a kid asks me a math
17 question --

18 DR. CURRY: Yes.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- you're on your own --

20 DR. CURRY: Yeah.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- until the math teacher
22 could assist?

23 DR. CURRY: Right. Maybe there is something to
24 where they have to say hey, you know, we'll get
25 back to you as soon as possible. You know, those

1 sorts of things. But yeah, it would be, you know,
2 the hope would be that everybody would come on the
3 same day, but in order to maintain flexibility, it
4 may be that you have a different set up some days
5 not every week. But it may be that for example,
6 homeschool parents travel sometimes, you know, they
7 may go to a Williamsburg pretending to -- you know,
8 on a on a trip with their family and it may be
9 something that they come to you and say well, this
10 week we're not going to be able to be there for
11 those two days out of the week. It would be the
12 same thing in a regular public school, but student,
13 you know, parents came in and said, I've got to
14 pull them because we got to go to -- we're truck
15 drivers and we got to go to New York, you know, you
16 have got to make accommodations. So that -- that's
17 my point in that is that we're trying to create
18 something that's flexible for parents, but at the
19 same time provides a minimum amount of structure
20 unlike again, the Freedom Accounts that are just
21 going to be basically, you know, to do whatever a
22 parent, you know, determines to do with 90 percent
23 of the ADM.

24 MR. BALDWIN: Would you mind sharing with us
25 what Scott Smith said to you about APSRC not

1 supporting the application? I'd be curious.

2 DR. CURRY: You know, again, I'll go back and
3 say that I probably should have had more interaction
4 with Scott. I didn't know that Scott didn't support
5 our idea. I didn't know that was a requirement that
6 APSRC had to have that, but -- and I don't mean that
7 because I'm saying anything against APSRC. I'm just
8 saying that I didn't know that that was a necessity,
9 so therefore we did not reach out.

10 MR. BALDWIN: And it's not a requirement --

11 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

12 MR. BALDWIN: -- but it's

13 DR. CURRY: Yes, sir.

14 MR. BALDWIN: -- a curiosity factor.

15 DR. CURRY: Right. Right. It would be my -- my
16 thought process was, you know, number one, I was
17 pretty busy with some other stuff, and I was trying
18 to kind of get things together and Ms. Graham worked
19 very hard on this program herself. She didn't have
20 the connections there at APSRC. Again, I think that
21 they do great work and I've worked with them a lot in
22 the past. I'm kind of surprised that Mr. Walter said
23 what he said about it because we -- we've had a lot
24 of conversations in the past, you know, Scott and I
25 have about this concept.

1 Like I said again, in Oklahoma, there's -- it's
2 a large, you know, school there that kind of operates
3 this way; and, you know, Mr. Smith was the one that
4 basically, you know, started talking about it to me;
5 and I checked it out. And, you know, there's a lot
6 of good things to be done there with it.

7 You know, I would hope that it would be the
8 circumstance that maybe APSRC wants to have some
9 involvement in it, and I'll be glad to say I'll talk
10 to Scott about it. I think there's two guys that are
11 very influential in the state and have a lot to
12 offer; and that's, you know, Scott and definitely Ken
13 Rich, both trusted guys that that I would reach out
14 to if we are approved to do so.

15 MR. DAVIS: And Mr. Baldwin, what I -- what I
16 heard from Mr. Walters at APRSC and I, you know, I
17 don't know if he is still there. But the way I took
18 his comment was they have not been involved with this
19 application process. Therefore, you can't assume
20 that they are in support of the application. I don't
21 -- I didn't think that he meant they are not
22 supportive, but I think that the point that they were
23 trying to make is they have not been intimately
24 involved in this process.

25 MR. BALDWIN: They're --

1 MR. DAVIS: And I think that's something
2 different than they're --

3 MR. BALDWIN: They're nodding their heads, yes,
4 right now.

5 MR. DAVIS: -- not supportive --

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. That --

8 MR. DAVIS: -- of it; right?

9 MR. BALDWIN: That's helpful.

10 MR. DAVIS: I think -- I think those words were
11 used, but I think it was from the vantage point of we
12 can't support something we have not been involved
13 with.

14 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. That's -- that's helpful.
15 Thank you for helping me with that.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton?

17 MS. NEWTON: I -- my concern is the absence of
18 consulting given all the gaps that I noticed; the
19 guidelines are not clear, the -- several things. So
20 my problem is a lack of having someone to advise
21 because clearly you have come not ready have --
22 answer our questions to the extent that they apply to
23 too many critical areas.

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any other comments or
25 questions? If not, I'll entertain a motion.

1 MS. NEWTON: I move not to approve the
2 application --

3 MS. SARACINI: I second.

4 MS. NEWTON: -- for The Freedom Learning
5 Academy.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All those in favor?

7 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All those opposed. Any
9 abstentions?

10 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. We will fill out
11 our voting sheets.

12 DR. CURRY: Thank you all very much for your
13 time. Appreciate it.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

15 MS. SARACINI: Do we need to say out loud?

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I think Dr. Wright-McMurray

17 MS. WAGNER: You do still need to read your
18 votes into the record.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes, yes. We're just -- we're
20 waiting. Yeah.

21 MS. WAGNER: Okay. I just -- Ms. Saracini kept
22 looking at me and so I was just --

23 MS. SARACINI: Can't I look?

24 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Dr. Wright-
25 McMurray.

1 MR. DAVIS: And just -- just a point of
2 clarification --

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes?

4 MR. DAVIS: All right. We are -- we voting for
5 the motion to deny or are we voting against the
6 application? Because the motion was to deny --

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Correct.

8 MR. DAVIS: -- so should we not be voting for
9 the motion to deny?

10 MS. WAGNER: So it's -- the motion is to deny
11 the application. That's the intent of the motion;
12 correct?

13 MR. DAVIS: Right. So we should be voting for
14 the motion to deny, not against?

15 MS. NEWTON: Yes.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yes.

17 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

18 MS. SARACINI: Yes.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Correct.

20 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

21 MR. DAVIS: Okay.

22 MR. BALDWIN: That's a very good point.

23 MS. SARACINI: Very. Yes. Thank you.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you.

25 MR. DAVIS: I just realized, I'm sometimes the

1 outlier, but on this one, I felt like I wasn't.

2 MS. SARACINI: No.

3 MR. DAVIS: It looks different on my screen.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: We -- we appreciate that.

5 MS. SARACINI: Yeah. Thank you.

6 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Dr. Wright-

7 McMurray.

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So I voted for --
9 although the concept brings forward a different
10 process to offer instruction for homeschool students,
11 the implementation of the model was not clearly
12 stated in the application or testimony. I would
13 recommend that the applicant make efforts to
14 strengthen their application and plan for
15 implementation.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Ms. Saracini.

17 MS. SARACINI: I voted for the motion to deny
18 the Freedom Learning Academy based on the lack of
19 clarity in the application and presentation.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Mr. Baldwin.

21 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. I voted forward to the
22 motion to deny due to numerous uncertainties about
23 the business model and effectiveness of the school
24 structure.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton.

1 MS. NEWTON: I also voted to deny based on the
2 guidelines for operation are not clear.

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Thank you very much.
4 All right. I'll accept a -- and if there's no new
5 business, I'll accept a motion to --

6 MR. DAVIS: Well, I need to read mine into
7 record.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Oh, I -- I keep forgetting
9 you're online. I am so sorry. Mr. Davis.

10 MR. DAVIS: That's all right. I voted for the
11 motion to deny the application due to the number of
12 gaps in the implementation of the curriculum.
13 Although, I'm hopeful regarding the new model,
14 additional work needs to be done.

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you so much. All right.
16 If there's no new business, I'll accept a motion to
17 adjourn.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I'll move to adjourn.

19 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

20 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. All in favor?

21 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. We're adjourned.

23 (The Action Agenda was concluded at 1:01 p.m.)
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

) ss

COUNTY OF PULASKI)

I, Miranda McEntire, Certified Court Reporter #852, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me in the caption on the foregoing proceedings are true; and that the foregoing proceedings were reported verbatim through the use of the voice-writing method and thereafter transcribed by me or under my direct supervision to the best of my ability, taken at the time and place set out on the caption hereto.

I FURTHER CERTIFY, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or employed by the parties hereto, nor financially interested or otherwise, in the outcome of this action, and that I have no contract with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an interest in the action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original deposition transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial attorney, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties in the action.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 13th day of September, 2023.



MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #852

