

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

August 16, 2023

9:00 a.m.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

DR. MATTHEW SUTHERLIN, CHAIR - ADE Coordinator of Standards
Systems Support

MR. PHIL BALDWIN Retired Bank Executive

MS. KARLI SARACINI ADE Asst. Commissioner - Educator
Effectiveness & Licensure

DR. SONJA WRIGHT-McMURRAY Division of CTE Associate Director

MS. TOYCE NEWTON Former Board of Education Member

DR. TINA MOORE Director, Workforce Development

ADE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. SHASTADY WAGNER DESE Attorney

ALSO APPEARING:

MS. DORIE SUMMONS DESE Charter Schools Director

LOCATION:

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Auditorium

#4 Capitol Mall

Little Rock, Arkansas

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P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Good morning. The August
3 16, 2023 meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is
4 called to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the
5 Department of Education, and I ask that you please
6 silence all your electronic devices. The goal is to
7 facilitate a fair and responsible hearing. So
8 therefore, I ask that each person speaking please
9 state your name and title for the record. I ask that
10 you continue to speak clearly into the microphone
11 throughout your presentation for the benefit of the
12 Panel, this audience, and the viewing audience. This
13 meeting is being live-streamed and recorded, and a
14 transcript of the meeting will be posted to the DESE
15 website.

16 All right. Good morning, everybody. Welcome.

17 Ms. Wagner, would you like to come forward?

18 MS. WAGNER: Good morning, Panel Members. My
19 name is Shastady Wagner; I'm with ADE Legal. And I'm
20 just going to give you guys --

21 [REVERB]

22 MS. WAGNER: Thank goodness for Chauncey. Are
23 we good now? Fantastic. Thank you, Chauncey.

24 Okay. So I'm just going to give you guys our
25 general hearing procedures. So the applicant --

1 which they are here in the room. The Chair will
2 swear everyone who is wishing to testify in front of
3 this Panel in. You can swear everyone in at once.
4 Once that has occurred, the applicant then gets 20
5 minutes to present. If they have anyone who would
6 like to speak on their behalf, they will speak during
7 those 20 minutes. I don't believe we've received any
8 public comments. Ms. Summons?

9 MS. SUMMONS: No.

10 MS. WAGNER: Okay. We've not received any
11 public comments. So after that would be when
12 opposition would go. We've also received no
13 opposition to this applicant's application. So after
14 that, we will do our legal review and then the Panel
15 will begin its deliberations.

16 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
17 much.

18 1) CONSIDERATION OF THE BENTONVILLE SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED
19 STUDIES NEW OPEN ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION

20 All right. Will all those who plan on speaking
21 on behalf of the charter please stand and raise your
22 right hand. Do you swear or affirm that what -- the
23 testimony you're about to give is the truth, the
24 whole truth and nothing but the truth?

25 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
2 much.

3 You can begin your presentation.

4 MS. ROWE: Great. Will the presentation show?
5 Oh, perfect. Okay. Just wanted to make sure. We're
6 all set. Fantastic.

7 Good morning, Members. I'm DeAnna Rowe, the
8 Executive Director for BASIS Charter Schools and our
9 new entity, the Arkansas School for Advanced Studies,
10 which is the sponsoring entity for our new school
11 proposal, the Bentonville School for Advanced
12 Studies. It's a pleasure to be with you today.

13 Before I introduce you to our team, I want to
14 take a minute to thank Ms. Dorie Summons and the DESE
15 team who reviewed our documents and responded to our
16 questions. They were a tremendous resource for us as
17 we work to insure that our application meets the
18 requirements for Arkansas students. We'd also like
19 to thank Scott Smith and his team at the Resource
20 Center for all of their support.

21 Our application in this presentation reflects
22 the efforts of the team whose shared mission is to
23 empower students to achieve at globally competitive
24 levels by providing the best education in the world.

25 As we progress through our presentation today, I

1 want to take a few minutes to talk to you about our
2 sponsoring entity structure. And then, I'm going to
3 turn it over to Peter Bezanson who is the mastermind
4 behind this new model and is also the CEO of BASIS
5 Ed, the management company that all BASIS charter
6 schools contract with. Peter is going to talk about
7 some of our successes and then along with Chris
8 Ferguson and Sean Clark will introduce you to the
9 School for Advanced Studies model. We have a number
10 of people here to support us in our efforts,
11 including Shannon Chavez, Tom Bickart, Cole
12 Schlabach, and Aaron Kindel should be joining us
13 online as well.

14 So as we mentioned, the Arkansas School for
15 Advanced Studies is the sponsoring entity for our
16 application. To insure the integrity and fidelity of
17 the key components of our model that drive the
18 academic, operational, and financial success in each
19 region, this new entity replicates the same structure
20 BASIS Charter School uses each time it opens in a new
21 region. BASIS Charter Schools, as the sole member of
22 each nonprofit and the founding member -- or the
23 founding organization, is the charter holder of 22
24 contracts in Arizona. It has established subsidy
25 entities for regional oversight in Washington, D.C.,

1 Louisiana, Texas, and now Arkansas. Creating the
2 entity includes identifying initial board members and
3 identifying a chairman. Once the charter is
4 approved, we engage directly with the local community
5 to identify key stakeholders committed to our mission
6 and build out the board. The board of directors
7 serves as the school board and is ultimately
8 responsible for insuring the school has strong
9 leadership, sound financial and operational
10 practices, and high academic achievement. The board
11 will act in accordance with the open meeting laws of
12 Arkansas.

13 This table is provided to give you a sense of
14 the people who make up our corporate boards and
15 ultimately serve as our governing board for each of
16 the respective regions.

17 As you can see, Craig Barrett is the chairman of
18 each of our boards. He joined BASIS in 2010, after
19 retiring as the chairman of the board of Intel
20 Corporation. Dr. Barrett is a leading advocate for
21 improving education in the U.S., in the United
22 States, and is the driver of our expansion.

23 On the far right, you'll see that Debbie Veney
24 is a member of a D.C. board. Debbie is the senior
25 vice president of communications and marketing at the

1 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

2 Glenn Hamer, who serves on the Texas board, is
3 the CEO of the Texas Association for Business. Prior
4 to assuming that role, he was the CEO of the Arizona
5 Chamber of Commerce for 14 years. He's also the
6 parent of a Basis graduate.

7 In the Louisiana column, Jessica Baghlan may be
8 a name familiar to some of you. Jessica served as
9 president of Watershed Advisors and supports
10 government leaders and advocacy organizations to
11 scale promising ideas in the education sector. Prior
12 to joining Watershed Advisors, Jessica was the
13 assistant state superintendent for the State
14 Department of Louisiana.

15 Currently, in addition to Craig Barrett as
16 chair, our Advanced Schools -- our Advanced Studies
17 board includes members -- a member of the D.C. board
18 and a member of the Texas board. Both Bill and Chad
19 are enthusiastic about this new model and our
20 expansion here in Arkansas. Again, we plan to fill
21 out this board with local individuals with diverse
22 professional backgrounds committed to the education
23 of students in Arkansas.

24 The agreement that each board makes to contract
25 with BASIS Ed for school management services is key

1 to our success.

2 I'm going to turn it over to Peter now who can
3 share some of our previous successes and also what
4 we'd like to offer in Arkansas.

5 DR. BEZANSON: I can stand for a little bit. It
6 actually helps because that limits what I -- the time
7 that I have. So it's good for everyone.

8 So BASIS Ed, the management company working with
9 BASIS Charter Schools, that has been successful and
10 has happened for a long time. So we started this
11 relationship, as I'll go into in a second, our first
12 school in 1998. But for the last decade-and-a-half
13 or so we have operated with this management company
14 nonprofit relationship. So as you can see, we're
15 divided into -- one management company into five
16 different divisions. The one that would manage the
17 school here in Arkansas, the first school, and
18 hopefully the first of many, would be the Advanced
19 Studies Management Company. The management company
20 is responsible for essentially everything that you
21 can imagine having to do with the operations of the
22 school, all under the governance and the purview of
23 the nonprofit board. So we make decisions on
24 curriculum and assessments, but then get those
25 decisions approved by the nonprofit board. We do all

1 of the hiring, we control all of the student
2 enrollment, all the marketing, all operational, all
3 back-end financial services, HR. Everything, again,
4 that you can imagine that is part of the management
5 and the running of the school is what BASIS Ed does.

6 As I said, we've been doing this for a long
7 time. So we started our first school in 1998, in
8 Tucson, and grew from that first school in Tucson to
9 the second school in Scottsdale. And then the really
10 rapid growth phase started in 2013, and has continued
11 over the years. We now operate 39 charter schools in
12 four different regions, in Texas, Louisiana,
13 Washington, D.C., and of course in Arizona, where we
14 started.

15 So if I were in your position, I would want to
16 make sure, if some kind of out-of-state operator was
17 coming in to start a school in Arkansas, that they
18 had a history of success. So all of the BASIS Ed
19 managed public high schools are highly ranked,
20 nationally so. There's something like 24,000 high
21 schools ranked here and we are anywhere from number
22 11 to number 274. When you look at the national
23 charter schools, there's interestingly only three
24 states in the top 10 and those three states are
25 Arizona -- two states, actually -- just Arizona and

1 Arkansas -- oh, I'm sorry -- Indiana. So, Indiana,
2 Arizona, and Arkansas are the only three states that
3 have schools nationally ranked for charter schools.

4 With a company like ours and a school like --
5 schools like ours that have a high-quality education,
6 academic achievement, and allege to bridge the
7 international achievement gap -- again, if I were in
8 your position, I would want to make sure that that
9 was true before approving us to come in. We've been
10 doing this for a long time and over that time we've
11 always given the OECD test, which is based upon PISA,
12 that test that come out -- comes out every three
13 years or so, where the United States performs kind of
14 a abysmally compared to the rest of the world. And
15 we're proud to say, if BASIS Ed managed schools were
16 a country, we'd be the highest performing country in
17 the world.

18 We are AP for all curriculum here in Arkansas,
19 at the Arkansas School for Advanced Studies -- first
20 one, in Bentonville. So if we're going to be AP for
21 all, where every student takes AP classes and AP
22 exams, we'd better be able to do a good job with
23 that. So, historically, our AP pass rates at our
24 high schools are very high, well above national
25 averages, well above international averages in all

1 areas.

2 And then, finally, our promise is if you come to
3 the Arkansas School for Advanced Studies in
4 Bentonville you will get not only an excellent
5 education starting in 5th grade, a really high-
6 quality education that Chris will talk about in 9
7 through 12, but you will get into some excellent
8 colleges and universities and have a choice between
9 those colleges and universities. So if we're going
10 to allege that, you know, we'd better have a track
11 record of it. Our college board scores are
12 incredibly high. We're proud of the fact that almost
13 -- almost 20 percent of our kids annually get into
14 the top 25 colleges and universities; a hundred
15 percent of our kids get into college and university;
16 a hundred percent or nearly a hundred percent have
17 gone on to college and universities; and almost a
18 hundred percent, between 98 and 99 percent, persist
19 from their freshman year in college to their
20 sophomore year in college, which is a key metric that
21 you look at in charter schools, those college
22 persistent rates.

23 So a few years ago, in 2018, we realized that
24 the BASIS model that we've been expanding with
25 requires a state to have virtually no curriculum

1 requirements. So we can go into states where they
2 said do whatever you want to do and then we can do
3 the thing that we first started doing in Arizona. We
4 wanted to be able to go to places that have really
5 good strong curriculum requirements. So what we
6 decided, in 2018, was let's create a new adaptable
7 model, a 5 through 12 model where we can come in,
8 adapt the curriculum, build a bespoke curriculum, and
9 operate an excellent school. So starting in 2018, we
10 began developing that model. It's taken us -- it
11 took us about three years to fully develop it. And
12 then, in 2022, over -- a little bit over a year ago,
13 a group from Arkansas came to us and said why don't
14 you put this first one in Arkansas. So for about the
15 last year we've been working on how to create it for
16 Arkansas specifically.

17 So I will turn this over to Chris. Our plan is
18 to open in 2024, serving 5 through 9, and then to
19 grow to serve 5 through 12 by fall of 2027. So I'll
20 turn it over to Chris to talk about the details of
21 the curriculum.

22 MS. ROWE: It will be Sean.

23 DR. BEZANSON: Sean. Sorry. Thank you. Chris
24 and Sean, eventually.

25 MR. CLARK: Thank you, Peter.

1 My name is Sean Clark and I'm a longtime BASIS
2 teacher and school leader, currently focusing on
3 curriculum and culture development for the
4 Bentonville School for Advanced Studies.

5 We build our school's vision on four central
6 pillars. First is an academic program embedded in
7 the world liberal arts and sciences. We provide a
8 true liberal arts experience through deep study of
9 influential works across all core academic areas,
10 including math and science. The Bentonville School
11 for Advanced Studies students are deeply engaged with
12 books, film, and music representing diverse human
13 experience that challenge and excite them. Students
14 and teachers work in a dialectical partnership,
15 together seeking deep understanding of complex ideas
16 and producing divergent multi-prospective thinking.

17 Through diverse core reading lists, which might
18 include the literary works of Chaucer or Alice
19 Walker, the scientific studies of Isaac Newton or
20 Jane Goodall, the documentaries of Werner Herzog, or
21 the classical music of South India, students engage
22 with similar works from across time and geography
23 that illustrate the inherent value of very lived
24 experience.

25 As a fundamental part of our academic mission,

1 students and faculty at all levels engage in a
2 communal textural analysis program of works
3 fundamental to the multifaceted American experience
4 -- and we call this program the New American
5 Conversation. The New American Conversation engages
6 students in evidence-based discussion and debate,
7 encouraging them to take an active and responsible
8 role in the ongoing conversation about what it means
9 to be an American. Here, the process of engagement
10 takes precedence over students coming to any
11 predetermined conclusions, and it's expected that
12 over time they will change their perspectives based
13 on the experience they have.

14 We call our second pillar Beyond Teacher
15 Quality. We believe that every teacher is
16 fundamentally a student, a student of their content
17 area, a student of knowledge and skills more broadly,
18 and a student of teaching, and a student of their
19 students. School leaders and our highly experienced
20 recruitment team will scour the globe to find
21 teachers who are not simply experts in their fields
22 of study, but who are also intellectually voracious
23 and omnivorous. We find educators who are steeped in
24 their content areas and deeply interested in the
25 world; so the English teacher who is also a

1 woodworker or the math teacher who writes cozy
2 mysteries on the side.

3 Teachers and staff are models for our students
4 on how to be thoughtful, compassionate, active, and
5 engaged citizens of their community, state, country,
6 and the world. Teachers bring their thoughtful
7 perspectives to the classroom and encourage students
8 to do the same. They engage in vigorous and rigorous
9 exchanges of ideas, using influential world texts as
10 the foundation for discussion.

11 Though our curriculum is rigorous and
12 accelerated, we do insure that it is also accessible.
13 We expect our educators to meet students where they
14 are and we expect our students to rise to the
15 challenge. Our teachers and curricular team design
16 instruction to provide support and clear, consistent
17 incremental goals to achieve academic success. There
18 are no shortcuts to effective learning, but we know
19 that with patience, perseverance, and support any
20 child can reach their academic potential at the
21 Bentonville School for Advanced Studies.

22 For our third pillar, Student Scholarship, we
23 model high -- our high school program on the
24 bachelor's degree programs of most liberal arts
25 colleges and universities in which all students are

1 exposed to a wide variety of content areas across
2 disciplines, but also pursue advanced work in their
3 major field of study. And Chris will speak to the
4 details of that in a moment.

5 At the Bentonville School for Advanced Studies,
6 the options for a major concentration are fine arts,
7 humanities, or math and science. All students take
8 rigorous coursework across each of these
9 concentrations with further, more advanced
10 coursework, AP and beginning college level work,
11 within their concentration area.

12 Our senior year program is genuinely
13 transformative. Our seniors work daily with college
14 -- a college counselor and they pursue advanced
15 coursework in their area of concentration and
16 participate in a semester-long community service
17 learning project. The senior year culminates with
18 each student's senior oral defense in which they
19 research, present and discuss a focus topic related
20 to their chosen area of concentration.

21 Ultimately, we want to accelerate and maximize
22 student growth, not just for college and career, but
23 for life.

24 And, finally, creating an engaged and authentic
25 student culture is our fourth pillar. Bentonville

1 School for Advanced Studies fosters a school spirit
2 of openness, self-expression, and self-discovery.
3 Students are encouraged to explore their developing
4 beliefs and perspectives in a safe and supportive
5 atmosphere where critical thinking is balanced with
6 civility, decorum, and acceptance of ideological
7 differences. We believe that young people need
8 balance of -- a balance of boundaries, guidance, and
9 freedom to develop. Learning requires experiencing
10 setbacks and making mistakes. We want them to face
11 and overcome those challenges while they're still
12 young and have people around them who can provide
13 care and guidance.

14 Students at all grade levels will engage with
15 their campus and larger community through regular and
16 frequent service projects. As students advance
17 through the grade levels, they will take an
18 increasing responsibility for finding and organizing
19 service learning events for the school and community.

20 And with that, I would like to turn it over to
21 Chris Ferguson to talk more about the details of our
22 program.

23 MR. FERGUSON: Thank you, Sean.

24 I'm Chris Ferguson, Vice President of Growth.

25 So as Sean and Peter alluded to, hiring subject

1 expert teachers, give them the training, are absolute
2 requirements within our program. Tying that together
3 with high-quality instructional materials is
4 requisite for success in any academic program. And
5 so, we are committed to our teachers having those
6 highest quality instructional materials; using the
7 tools from EdReports and the team of educators within
8 our program in order to insure that our educators
9 have the best materials in order to reach our
10 students.

11 Our program begins with the end in mind. We
12 want our students to not only get into the college of
13 their choice, to major in what they want to major in.
14 And so we really start with looking at we want them
15 to do that, we want them to persist in college; so
16 they need a rigorous, robust world liberal arts high
17 school curriculum that is an advanced curriculum
18 throughout all of the subject areas. There is
19 additional opportunity for advancement in a select
20 area. So students have two elective periods each and
21 every year. One of those is towards their
22 concentration; the other one can be any elective they
23 choose. Or if they have one year where they really
24 need to focus on something else, they could also
25 choose a study hall.

1 That begins with our middle school program,
2 being a diverse selection of courses that does start
3 the acceleration here, but has easy access and entry
4 periods where we can support the students. But then
5 also meet them where they're at, whether that is a
6 student who might be struggling or a student who is
7 needing acceleration. That acceleration starts
8 especially in math and science across the board and
9 then allows for the opportunity for differentiation
10 through the seminar-based discussions in history and
11 English. Of import, our students take ancient
12 languages every year, starting in 5th grade which
13 leads into them taking three years of foreign
14 language when they get to that high school program,
15 incorporating the fine arts. And then something
16 we're excited about here in Arkansas is the fact that
17 our students will be taking those computer science
18 courses every single year. That is a change from our
19 typical curriculum and something we're really excited
20 about.

21 Within the concentration, students have
22 accelerated coursework specific to the concentration
23 they choose. So in addition to the normal graduation
24 requirements, students will have an additional
25 college-level type course, whether that's an AP

1 course or in the fine arts, in original work and
2 presentation that they create. And then there are
3 additional concentration electors which could be AP
4 electives or they could be a wide-ranging variety of
5 things, such as microbiology or anatomy or theater
6 tech, in which they're diving deeper into their
7 chosen area of study. Not all of our electives are
8 concentration electives; some of them are, such as
9 accounting, which would fall under the math and
10 science elective for that concentration. Others of
11 them, such as (inaudible) or PE, aren't concentration
12 electives but they're something we're really excited
13 to offer.

14 Lastly, this is just an example of what a
15 college counselor may work with -- through with a
16 student starting in 7th grade, and then in 8th grade
17 as part of our comprehensive school counseling plan,
18 working through what is their career -- what is their
19 high school career going to look like, what is that
20 track going to look like. This is, of course,
21 subject to change. This is a 7th grader and an 8th
22 grader talking through what they're going to do.

23 We're not all academics though. We really are
24 committed to engaging with our students athletically,
25 engaging with the community through learning service

1 opportunities, a school counseling program, a full
2 library media center, et cetera.

3 We're really looking forward to serving the
4 students of Arkansas. And thank you for your time.

5 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you so much.

6 Ms. Wagner.

7 MS. WAGNER: All right. We're going to go over
8 the legal review now. So to get started, the first
9 one is the Alternative Learning Environment. They
10 have fully effectuated the waiver, and I had no legal
11 concerns.

12 Okay. Gifted and Talented is number two, same
13 thing -- fully effectuated and I had no legal
14 concerns.

15 Curriculum, Advanced Placement Courses -- if you
16 will notice, they have only requested this waiver
17 until June 30, 2026, at which point it will expire.
18 And I have no legal concerns.

19 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So, just one question on
20 that one. Is that so that they can progressively do
21 their grade level steps? That's the way I read it in
22 the application. I wanted to make sure.

23 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

24 MR. WALTER: Yes. Yes, sir. And the same --
25 just to preview the same with number four.

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay.

2 MS. WAGNER: Yes. So number four is Required
3 Instruction. I had no legal concerns. It is
4 requested to expire on June 30, 2027, which is to
5 follow that progression, because they will have up to
6 the 12th grade after that point.

7 Instructional Materials -- same thing, no legal
8 concerns.

9 All right. Number 6 through 16 are all
10 Personnel Policies. They were fully effectuated, and
11 I had no legal concerns.

12 Number 17 is the Superintendent -- no concerns.

13 18 is Principal -- as well, no concerns.

14 19 was Teacher Licensure -- I had no concerns
15 about that either.

16 20 was Transportation, and 21 was the Financial
17 Management for Business Manager -- I had no legal
18 concerns about any of these.

19 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
20 much.

21 MS. WAGNER: Easy legal review.

22 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yes. All right. We will
23 start down on this end with Dr. Moore.

24 DR. MOORE: Sure. Thank you for your
25 presentation. I do have a few questions.

1 I was wondering, in the application you list
2 schools in the neighboring area and then you mention
3 schools that will be targeted for enrollment. And
4 Decatur and Gravette appear on schools in the
5 neighboring area, but not on the list of schools that
6 you may recruit from. Can you speak to that?

7 MR. FERGUSON: Yeah, absolutely. We were really
8 looking to mention any of the area school districts
9 that were in any way surrounding it in that list of
10 school districts that are in the relative vicinity.
11 But specific to the areas that we are going to be
12 looking to recruit students from it is in the more
13 immediate vicinity. But in our research, we wanted
14 to include an even wider-ranging radius of
15 demographic there.

16 DR. MOORE: Well, it's my understanding that
17 Decatur and Gravette are actually quite a bit closer
18 to Bentonville than Eureka Springs. But they were
19 left off.

20 MR. FERGUSON: At the center of them, I believe.
21 I don't have the map of Arkansas. Apologies. I'm
22 still learning that. But when I did that, I was
23 really intending to list all of the school districts
24 that were in --

25 DR. MOORE: Okay.

1 MR. FERGUSON: -- any vicinity --

2 DR. MOORE: So it wasn't purposeful --

3 MR. FERGUSON: -- or contiguous.

4 DR. MOORE: -- that it would be left off?

5 MR. FERGUSON: No, ma'am.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. And then I was very impressed
7 with your goal to fund polymast and auto adapting. I
8 will not lie, I had to Google that. But where do you
9 hope to recruit these teachers from? They sound like
10 amazing people. Where do they find them?

11 MR. FERGUSON: Yeah. So a lot of our teachers
12 that we recruit, we primarily start with recruiting
13 from some of the top universities in the country and
14 then specifically the top universities in the state.
15 And so, here, we are going to spend a lot of time at
16 the -- in Fayetteville, trying to recruit some of
17 their teachers. And we're specifically looking for
18 teachers who may have dual majors, teachers who have
19 a major and a minor. We're primarily recruiting
20 subject experts in their field. So we're recruiting
21 the person who is super into AP psychology as well as
22 history -- you know, psychology and history, who's
23 really looking for that opportunity to explore a
24 diverse world. Those are -- those people are out
25 there. I was touring the State Capitol with Shannon

1 yesterday as we were learning all sorts of wonderful
2 things. But that's really what we're looking for.
3 Our focus is on that subject expert first, and then
4 we give them the support and the tools in order to
5 become amazing teachers in the classroom. And so we
6 recruit there. And then specifically for the
7 Bentonville school, there's a wide interest within
8 our current network of teachers who are very
9 interested in getting this model -- this specific
10 model for Arkansas off the ground. And so, largely,
11 we're going to recruit from here in the state, but
12 with -- also some current teachers within our network
13 that we're going to be bringing -- hopefully bringing
14 over as well.

15 DR. MOORE: All right. Thank you.

16 DR. BEZANSON: I just want to tag on to that a
17 little bit. Because I mean teacher quality is
18 essential to the model and we've got -- I think these
19 days we hire anywhere between 300 and 700 teachers a
20 year in our network as we've been in this rapid-
21 growth phase. So we've gotten very good at hiring
22 teachers. And then I want -- and so we'll continue
23 to do that. But the thing that's been the best for
24 us is targeting really high-quality universities
25 within the state where the school is, because a lot

1 of in-state kids want to stay in-state. So targeting
2 high-quality majors within high-quality universities
3 within that state; so we'll spend a lot of time in
4 the universities in Arkansas.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay. That's great.

6 I have a few more questions, but I'll -- come
7 back to me --

8 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay.

9 DR. MOORE: -- last.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: I did want to just ask one
11 question regarding the teacher training. So, in
12 specific, like what are some of the trainings that
13 you offer in terms of pedagogy, that sort of thing,
14 for your teachers?

15 MR. FERGUSON: Absolutely. So one of the first
16 things our teachers do, we bring the teachers on
17 early. Training typically starts two weeks before,
18 and with new teachers it starts the week before that.
19 We run a full-on teacher institute. It is heavily
20 leveraged using Teach Like a Champion and Doug
21 Lemov's work there, as well as Get Better Faster,
22 that coaching model. And so that is a continuous
23 process where we work with our teachers with biweekly
24 coaching meetings that are followed with
25 observations, followed by another meeting, followed

1 by another observation. Additionally, we have
2 compliance, special education training that is part
3 of the CMO management provided services. And then
4 we're also planning on partnering with APSRC for RISE
5 training, as well as additional training. We were
6 excited to meet with them yesterday to talk about a
7 bunch of those. And then, of course, AP training for
8 our teachers. And then Sean can fill you in more,
9 because this is actually his area of expertise.

10 MR. CLARK: I agree with everything you just
11 said.

12 But I'd also like to tie that back a little bit
13 to recruitment and retention of teachers, which is a
14 massive issue for everyone. Because we do have a lot
15 of training, but we also try to balance that with a
16 lot of autonomy in the classroom as well. These are
17 people who are professionals. We try to treat them
18 as professionals. We give them support. They ask
19 for support. Again, we hire teachers who are
20 students of the craft of teaching. And they may have
21 come to that in various different ways; they may not
22 have gone through a traditional, you know, teacher
23 education program. But they want to be able to
24 impart their knowledge to students in the best ways
25 that they can. And that takes time, so we try to

1 give them that time as well with the frequent but not
2 overwhelming -- we want them to make mistakes in the
3 classroom too, and learn from those mistakes. So I
4 just want to -- and I think that's something that is
5 particularly important for the teachers we're looking
6 for is that sense of autonomy with the support as
7 well. We're not hiring teachers who just want to be
8 given a script and go in and say it to the students;
9 they want to have genuine connections with the
10 students and build a career doing that. So --

11 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

12 Ms. Newton?

13 MS. NEWTON: I have -- my question is what
14 process do you -- did you use to determine the need
15 for this type of school in the area? And how did
16 that -- you know, how did the idea develop or the
17 need verified?

18 MR. FERGUSON: I believe Aaron Kindel is joining
19 us online, on Zoom. He is our Chief Growth Officer.
20 And soon he is --

21 MR. KINDEL: Yes. Can you hear me? Can
22 everybody hear me?

23 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yes, we can hear you.

24 MR. KINDEL: Great. Well, first of all, good
25 morning, Panel. It's nice to be with you today.

1 Regarding how we establish the need or where
2 we're going to locate a school, there are several
3 factors that we look at. We looked at the school
4 districts that we named in the charter application.
5 Effectively what we've done is we identify sort of
6 the northern portion of northwest Arkansas that is
7 there and we want to serve, at least initially as we
8 come into Arkansas. And we did this for a few
9 reasons. We looked at a lot of data that -- pulled
10 some things. And, again, when we look at where we
11 want to place new schools -- one, we want to see is
12 there some sort of need that we can meet in the
13 community. That need can be not just academic, by
14 the way; it could also be, even if there's good
15 schools in the area, do parents want another high-
16 quality like world-class option. So a combination of
17 both -- need, but also is there a sort of demand, if
18 you will, in the community. And then, of course, we
19 look at, look, do we think there's a sufficient
20 number of kids and enrollment demand to make sure
21 that we can have a sustainable budget. And, of
22 course, attracting talented teachers is a key part of
23 that.

24 So as we looked at this area that we've identified
25 in the charter application, the two things that we

1 saw -- first of all, just looking at the number of
2 students in the area, especially relative to other
3 areas that we serve, we see that there is a
4 sufficient number of students, so we could fill up a
5 school and we think we can make that work from a
6 budget perspective. But we also were very compelled
7 by the growth in the region. Whenever there's a lot
8 of growth in an area, this is typically a good place
9 for us to go. We can fill seats and feel like we can
10 meet a desire by families in the community when
11 there's a lot of growth.

12 You may know that we operate schools -- so you
13 do know we operate schools in Texas. Texas is a
14 growth market where we can expand there, and reach a
15 lot more students in Texas. There are a lot of kids
16 there, a lot of big cities. But the growth rate in
17 this region is actually greater than the average of
18 the communities we serve in Texas. So if you look at
19 all the communities we're currently operating in
20 Texas, with the average growth rate, this growth rate
21 is actually higher. So we -- that's very encouraging
22 for us.

23 And then I'll also say there's a nice balance
24 here of families that we think would be attracted to
25 this program. So we looked at the families that are

1 currently here, families that are moving, there's a
2 certain education attainment in the community that's
3 attracted to us. So, in other words, about 30 -- a
4 little over 33 percent of the households in this area
5 have a bachelor's degree or more. That number is
6 compelling to us for two different reasons: one is we
7 think there's a lot of households and families that
8 value our kind of college preparatory program. But
9 also there's a lot of families who would want that;
10 maybe they don't have that but want that for their
11 family. So there's a nice compelling balance of both
12 families who understand what we have to offer and
13 families that may want an out for this -- for their
14 children, even though they may not have a college
15 degree. So a combination of the number of kids that
16 are currently there, number of families moving to the
17 area, and this nice blend of families who we think
18 would be attracted to this type of a program. And,
19 by the way, when we compare those type of -- that
20 type of data to the regions or communities we're
21 already serving, we see a lot of similarities in
22 places where we've had enrollment success.

23 There's a few other reasons. But let me stop
24 there and see if there's any questions about that.

25 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

1 MR. KINDEL: You're welcome.

2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

3 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. Okay. Just a couple of
4 questions. And I appreciate the discussion we've had
5 so far and the thoughtful presentation about your
6 program. In looking at your application -- I'm on
7 the page that talks about the schools in northwest
8 Arkansas, and the college-going rate for these
9 schools comparing to your college-going rate, and
10 it's pretty impressive when you see a hundred percent
11 college acceptance. And I guess my question on that
12 would be how many years have you achieved that? Is
13 that something that has evolved over time? Or maybe
14 talk a little bit about that.

15 DR. BEZANSON: I'll say the big number and then
16 I'll let Chris do the details. So it's always been
17 the case that we've had a hundred percent college
18 acceptance rate. Part of that is because that's a
19 graduation requirement; so it's a graduation
20 requirement from our schools to get into college.
21 And then we put all the work and all the resources
22 necessary at the schools in order to make that a
23 reality for the students. So they have fulltime --
24 as Chris said, fulltime college counseling every day,
25 a full course devoted to it. So that's been a part

1 of the model in BASIS Ed managed schools from the
2 beginning.

3 MR. BALDWIN: Let me -- while you're probably
4 there, let me ask -- you have a lot of schools that
5 you manage, so I'm sure that there are some that
6 function easier than others.

7 DR. BEZANSON: For sure.

8 MR. BALDWIN: And so maybe talk to us about one
9 of your schools where you had to work hard to get
10 that college rate and what you did to overcome the
11 challenges that you had to face there.

12 DR. BEZANSON: Yeah. That's a great question.
13 So we have -- I would say our two -- the two most
14 difficult types of schools for us to operate are the
15 ones that are in the highest income areas of town, of
16 any given town, where parents have unrealistic
17 expectations for their students sometimes. And so
18 dealing with that parent population and their
19 expectations for students and them going out and
20 getting private college counselors and private tutors
21 and all of that, that really hurts the work that
22 we're doing and can kind of build a false
23 understanding of -- on their family side of what is
24 -- what their kid is capable of. So that's on the
25 one-hand.

1 On the other hand, the other more difficult but
2 also much more rewarding than the first one is the
3 schools where -- that we operate where a significant
4 percentage of our kids are first generation college
5 students or will be first generation college students
6 from their families. So we have schools, you know,
7 where 70 percent of the kids are eligible for free-
8 and-reduced lunch; that's our highest. But we also
9 have some where it's -- and Chris can speak kind of
10 anecdotally -- where it's more like 30 or 40 percent.
11 Washington, D.C. has had a really amazing set of -- I
12 think five or six graduating classes to this point,
13 and many of those -- for many of those families it
14 was the first family member to go to college. So
15 that takes a lot of work, a lot of additional
16 resources, more college counselors than maybe had
17 previously been budgeted and we've got to go and
18 figure out how to do that.

19 MR. BALDWIN: It's possible that in Arkansas
20 you'll have a lot of first generation --

21 DR. BEZANSON: Yes.

22 MR. BALDWIN: -- college --

23 DR. BEZANSON: I hope so. I hope so.

24 MR. BALDWIN: In looking at your growth plans, I
25 see that in year one and two you're projecting

1 budgeting 330 students each year. But then I see
2 that your enrollment cap moves up to 750 over five
3 years. Talk to us a little bit about your plan as
4 far as growth of number of students in this school,
5 and then maybe also your bigger plans for Arkansas.
6 I'm sure you -- you know, you guys look like you have
7 big plans. So do you have plans for Arkansas beyond
8 Bentonville?

9 DR. BEZANSON: Yeah. I'll answer that, and then
10 I'll let Chris or Tom -- sorry, I should sit down
11 too. My leg is getting mad. The -- I mean, we do
12 not want this to be the -- well, first of all, we
13 don't want to ask for more than one school. Right?
14 We want to come and -- humbly and open a school and
15 have it be great, and then come back and ask for more
16 campuses. But our goal is to be throughout the state
17 of Arkansas. So we would love to be -- five years
18 from now, we'd love to be three schools; ten years
19 from now, we'd love to be five schools. So kind of a
20 slow -- relatively slow growth, but we'd like to be,
21 you know, everywhere, from the delta to northwest
22 Arkansas.

23 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

24 DR. BEZANSON: Chris.

25 MR. BALDWIN: My follow-up question -- sorry, I

1 have a lot. But I'm intrigued by the way that you
2 engage students in processes in the community.

3 DR. BEZANSON: Yeah.

4 MR. BALDWIN: So those special service projects,
5 I guess during their tenure in the school and then
6 the -- what you called a service learning project in
7 their senior year, talk to us about what those
8 actually look like, especially at the senior year
9 project. And then also the senior students' oral
10 defense, that almost sounds, you know, like a Ph.D.
11 type plan. So talk to us about that.

12 MR. FERGUSON: It is. Do you want me to address
13 the budget question first?

14 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

15 MR. FERGUSON: Okay. So our first year -- I
16 believe you said 330; it is 275 that we built the
17 budget for. Just -- I believe you were in year-two
18 when you were looking at that. But that is what we
19 built the budget off of. Our actual internal
20 enrollment projection is closer to 400 students. We
21 were being very conservative in all of the metrics
22 that we were using as far as that goes. So that's
23 why the enrollment cap is 500. But then, we built a
24 very conservative budget because we want to make sure
25 that we are able to open even if we're not at that

1 cap. And so everything that was built in there was
2 playing very conservative section counts that were
3 not full, et cetera. And so as far as our projection
4 to get to, we are looking to get to 100 students per
5 section per grade level, starting in 5th grade, and
6 then going through our graduating class to get to
7 that 750 cap.

8 As far as the service learning projects, those
9 start in 5th grade with community service hours with
10 them. Learning -- service learning, that can be very
11 easy opportunities to help the school; that could be
12 opportunities through peer tutoring as they get
13 older. More importantly, that can be opportunities
14 to go out and do things like watershed management, to
15 go out and do things regarding how do we support our
16 community as a whole. It's really related towards
17 opportunities. It's relying strongly on the teachers
18 at the school and the family members, and so those
19 are community ties that are built-in. As they get to
20 their senior year, frankly, it resembles an Eagle
21 Scout project where the student is responsible for
22 developing what that project is going to be, where
23 the learning opportunity is going to be for
24 leadership for themselves, the opportunities for
25 their learning, and the opportunities for other

1 students to be able to help them and support them in
2 that success.

3 As far as the oral defense, Sean is absolutely
4 the one who is going to speak more about that.

5 MR. CLARK: So one thing about the service
6 learning project particularly -- we didn't get to
7 talk about it very much in the presentation. But as
8 academic as we are and we want to be, we're also very
9 much part of the community. And we -- our students
10 -- I mean, and Chris was right, teachers are a big
11 part of this. But a lot of the times these service
12 learning projects and clubs and things like that that
13 go out into the community and do things -- and
14 sometimes they actually start businesses. We've had
15 kids start tutoring businesses and things like that.
16 That isn't exactly service learning, but you get
17 where I'm going. So a lot of it is the kids. The
18 kind of kids that we generally attract and I think
19 try to promote and grow are the kids who have that
20 precocious sort of feel about the world; they see
21 something and they want to do it, and they're not
22 afraid to go to their favorite teacher or to the Head
23 of School hopefully and say, hey, I'd like to do
24 this; how do we do it. And we walk them through the
25 whole process and we talk about budgets with them --

1 and this is down to, you know, elementary school. We
2 show them how to put these things together, how to
3 recruit other students. And so it's not just going
4 out and -- you know, to a soup kitchen or something
5 like that and then ladling out some soup every once-
6 in-a-while, though that's fantastic too. But we
7 really do try to build it into something more that
8 gets the students actively involved and engaged in
9 what they're doing.

10 As far as their oral defense goes -- so the idea
11 is to have a student in their senior year,
12 particularly, take a research question and follow it
13 all the way through the research arc, basically. So
14 they go from, you know, initial questions and
15 background research to designing some sort of program
16 or experiment or whatever it might be, to the data
17 gathering, to data analysis, and then to a public
18 presentation. And by oral defense, that probably --
19 that is meant to sound a little bit more academic and
20 maybe a little scarier than it actually is. But
21 these are public presentations and the teachers come
22 to those and they ask questions. And they have
23 outside advisors often at universities and colleges
24 or in business and industry who come to those as
25 well, and they will ask hard questions. And it's

1 all, you know, very much in the spirit of joy in
2 learning and things like that. But it's -- they have
3 to stand up there -- they get all dressed up in their
4 Sunday best and they say what they've done and how
5 they've done it and what their conclusions are and
6 what worked and what didn't. And a lot of them find
7 that, you know, their research project didn't go as
8 great as they thought it was going to be. But there
9 -- there were obstacles in the way, that they ran out
10 of time or they didn't have enough money or they
11 couldn't do this or that, that probably most of us
12 have experienced when we've tried to do those sorts
13 of things.

14 So it really sets them up, again, to go into
15 college and universities with that experience -- some
16 of that experience behind them. And what we find is
17 that the students go in and they're very impressive
18 to their professors. And, very often, positions in
19 research institutions and laboratories and things
20 like that, that would be reserved for grad students
21 or, you know, upper undergrad students, our students
22 are better prepared for those because they've already
23 done some of that and they get right into those
24 programs.

25 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you for the answers. That's

1 all my questions. But let me just say, you know, I
2 know the quality teachers are really important --

3 MR. CLARK: Yeah.

4 MR. BALDWIN: -- to see the results you do. But
5 I think the service projects will help students find
6 their passion when they get out in the real world.

7 MR. CLARK: Absolutely. Absolutely.

8 MR. BALDWIN: Volunteer with a nonprofit or, you
9 know, being a part of something bigger than them,
10 that's part of what happens with things. So --

11 MR. CLARK: Yes. And I will say, too, on that,
12 we've had quite a few students, and some of my own
13 students from when I was teaching with BASIS, come
14 back to BASIS as teachers. And some of them have
15 kind of, you know, gone into administration -- and we
16 have quite a few of those examples too, which I think
17 says a lot about them. And when I think about those
18 kids specifically, they're not necessarily the kids
19 that I would've thought, oh, yeah, they'll come back
20 to BASIS. But they go out into the world and they
21 realize that a lot of the rigor that we put them
22 through was very valuable, though they might not have
23 felt so at the time. They do come back and they say
24 those things and they want to work with us, which is
25 -- you know, just puts me over the moon.

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Before we move
2 on to Ms. Saracini, I believe we have our Office of
3 Special Education online and they had a question.

4 Ms. Greene.

5 MS. GREENE: Yes. We were -- I'm Yvonne Greene;
6 I'm with the Office of Special Education. And we
7 were wondering how you are going to insure that
8 students with disabilities are enrolled and have
9 access to all of their needed special education
10 accommodations, supports, and supplementary services
11 while they're still participating in the highly
12 rigorous curriculum that you've described.

13 MS. CHAVEZ: Thank you for that question.
14 Shannon Chavez, ABC Compliance Services. Thank you,
15 all, and good morning.

16 That's an important question. Part of under the
17 CMO, the Compliance Services Department, which I'm
18 responsible for, we have an Exceptional Student
19 Services Department. There is currently a director
20 over Exceptional Student Services and two regional
21 assistant directors. And those folks will also help
22 to oversee special education and other Exceptional
23 Student Services, such as services for students on
24 504 plans or English Learner services in Arkansas.
25 It's really important to us that we provide every

1 student the opportunity to have our curriculum. I
2 think that what you probably heard, and I can
3 reiterate from the beginning of the presentation that
4 was given, is that this is an AP for all model; it is
5 a model where we believe that we're not just
6 preparing students for school or the next phase of
7 school, but for life, which I believe -- I'm a
8 special educator myself, I am a certified special
9 educator in the state of Arizona. I believe and we
10 believe as part of our model that all students have
11 that opportunity and that coincides with the purposes
12 behind the Individuals with Disabilities Education
13 Act as well. Those things coincide well. We are
14 also preparing those students who have disabilities
15 for life as well.

16 The model that we currently have in our other
17 states is a model where we do provide special
18 education services in a variety of different service
19 levels, different service types, from students who
20 are receiving services on a push-in basis or all the
21 way to students who are placed into private day
22 settings. As well we have some students who are home
23 or hospital based receiving student services because
24 that is the level of need that they have. It is
25 something that we do. We have students who have a

1 variety of different related services. We typically
2 contract with those, but we do usually, and we will
3 in this school, have a teacher on staff who is a
4 certified special education teacher, a licensed
5 special education teacher. We have it set up in our
6 budget for the first year for that being a halftime
7 teacher, just not knowing for sure how many students
8 we'll get right off the bat. Sometimes, especially
9 in a 5-12 model, the community hears, you know, a
10 rigorous curriculum; they're not really sure that's
11 going to be a school for students with disabilities,
12 and then they find out it is. And so we anticipate
13 by the next year that person having a fulltime
14 special education teaching position to really have
15 enough kids on the caseload that would be warranted
16 there.

17 So there will be a teacher. We'll provide
18 specially designed instruction to those students in
19 accordance with their IEP. And like I said, we will
20 in all likelihood contract with related service
21 providers. Those people -- we are currently looking
22 for. I was able to, when I was here at the APSRC
23 conference in May, able to actually connect with a
24 couple of people as vendors who do services. And
25 have also tried to put some feelers out in the

1 community to find all those vendors that might be
2 available to be able to provide those contracted
3 related services, as well as psychological services
4 for evaluations and those type of things. Also
5 noting that you guys have, here in Arkansas, Arkansas
6 Schools for the Deaf and Blind that I know provides
7 consultation and support throughout the state as
8 well. We have something similar in Arizona, Arizona
9 State Schools for the Deaf and Blind -- just
10 something similar where they have a main campus where
11 students can actually go fulltime but also do
12 services in sort of a co-op or consultative model
13 throughout the state. So that was something that was
14 nice to see, something we're familiar with.

15 So a variety of different types of potential
16 students with potential needs and we're going to be
17 able to meet those. We anticipate, just because it's
18 a 5-12 school and sort of what we see in our other
19 schools, that the vast majority of those will be
20 students who have higher disabilities; and so
21 probably things like speech language, impairments,
22 specific learning disabilities, potentially dyslexia,
23 things like that, or OHI for a lot of kids, you know,
24 now with ADHD who are eligible under that category.

25 And so we're really well-versed in doing this.

1 We serve a lot of kids this way and we're able to do
2 it. And we teach the teachers in the classroom how
3 to continue to make sure that those students' IEPs
4 are implemented, how those accommodations are done.
5 I'm a big believer that in a facilitated IEP approach
6 to the IEP team meetings and getting those regular
7 teachers at the team meeting, talking about what
8 their students are doing in the classroom; what
9 things they're doing that work; what things that
10 might be totally different than what they might do in
11 their normal course of providing universal design in
12 their classroom, so we would need to carve those
13 things out of accommodations and figuring out if that
14 might be something we need in other classes. As you
15 see in our model, our students are going to be moving
16 through a variety of different classes, as opposed to
17 being sort of in a static classroom all day. And so
18 it's really important if we have one teacher who's
19 successful with the type of accommodations -- he's
20 providing the type of modifications he's doing that
21 we really get to the root of that and are able to
22 provide that across the board. So through supports
23 for school personnel, making sure those others know
24 how to do that as well.

25 I could talk about this forever. I'm going to

1 stop and let you -- and let you tell me if you have
2 any questions for clarification or answers to
3 questions.

4 MS. GREENE: I think that answers my question.
5 Thank you so much.

6 MS. CHAVEZ: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini?

8 MS. SARACINI: I think about all my questions
9 have been answered. But I just want to say I
10 appreciate your attention to the detail both in your
11 application and the presentation today. Since I'm
12 Educator Effectiveness and Licensure, I want to make
13 sure that you do have high-quality teachers because
14 we know they impact students more than anything. So
15 I really appreciate that that's your goal.

16 I was very intrigued by how you go out and you
17 really look for your teachers at Higher Ed. And so
18 we do have a highly qualified professor [sic] route
19 to licensure. Because I know that people have to
20 think outside the box, which I'm assuming you do
21 because of just what all I've read. But kind of are
22 you looking -- maybe tell me a little more about are
23 you looking at parttime staff for that, when you're
24 looking at individuals that are experts in their
25 fields, especially your content areas at your high

1 level -- those AP classes, especially at that junior
2 and senior year.

3 MR. CLARK: Yeah. I mean, broadly I think we're
4 looking for anybody; you know, sometimes beggars
5 can't be choosers. But I think, you know, when we do
6 hire parttime -- and it's probably less -- you know,
7 we generally want to hire a fulltime teacher and
8 fulltime member of the community. But that doesn't
9 mean we're opposed to hiring parttime teachers,
10 particularly if it's a good fit, if it is somebody --
11 we've often done that -- or occasionally done that
12 with parents who may have, you know, advanced degrees
13 in something that we need and they're a good fit for
14 our community. So we would absolutely be interested
15 in looking at whatever kind of, you know, programs
16 there might be or opportunities to have good members
17 of the community come in. What we don't want from a
18 parttime teacher generally is just somebody to come
19 in, you know, kind of punch the clock and go home.
20 We are trying to build a community. But there are
21 plenty of people who, you know, for whatever reason
22 their life dictates that they have a parttime job
23 instead of a fulltime job, but they're great members
24 of the community and go to things and help out with
25 this, that and the other. So we would be more than

1 happy to look into that.

2 MS. SARACINI: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Again, thank you for your
5 presentation and sharing some additional details that
6 was in the application. I do have a couple of
7 questions.

8 So, first, almost kind of leveraging off what
9 Mr. Baldwin brought up, as we're looking at the ACT
10 scores of our students that are currently in the
11 schools you're going to be pulling from, and then
12 looking at the average ACT score that you reported,
13 which is extremely impressive -- but according to
14 your application you will be beginning to enroll
15 students 5 through 9 in your first year. So
16 realistically second semester, sophomore, senior --
17 or that summer or at least 11th grade they're going
18 to be taking the ACT. So looking at the ACT data
19 that we currently have, knowing that that is not
20 going to be where you guys are reporting, how do you
21 anticipate closing the gaps for those students? And
22 I guess my deeper question is the type of student
23 that is coming to you, do they have a higher
24 propensity to already be in that score level? Or are
25 you dealing with students that are coming to you that

1 struggle and then you close the gap and bring them to
2 the higher ACT scores?

3 MR. FERGUSON: Both, in answer to the last
4 question, is it is -- it is students from both, to
5 answer that. The ones we take the greatest pride in
6 are the ones who have had to work the hardest to get
7 there. We firmly believe that school should be hard.
8 That hard work is the most rewarding for the
9 students. It's the most rewarding for us. My most
10 treasured moments throughout my experience with the
11 company has been the students who we've had for five
12 years in our program and I drive to see them at their
13 summer job to tell them what their AP score was and
14 to celebrate that with them. Those are the ones I've
15 taken the greatest pride in.

16 How we close that gap, it's multi-fold. So as
17 far as the formalized testing and stuff like that,
18 the process begins with those AP tests and stuff like
19 that. Starting in their freshman year, our students
20 take the PISA, for example, starting as early as the
21 8th grade year to get them used to that testing
22 setting in what is a relatively low-stakes
23 environment. For the PISA, it's a no-stakes
24 environment until they get to their junior year. And
25 so giving them that opportunity to experience that is

1 actually transformative in and of itself.

2 Our math program focuses on not just rote
3 memorization of the processes in order to solve
4 something. When students are learning at a much
5 younger level long division, for example, learning
6 just the rote of how do I go about doing this doesn't
7 help them when they get to high school and we're
8 dividing polynomials. It takes a true understanding
9 of why am I doing this. And so across the board our
10 program focuses on that in mathematics, why am I
11 doing what I'm doing and what's the rationale behind
12 this, and having a deeper understanding of that. So
13 that leads to a large level of their success there.

14 The other part is our math program is
15 accelerated, so the students have covered more of the
16 mathematics, more of the higher mathematics. A lot
17 of those questions on the ACT doesn't require higher
18 mathematics, but it's a more elegant solution and
19 it's faster to get there and it's a deeper
20 understanding of why did I -- why did I achieve that.

21 As far as the other end of it, when we're
22 looking at, you know, the other components besides
23 mathematics, we do have a deep science background; we
24 do have that deep literature. And it's really those
25 conversations around the literature and around the

1 seminal texts that they're reading and discussing.
2 It's not just about a book. It's not a book report.
3 It's not just about memorizing facts from history.
4 It's about diving into a text, what did the author
5 mean in this when they wrote this amendment of the
6 constitution, what was meant here in the Gettysburg
7 Address. It's not just reading it and memorizing it;
8 it's what did that sentence mean, what did that get
9 into, and diving into a paragraph and talking about
10 it for two weeks, about the meaning of what is the
11 historical background in that. And that lends itself
12 towards that being able to put it forth on the test.

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

14 MR. FERGUSON: I think Sean wants --

15 MR. CLARK: As far as closing the gap too, I
16 think -- again, everything Chris said was right on
17 the money. But by doing regular -- you know, using
18 the PSA -- PSAT test, doing regular data analysis to
19 drive the instruction, that really does help. And I
20 don't think maybe with all of us we talk or bring up
21 data-driven instruction as much as maybe some others,
22 because it is just such a fundamental part of who our
23 teachers usually are and what we do that -- it's just
24 general operating procedure. They look at what the
25 kids are doing. They start with the end in mind.

1 You know, we have to train some of them to do that
2 more or less or what-have-you. But the -- that sort
3 of instruction and looking at those numbers and
4 quantifying those things really does help us set
5 goals for individual students. We have many students
6 who come in at low levels and they over time, with
7 patience and persistence and support of the community
8 and their parents, do very well. It does take time
9 as well, and it does take work on their part. You
10 know, as can absolutely support them, but we try to
11 provide an environment in which they want to be
12 there, they want to enjoy learning, they want to come
13 in and put in that effort. And that's ultimately
14 what really ends up closing the gap. We can do all
15 the numbers we want and all that, but if that drive
16 -- and I think passion is maybe sometimes overused,
17 but that joy in learning and being in school and
18 being with other people who are learning, that's what
19 gets to close that gap ultimately, because we can't
20 do it for them. We can just try to support them in
21 it.

22 DR. BEZANSON: Everyone is going to want to
23 speak on this because it's so core to the mission.
24 So I think that -- I mean, and if we fast-forward
25 like, you know, five years or so and we're getting

1 almost all of our students in the 5th grade, that
2 gives us a lot of time to get to these standards in
3 10th grade. But we want to open -- and so if we
4 could -- even if we can find 300 5th graders, we
5 still would want to open 5 through 9 because we want
6 to get into the community and get going and get a
7 graduating class within a reasonable number of years.
8 But that means that -- and we're fully committed to
9 meeting students where they're at when they come to
10 us. And as you intimated, I mean, to get kids from
11 where they're at -- or some of those kids, you either
12 have to be highly selective -- if you want to hit
13 those sort of scores that we're talking about in that
14 first or second year, you have to recognize that
15 you're not going to get there right away. And we
16 recognize we're not going to get there right away --

17 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

18 DR. BEZANSON: -- because we're not going to be
19 highly selective. So we're going to see the scores
20 increase over time for the first four or five years
21 in the school, because it's not magic. It takes
22 time. So when we take a new 9th grader it's going to
23 take time to get him up to that level in 10th grade.
24 The 5th grader, it takes that time. So you'll see
25 the scores increase. You'll still be proud of those

1 scores when we open, but they will get -- they will
2 get higher.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you. And
4 another question that -- I noticed that you guys are
5 trying to identify a location. Do you have an idea
6 of when that will come together? Or do you have any
7 ideas in mind or has that been changed or -- well,
8 you started looking up there and I was like -- oh, I
9 was like okay.

10 MR. KINDEL: Yeah, I think that's my cue again.
11 So I'd say this, we have two big goals where we think
12 about the facility and how to deliver that. One
13 certainly is to locate it in a way, sort of static,
14 that creates as much accessibility to as many
15 families throughout all of those school districts
16 that we named in the application. And then, of
17 course, we deliver -- the facility doesn't only have
18 to be appropriate and safe for the students but has
19 to be affordable for the school. So those are the
20 two big goals.

21 To answer your question, we do not have a
22 facility identified yet. We have the preliminary
23 started, sort of our homework and our search. We are
24 conducting a thorough search throughout all those
25 school districts. And of course there's a little bit

1 of a limit to how much we can do until or if the
2 charter is approved. If it were to be approved, then
3 we are in a good position to move very quickly. We
4 do intend to lease initially; so we'd like to lease
5 for the first few years, during which time we'll grow
6 the enrollment but also develop some operational
7 track record there in Arkansas. So not only building
8 the budget but also building our financial strength
9 and credit, and then in a few years we'd like to make
10 a big investment in a permanent facility. So when we
11 provide a permanent facility, we usually spend
12 somewhere between 25 to 40 million dollars, depending
13 on the number of students we're serving and how big
14 the facility is. And, again, we'll be in a position
15 to do that in a couple of years, which is part of the
16 reason why we want to lease initially. We will look
17 at all options, even our short-term options. We
18 sometimes get extensions on the lease. If we really
19 like the facility, we might want to stay there longer
20 than we originally intended. We do a lot of ground-
21 up construction, but we also like to adapt and re-
22 use. So if we can find a building that's in good
23 shape and the right location, we can often get into a
24 good facility, the more affordable way, especially
25 given the current rate of construction costs right

1 now. So, again, we look at all those options,
2 including financing options. We will look at a lot
3 of different lending products, if you will, to make
4 sure the school is getting the right financing
5 package and makes the most sense for the school. But
6 we do intend to lease first and we do feel confident
7 about our ability to move quickly and have that ready
8 for the 24-25 school year.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I guess my next
10 question from there, when the -- so if the
11 application is approved and they after the fact
12 select a location, are they coming back to us with
13 that information or are they just going forward? As
14 we're approving today, we're just approving it in
15 totality and then if they so choose, they so choose?

16 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: I'll let Ms. Wagner take
17 that one.

18 MS. WAGNER: So to answer your question, once
19 they choose their location, when they enter into a
20 lease, they will have to submit a debt request to us
21 and that's how we will know what they have chosen.
22 Because the Commissioner, or Secretary, has to
23 approve those debt requests.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

25 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Any other
2 questions from panel members?

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I do. Sorry.

4 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay. Okay.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I was excited to see
6 that you guys have a plan to offer Career Technical
7 Education, so that did my heart good. But I do have
8 a question on how did you choose the courses that
9 you're planning to offer? What was the thought
10 process behind that?

11 MR. FERGUSON: So it was relying on our past
12 expertise, of course, is that we have offered in the
13 past and really making sure they're streamlined.
14 That is one of the areas where Arkansas -- the number
15 of pathways that are offered for CTE is an increase
16 over the other states in which we operate. And so we
17 wanted to start with pathways that lean on our
18 expertise as a management company, within the
19 Computer Science, within the Math. And then we're
20 very excited about the JROTC as well. We are looking
21 forward to expanding the number of pathways as we
22 become familiar with what our students want. But it
23 started with what is the expertise us as a management
24 company, from a curriculum development standpoint,
25 are most familiar with.

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Okay. I would just
2 recommend, if approved, that -- Mr. Tim Johnson is in
3 the back, and so he will be a great resource to work
4 with you on those pathways.

5 MR. FERGUSON: Yes. I am looking forward to it.
6 I met with Tim prior to the initial application. I
7 look forward to meeting with him again.

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Great. And then a couple
9 more questions. So Career Development, I see you're
10 offering that in 8th grade.

11 MR. FERGUSON: Yes.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So, glad to see that. But
13 typically that is paired with Key Code, which you
14 have in 7th grade. So I was just wanting to get a
15 sense of why you guys decided to split those up and
16 offer Key Code in 7th grade and then Career
17 Development separately in another grade.

18 MR. FERGUSON: Well, we're happy to offer them
19 together. I frankly didn't realize that. I knew
20 that it was a requirement for either 7th or 8th
21 grade.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

23 MR. FERGUSON: And so I thought it was just
24 typically a split, one semester of each per grade
25 level. If it's typically paired up, then --

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

2 MR. FERGUSON: -- we can switch that -- switch
3 that.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

5 MR. FERGUSON: The Key Code and the Computer
6 Science for 7th grade, we can just swap those.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All right. That's
8 all I have.

9 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Is that it?

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah, that's it. Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Just wanted to make sure.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

13 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Anybody else?

14 DR. MOORE: Yes. So I appreciate your
15 acceleration and especially in mathematics, but I did
16 have a question. Since you are hoping for 80%
17 student retention, that would mean that inevitably
18 you would have some students that would come to you,
19 say, for example, in the 10th grade who may be coming
20 from a program that wasn't accelerated. What are
21 your plans to get a student up-to-speed and to get
22 them on what you consider grade level, considering
23 that you are offering like pre-AP Algebra II to 10th
24 graders?

25 MR. FERGUSON: Yes. So we want -- it was built

1 with the intentionality of students being able to
2 come in in 10th grade, and so there is still a
3 pathway to get there. If we accelerate it faster
4 than that, there would be an opportunity for a
5 student coming in who hadn't taken Algebra I yet or
6 hadn't passed Algebra I in 9th grade coming in to do
7 that. So that pathway to get in with something we
8 were very intentional with. Part of our counseling
9 plan and part of our non-teaching staff plan is
10 regular meetings with those kids who are struggling,
11 whether that's a daily meeting or a weekly meeting
12 with the college counselor, with the school
13 counselor, with a different member of administration.
14 Or our teachers also have an advisory period that is
15 built-in, that is specifically built in to help those
16 students with those skills that they need and walking
17 through that. And then it's going to be intensive
18 help. So all of our teachers offer opportunities for
19 additional support before school, after school; it
20 depends on the teacher when is the most available.
21 It will look a lot like office hours in college. We
22 want the students coming in, asking for that help.
23 We want to support them. Those are the students who
24 are coming to us, saying I want more support, I want
25 to be successful in this. And we're really anxious

1 to provide that support and then also make sure we're
2 working up that pathway -- what does this look like
3 to get there hopefully for on-time graduation. But,
4 most importantly, how do I get to graduation and how
5 do I provide the supports and that college pathway to
6 get there. We have built the course sequencing, as
7 well as, you know, providing what is your
8 developmental goal, where are we coming to start with
9 -- and determining where that's at is the very first
10 step.

11 DR. MOORE: Okay. So --

12 MS. NEWTON: I have one.

13 DR. MOORE: No, go ahead.

14 MS. NEWTON: Just a seg-way to that, is there a
15 vetting process to the students that apply, in how
16 you select them?

17 MR. FERGUSON: No. It is an open-enrollment
18 charter school with a lottery. We do not vet our
19 students.

20 DR. MOORE: So a student potentially may be with
21 students of another grade level when they first come
22 in, and then maybe double-up on math courses? Like
23 what -- can you tell a little more about that
24 pathway?

25 MR. FERGUSON: Yeah. So potentially -- it's

1 hard to speak in too hypothetical of a situation.
2 So, but yes. So it could be doubling up on a
3 mathematics course. It's not uncommon for students
4 to double-up on a geometry course and Algebra II
5 course. It's not uncommon, and there is that
6 additional elective period there for students to do
7 that. It's not uncommon for students to double-up
8 with biology and chemistry in order to meet those.
9 There are multiple pathways. So, yes, it's
10 accelerated, but it's a reasonable acceleration
11 within each of the different areas of study. And so
12 we can double-up to really get to where the student
13 is at. So if it's an area where they're behind in
14 science, we can double-up in science and make sure
15 we're getting the basic requirements done there, and
16 going from there.

17 DR. MOORE: Okay. And were you wanting to add
18 to that?

19 DR. BEZANSON: Yes, ma'am.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay.

21 DR. BEZANSON: Thank you. Another thing that's
22 like core to the mission -- so it's -- we -- we --
23 well, first of all, it's not very often that we lose
24 high school students traditionally across BASIS
25 managed schools. So we have, you know, reasonable

1 attrition in the middle school. And then the main
2 point of transition out is from 8th to 9th grade, if
3 there is one. So the students with us through 9th
4 grade, they tend to stay with us through graduation.
5 So there's not very many open spots. But it's been
6 really important to us as we built this model to
7 create that -- not seamless, because it's going to be
8 hard -- but that ability to in-take students into
9 10th grade and any grade below that, and maybe even
10 into 11th grade. That jives with also something that
11 we talked a lot about, once we came up with the idea
12 of having high school concentrations, with
13 recognizing that students are going to think that
14 they want to concentrate on fine arts and then
15 they're going to get halfway through it and say I
16 wish I'd concentrated on math and science. So that
17 moment at the end of 10th grade is where you make
18 that -- where you can make that switch, or sometime
19 during 10th grade. So that, allowing a student to
20 chance concentration helps with -- and creating a
21 system for that helps with also creating a track or
22 pathway to get in at that same time. So that's
23 something -- it's -- again, it's very -- and to your
24 question, we have no admissions criteria, so it's
25 just -- it's just the luck of the lottery. So I

1 want, number one on that list, for the lottery to be
2 capable to being able to come into Bentonville School
3 for Advanced Studies in 10th grade. So --

4 DR. MOORE: Okay.

5 MR. CLARK: I just have one quick thing. So to
6 get to sort of the nitty-gritty of your question, I
7 think on the school level -- as I said, I was Head of
8 School for eight years -- the way we actually do some
9 of those things, particularly with math, is we've
10 gotten very good at identifying for individual
11 students where their particular deficiencies are
12 coming in. So we've gotten very good at figuring out
13 where they need to be and what that gap is and
14 filling it, without saying, well, you've just got to
15 take the whole year of Algebra I again necessarily.
16 They may need to do that, but it may be that you've
17 got these three or four little gaps here that are
18 really causing you problems; we're going to focus on
19 that for the next month and you're going to go to
20 student hours and you're going to, you know, do some
21 extra time after school or we'll get you a senior to
22 tutor you or whatever it is; but we get those filled
23 in, then you'll be in much better shape and you don't
24 necessarily have to re-take that whole year. So we
25 really try to tailor it to what the student needs and

1 find a way to make that happen for them as quickly as
2 possible. Because it can be tough for the kids to,
3 you know, be in a grade level behind or something
4 like that, emotionally or whatever. So when we don't
5 have to do that, if we can figure out how to close
6 that gap in another way, we'll choose those things
7 too. And we've become very good at that.

8 DR. MOORE: Thank you. And then I have another
9 question. I see AP is mentioned quite a bit, and a
10 lot of times we bifurcate whether AP or concurrent --
11 but sometimes there's room for both. But I didn't
12 see really much mention of concurrent credit. Is
13 concurrent credit something that you consider or
14 offer in your schools? And if so, have you spoken
15 with NWAC or U of A regarding concurrent credit
16 opportunities?

17 MR. FERGUSON: No, we're not currently looking
18 at concurrent credit. We're primarily looking at AP
19 credit.

20 DR. MOORE: Okay.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I guess that -- sorry --
22 that lends to a follow-up question. Why are you not
23 looking at concurrent credit?

24 MR. CLARK: The biggest reason, to me, as a
25 school leader particularly, is that (a) I know that

1 we can provide a tailored known system for that kid
2 and I want them to be in that. We do provide college
3 level -- college level work, college level rigor.
4 But I want to make sure that we're preparing them.
5 It's kind of a protective thing, to me. And I think
6 while we're not pursuing it necessarily, we're also
7 not necessarily against it. We have done it in some
8 of our schools before. But we're -- again, we're
9 really trying to make a community, and if we have
10 lots of kids going off to do different things in
11 other areas that can sort of be a drain on that
12 community and they're not as connected. We don't see
13 them as much. And these are very important years for
14 these students and -- so we're not really looking
15 into it at this point. But if there are
16 opportunities, we have taken them. But we want to
17 make sure that we're -- we're nurturing our students
18 as best we can, and we feel like we're the ones best
19 equipped to do that.

20 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Before you move forward --

21 DR. MOORE: Yeah, some clarity on -- concurrent
22 credit in Arkansas is most often tied at the high
23 school by your teachers.

24 MS. CHAVEZ: Right. And I want to say we
25 actually had a conversation about whether to seek a

1 waiver for that when we were doing the application,
2 and determined that we wouldn't seek a waiver for it
3 because we -- again, we're not opposed to it. It's
4 not something that we have historically done in our
5 other schools that are managed by BASIS Ed, because
6 the AP tends to take the focus of the curriculum.
7 But it's -- you know, you guys went through a 38-
8 course requirement; so potentially there's more of an
9 opportunity for that as we build out the curriculum
10 down the road. So I don't think that we have
11 opposition to it at all. It's just not something
12 that we have currently built into the model and are,
13 you know, actively programming toward. But also, you
14 know, the school would open with 5 through 9 and then
15 add 10th, and then 11th and 12th grade. So there's
16 also an opportunity for us to get more familiar with
17 sort of these things in Arkansas, and determine
18 whether or not that would be an appropriate --

19 DR. MOORE: Because even like, for example,
20 quantitative literacy is one of the courses you plan
21 to offer and that's an opportunity for concurrent
22 credit.

23 MS. CHAVEZ: Certainly.

24 DR. MOORE: But you would have to have someone
25 that was qualified on your --

1 DR. BEZANSON: Yeah.

2 DR. MOORE: -- campus to --

3 DR. BEZANSON: Yeah. I think we're absolutely
4 open to that idea. The original kind of no was that
5 we've been focusing on creating courses that met the
6 curriculum requirements of the AP. And once you're
7 doing that, they probably don't -- they're different
8 than course requirements to get concurrent credit
9 perhaps. So, but for courses that are non-AP
10 courses, I think that's a -- that's a great thing for
11 us to pursue.

12 DR. MOORE: Well, and potentially sometimes
13 there's opportunity to do both within the same class.

14 DR. BEZANSON: Okay. Great. Thank you.

15 DR. MOORE: We'll be happy to provide more
16 support on that.

17 DR. BEZANSON: We'll be happy to avail ourselves
18 of that support.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I did have another
20 question.

21 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yes.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So -- because I was trying
23 to not keep looking at my book. But, so it looks
24 like we're wrapping up a little bit. So my other
25 question -- again, appreciate you guys putting a

1 focus on offering CTE courses. And as I've listened
2 to you guys today and looked through your materials,
3 I will say that I'm still trying to make the
4 connection for our students that, as they're
5 preparing to go on to college, what types of
6 opportunities will they have when they're with you to
7 further explore career opportunities that are
8 connected to those CTE courses; what opportunities
9 will they have to prepare to go into those career
10 fields, those types of work-based learning
11 opportunities, career exploration opportunities,
12 engaging with business and industry partners. Is
13 there someone that can speak to that?

14 MR. CLARK: Yes. So one of the biggest ways we
15 would do that is in the senior project, the senior
16 oral defense and service learning aspect of the
17 senior year. So a lot of students for those projects
18 go into and research careers that they're interested
19 in. And we've had students who intern with
20 engineering firms or do work in laboratories or
21 intern with doctors or lawyers or what-have-you.
22 Lots of business opportunities. And we've had very
23 good success and a great track record with business
24 owners, scientists, professors, lawyers, doctors
25 having our students come onto their teams, often, in

1 fairly fundamental ways and really get a sense of not
2 just -- you know, engineering sounds like fun because
3 you get to build stuff; but what do you actually do
4 as an engineer? And we've had plenty of kids who've
5 gone into those things and said, yeah, it was fun; I
6 don't want to do that, I want to do something else.
7 And, you know, that -- we feel like that's a very
8 valuable thing for them to get to see too, is what
9 they don't want to do. Because they're about to go
10 into college and spend, you know, many, many years
11 and maybe a lot of money to go into a career that may
12 not actually be a good fit for them. So that's one
13 of the big ways we do it.

14 We also tend to have communities around our
15 schools that do have folks who run businesses, who,
16 you know, are doctors, lawyers, all kinds of
17 different things, entrepreneurs and things like that.
18 And they have been a huge source of -- or huge
19 resource for our schools and our students to go in
20 and do things through summer internships, and we
21 actively pursue those things. Particularly as a Head
22 of School and the college counselors, we're getting
23 to know the students and getting to know the
24 families. That's one of my first things, is what do
25 you do; oh, would you mind having a student come over

1 and, you know, shadow you for a day or work in your
2 office or something like that. And we use those
3 resources as much as we can to get kids out in the
4 community and get some of that experience, and then
5 bring that back and, you know, present it to the
6 community and share their knowledge and their
7 experiences. And it's one of the ways, I think, that
8 we keep students from year to year as well, because
9 we do share that information and we encourage the
10 students to do so. And the younger students see --
11 you know, a 5th grader can come in and watch the
12 senior oral defense and go, wow, that's really cool
13 and I can get to do that in a few years. So it's
14 absolutely something that we do a lot of and will
15 continue to do, and the Bentonville area and
16 northwest Arkansas is a great place for that. We
17 look forward to tapping into some of those things.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So for the 5th
19 grader or 6th grader, outside of them coming in and
20 viewing the upper classmen's oral defense, what are
21 some opportunities they would have to engage in
22 career exploration?

23 MR. CLARK: There are probably a few. One would
24 be some of the clubs that we offer. We offer
25 engineering clubs, robotics clubs often for the

1 younger students. You know, as much as we don't have
2 some of the -- or at least not starting with some of
3 the CTE things like, you know, woodworking, welding,
4 or something like that, kids love doing that stuff.
5 They really enjoy it. In Flagstaff, when I was up
6 there -- and just as an example -- we had a parent
7 who was a blacksmith. And he actually had a degree
8 in microbiology, but he became a blacksmith. And we
9 actually had a blacksmithing club where the kids
10 would go over there -- and, you know, very safe and
11 controlled kind of stuff. But, you know, 5th, 6th,
12 7th graders would go over there and they would learn
13 about metallurgy and he could talk to them about the
14 chemistry behind it as well. So those are the kinds
15 of things that we would be looking for for all our
16 students.

17 One of the things that I always talk to the
18 teachers and staff about is we don't want to just
19 have a fieldtrip to the zoo or to a museum or
20 something like that. That's fine. There's nothing
21 wrong with that. But you can do that with your
22 families, like -- and encourage you to. We want to
23 do the things that take you behind the scenes, that
24 get you to -- you know, the 5th and 6th graders and
25 their biology class going to see the -- you know, the

1 lion vet at the zoo or see the -- you know, something
2 that really gets them engaged and thinking outside of
3 what their limited experience is as a 5th or 6th
4 grader. And so we spend a lot of time trying to
5 pursue those opportunities and push them kind of to
6 the next level -- you know, going to the Capitol or
7 something like that. Well, we're not just going to
8 go to the Capitol; we're going to meet with our
9 representatives or, you know, those sorts of things.
10 And we try to do that as far down the grade levels as
11 we can to get them to see the wide opportunities that
12 they've got ahead of them, particularly if they stay
13 in school and do their work and progress through the
14 program like that.

15 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All right. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any other questions from
18 the Panel?

19 Okay. If not, I'll entertain a motion.

20 MS. NEWTON: I'll move to approve the motion to
21 grant the charter.

22 DR. MOORE: I second.

23 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. The motion has
24 been made by Ms. Toyce Newton and seconded by Dr.
25 Moore. All in favor?

1 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

3 Any abstentions?

4 All right. Motion passes.

5 Let's take just a few minutes to fill out our
6 voting sheets.

7 (A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE)

8 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So we'll start down here
9 with Dr. Moore.

10 DR. MOORE: I voted for, and stated that the
11 Bentonville School for Advanced Studies proposes to
12 offer a unique college preparatory program in the
13 northwest Arkansas region not currently available to
14 students and families. They have demonstrated
15 successful outcomes with their model in other states.
16 I encourage consideration of blended concurrent AP
17 courses so that students can earn college credit
18 while in high school, in addition to being exposed to
19 the rigorous AP curriculum.

20 MS. NEWTON: I voted yes. The applicant has
21 identified student -- a student population and they
22 have a solid plan and approach of reaching their
23 identified outcomes and addressing student needs in a
24 variety of areas.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin.

1 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. I voted for the application.
2 You guys have done a good job of explaining your
3 program and your plan. It's unique, it's successful,
4 it's creative. I think there's a need in Arkansas
5 for that, even beyond Bentonville. And we look
6 forward to you all bringing new ideas to us.

7 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini.

8 MS. SARACINI: I support the approval of the
9 Bentonville School for Advanced Studies. The BASIS
10 model brings to Arkansas a unique world-class college
11 prep education to the northwest Arkansas region. I
12 look forward to seeing the outcomes to Arkansas
13 students, families, and communities.

14 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray.

15 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I voted for. I support
16 Bentonville School for Advanced Studies' application
17 to open a charter school for academic year '25. They
18 presented an established model for advanced studies,
19 college preparatory instruction. I greatly
20 appreciated their inclusion and attention to career
21 technical education. This model has potential to
22 improve outcomes for students in northwest Arkansas.
23 I look forward to learning from their outcomes on
24 closing gaps for students taking college assessments.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So, congratulations. We

1 look forward to seeing what you do here in Arkansas.

2 One point of information: Mr. Jeffrey Fetter is
3 back there in the back. You'll have to put in an LEA
4 request with him before June 1st of next year.

5 All right. Thank you so much.

6 So what's the pleasure of the Panel? Do we want
7 to take a 15-minute break? 10 minutes? 5? Okay. A
8 5-minute -- 15?

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: 10.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: 10? Okay. We'll do 10.

11 We'll do 10. So we'll return at 10:50.

12 (BREAK: 10:42 a.m. - 10:55 a.m.)

13 2) CONSIDERATION OF THE INSTITUTE FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS NEW
14 OPEN ENROLLMENT PUBLIC SCHOOL CHARTER APPLICATION

15 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Good morning again,
16 everyone. I call the meeting back to order. We'll
17 have Ms. Shastady Wagner come up and go through the
18 procedures.

19 MS. WAGNER: Good morning again. So our
20 procedures for this are the applicant -- the Chair
21 will swear everybody who's wishing to testify in.
22 You can swear everybody in at once. The applicant
23 then gets 20 minutes to present. And we have
24 received two public comments that go along with this
25 application. Since we received them in writing prior

1 to they will go immediately following. Ms. Summons
2 will give you the information on those public
3 comments. And we have received no opposition. So we
4 are good to go.

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

7 Ms. Summons.

8 MS. SUMMONS: Okay. We have our public comment
9 from Senator Justin Boyd, who is with us via Zoom.
10 Senator Boyd, we're ready for you.

11 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: That will be -- that will
12 be after the presentation. It's okay. It's okay.

13 All right. You may begin your presentation.

14 MS. COLE: I want to make sure before we start
15 -- am I using this? I see two clickers up here.
16 Okay. So we are going to --

17 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yes, so we will need to
18 swear in first.

19 MS. COLE: Okay. And let's see, there we go.
20 Let me make sure I know what I'm doing here.

21 MR. WILLIAMS-WESLEY: After y'all swear in,
22 we'll do that.

23 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay.

24 MS. COLE: Oh, thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Perfect.

1 MS. COLE: Okay. Perfect.

2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. So everyone
3 who's going to speak on behalf of the charter, if
4 you'll stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear
5 or affirm that everything you're about to testify is
6 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
7 truth?

8 [ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY]

9 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
10 much.

11 MS. COLE: Good morning. I am Jeannie Cole from
12 Fort Smith, Arkansas. I am chairman of the board for
13 the Community School of the Arts. I was on the Fort
14 Smith Public Schools Board of Education for 23 years.
15 I grew up in northeast Arkansas, singing in church
16 and in the school chorus, the show choir, weddings,
17 and funerals. In college I majored in Music
18 Education. But I can tell you, as a freshman at
19 Harding University, I found that my high school
20 experiences had not adequately prepared me to take on
21 the rigorous college music curriculum. I had a lot
22 of catching-up to do so I could excel in my classes.
23 I can only imagine what it would've been like to have
24 had a more immersive, more intensive fine arts high
25 school experience.

1 DR. RUSSELL: Well, thank you, Jeannie. I'm Dr.
2 Rosilee Russell. I am the executive director and the
3 founder of Community School of the Arts. We are the
4 sponsoring entity today for the Institute for the
5 Creative Arts, which is a performing and visual arts
6 high school.

7 And if you will look up here, you can see the
8 mission of ICA. And that is to empower students
9 through an intensive arts and academic curriculum
10 that is going to prepare them for higher education
11 for creative careers and to be leaders in the arts
12 and creative industries. And I want to emphasize the
13 fact that this is an intensive arts and academic
14 curriculum.

15 First of all, I want you to meet our team. You
16 heard from Ms. Jeannie Cole. She is currently our
17 board chair of CSA. Dr. Phillip Russell and I are
18 the cofounders of ICA. And then Ms. Deana Griffith
19 will be moving into the Director of Operations and
20 Finance position, should we receive approval for ICA.
21 Deana currently works at CSA.

22 MR. RUSSELL: My name is Phillip Russell. I'm
23 Director of Development for Community School of the
24 Arts. And just a few words about Community School of
25 the Arts -- it is a nonprofit; it serves the Fort

1 Smith region, and it is an afterschool program in the
2 arts. And it is probably -- I would say it is the
3 leading arts education program in that part of the
4 state. It has a long history. And one thing that
5 stands out in that history is that it has always been
6 an institution, an organization that serves the needs
7 of all, including the underserved. And I think what
8 you'll find in the philosophy of that organization is
9 that -- the belief is that no teen or child should be
10 deprived of an arts education.

11 When we look at the vision of CSA, we see a
12 seamless thought -- and by that, I mean the idea
13 behind CSA has always been to create or establish an
14 arts organization that would span seamlessly from --
15 for students from preschool through high school. And
16 we've held to that vision for a long, long time. And
17 actually we've based our progress toward meeting that
18 vision over the years. In fact, today, we serve over
19 1,000 students in our afterschool programs at CSA.
20 And you might be wondering how we do that. It's a
21 tuition-driven model. But we do that in large part
22 through scholarships and through outreach programs
23 that are supported by people that believe in the
24 power of arts education in the lives of young people.
25 So I would say to you that now is the time to take

1 the next step toward implementing that vision.

2 And you will see on this slide the supporters of
3 CSA. There are federal, state, and local officials
4 listed there. There are also a good number of
5 regional businesses. And actually that slide does
6 not do justice to the number of people that support
7 this organization. As Director of Development, I
8 could tell you a lot more about many people from all
9 walks of life that support this. But I will just say
10 that all the people here support -- have supported
11 our past efforts and they are committed to our future
12 growth and all endorse the idea of the proposed
13 institute.

14 DR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Phillip.

15 And I did want to say how happy we are to be
16 here today and really, really very excited to share
17 with you our vision and our model for this. So --
18 and I'm Dr. Rosilee Russell, again, for the minutes.

19 I want you to meet one of our students. This is
20 Grant, and you can see little Grant started with us
21 when he was seven and moving on with us. He was in
22 our afterschool programs all the way through high
23 school. And if you look over there to the right, he
24 is now in college and pursuing a career in the arts.
25 And he, like many, many others, is one of the reasons

1 we're here today, because he had a dream, like so
2 many of the students who are creative or who are
3 interested in a creative field of being in some type
4 of a high school where they can literally be immersed
5 into creative arts activities. And so, as I said,
6 Grant is now pursuing a career in the arts. And we
7 believe that through the ICA Performing and Visual
8 Arts High School that we can meet the needs of
9 students from across socioeconomic bounds in a very
10 intense way and meet their creative needs and prepare
11 them for a career in the arts. By the way, that last
12 slide there or that last image is Grant speaking,
13 about a year ago, to our former Governor Hutchinson
14 and First Lady. And Governor Hutchinson, by the way,
15 credited his time in musical theater in high school
16 for some of his successes in law and politics.

17 So I kind of want to jump in, just dive right
18 into what -- really why we're here and what this is
19 all about. And you can see some bullet points there
20 that are very important that we will kind of go
21 through as we move on through some of these slides.
22 But those are some of the most important, and we'll
23 talk a little more about that.

24 So for me, one of the most important things
25 today, if I do nothing else, is I hope that we can

1 get across what arts immersion is. Now, let me say
2 first that there are arts integration schools in our
3 state and they are wonderful; I highly support them.
4 We are over here on the left. We are an arts
5 immersion. That's what ICA will be. We will be the
6 first arts immersion, the first performing and visual
7 arts high school in the state. And let me say
8 personally I have lived this life. This is my life,
9 my education. As a performing artist in piano and a
10 college professor and an arts administrator, this is
11 my life since I was seven years old. And what this
12 is is that when students enter ICA they will
13 literally be immersed into an arts creative field, a
14 curriculum, and they will be mentored and worked with
15 in a very intense -- often one-on-one; lots of group
16 settings, lots of rehearsals, lots of drills. They
17 will be coached by master teachers. The master
18 apprentice approach is an old Italian style where
19 these master teachers impart knowledge and skill on
20 to these students. And as they train this way, it is
21 literally a training center. As they train this way,
22 they master skills on a daily basis. So the self-
23 esteem that's built, the mastery that's build is
24 really incredible. The one-on-one time is wonderful
25 and it produces students who get out and display and

1 do performances, events for the public; lots of
2 public performances and festivals and that sort of
3 thing. Interestingly, in an arts immersion school
4 the skills, the discipline, the focus, the critical
5 thinking skills, the communication, the engagement
6 between students and teachers, and vice versa, all of
7 that transfers over into core academics, which is a
8 very important thing. And so if you know some things
9 about national performing and visual arts high
10 schools, they often produce students who have very
11 good grades. Students who are even coming from a
12 background that they've had limited studies and
13 limited quality education and core academics, their
14 grades will improve in a school like this because of
15 the discipline and focus. And I have to say
16 personally I think we probably are all aware of some
17 performing -- national performing arts high schools,
18 they are talked about at a national level in
19 education. They are top models. And that's one of
20 the reasons we're looking at this, is I firmly
21 believe in this style of learning to produce great
22 students. But they're talked about on a national
23 level, and for me personally I can't think of
24 anything better than for Arkansas to have a top high
25 school model that can be in the discussion with other

1 performing arts high schools in the nation.

2 So that's what we're about. That's a -- just a
3 little taste of that.

4 Let's take a look at Fort Smith. You can see
5 there clearly there -- these are the high schools
6 that currently exist. If you're keeping up with the
7 news, and I'm sure you are, within a year from now
8 some 900 to 1500 families are going to be moving into
9 the Fort Smith area for the Air Force fighter
10 training. Many of them are coming from foreign
11 countries. Many people in these countries have a
12 strong interest in the arts. On top of these high
13 schools, we believe we need another high school just
14 to meet the needs. And in addition, we're completely
15 void of an arts school which will meet the needs of
16 many of these families coming in. By the time this
17 school would open, in August of '24, there will be
18 many families already there. So this just kind of
19 gives you an idea of what's going on there in Fort
20 Smith. So the location is a perfect fit.

21 The school itself, this is a model -- this is a
22 college model. And if you take a look at this image,
23 in the center is where all of the core academic
24 courses will be housed -- math, science, English,
25 social studies. Each one of these departments --

1 each one of these circles is set up as a department,
2 called a school. All of the core courses will be in
3 the School of Academic Studies. All students will be
4 in the School of Academic Studies. We will not at
5 all slight that school. There will be a lot of AP
6 and pre-AP type courses in that school. There will
7 be a director over each of the schools. As the
8 students enter this school, they will be assessed and
9 auditioned to be placed -- not to determine whether
10 they get in or not; we want to reach all students.
11 We are very serious about reaching some of these
12 rural areas. So these students will be assessed as
13 to what their creative abilities are and placed in an
14 area or areas, school or schools, that will be best
15 serve their creative abilities. In addition to that,
16 they will be assigned the director and lead teachers
17 in that particular area, creative area, along with
18 the lead teacher in the School of Academic Studies
19 will serve as a mentor and will help guide those
20 students through their entire high school experience.
21 That is a huge benefit to a school like this, because
22 the mentor teachers work directly with the counselor.
23 And when they have the counselor working with them,
24 along with that lead teacher, they're working
25 together to work out their student success plan,

1 their Capstone project, their college plans -- all of
2 those sorts of things. They literally will have
3 teachers walking with them through this school. And
4 I can personally attest to that because I've had that
5 through my entire career and it's wonderful.

6 So this is a pretty exhaustive list but not by
7 any means the full list of benefits to an arts
8 immersion school. And let me start just -- I'm just
9 going to point out two or three. But one of the most
10 important ones up here is a clear career path. And
11 in many ways an arts immersion school is not unlike a
12 career tech center, because some of these kids are
13 going to graduate from high school and go straight
14 into a career path. That is a possibility these
15 days. And I know that many of us -- I hate to even
16 say it, but many of us have a stereotype of the arts
17 and it can be the starving artist. We are not that.
18 We are here to insure that we don't have starving
19 artists. And in this day and age, in a digital world
20 I can guarantee you that the career path is pretty
21 significant.

22 Another thing that's very important and to the
23 benefit is -- as I mentioned earlier, as students are
24 mastering skills daily the self-esteem that's built
25 into arts and an arts immersion school is amazing.

1 Students coming from these little rural underserved
2 areas, their self-esteem grows immeasurably over a
3 very short period of time. That translates into
4 increased engagement, better academic performances.
5 It's a whole host of things that happen. For me
6 personally, the communication skills and, as Jeannie
7 mentioned, being fully prepared for college, that's a
8 big deal. And I know that we all today are probably
9 in many ways, on many days frustrated with the way
10 teens communicate or don't communicate. In this
11 particular school and the arts, students learn to
12 communicate probably better than any other area and
13 they actually speak, they talk, instead of just
14 texting. And that's a wonderful thing. We love
15 that.

16 So I want to show you our course offerings.
17 This first slide gives you the basics of -- the 38
18 course offerings that we will offer. We will be
19 working with CTE. We have courses in the arts that
20 are already coming through CTE, and hope to do some
21 additional work there. We've been working with Mr.
22 Tim Johnston and would love to be able to develop
23 some further courses that provide another career
24 pathway through CTE. But you can see, we have very
25 healthy pre-AP courses. I've been working with Ms.

1 Krystal Nail on the pre-AP side. We want to offer
2 the advanced level courses. We will also have
3 remediation. And, again, our core teachers will be
4 engaged with these students one-on-one to provide
5 that remediation.

6 Now I want to show you the arts course
7 offerings, and I know this is a bit of a daunting
8 list. This will be phased in; this is not all at
9 once. This is designed as a college prep model. If
10 a student comes in and they're clearly -- let's just
11 say they've been involved, as I was, in piano from
12 age seven, and they're coming into this high school
13 -- they know what they want to do, and we will engage
14 them immediately in these courses in music, that then
15 will prepare them very well for college and beyond.
16 But as I say, these courses will be phased in. Many
17 of them are very intense; they involve rehearsals,
18 practice, drill, memorizing, all of those sorts of
19 things. But this is what a performing arts school
20 would offer if you're looking at course offerings in
21 the arts.

22 Then we can look just for -- briefly at the
23 career pathways. I love this slide, and it's not
24 anywhere near exhaustive, because not only are there
25 career pathways in the arts, which we have some

1 listed up here, there are career pathways in the
2 corporate world, in the medical field. We have a
3 student in Conway right now who is a pre-med major,
4 and she was -- she studied theater with us for
5 several years. She's a theater minor, and she's
6 working at an assisted living with theater therapy.
7 There are all kinds of therapy services in the arts.
8 If you look at this list, it's heavy on digital,
9 heavy on technology, and heavy on technical --
10 lighting design, sound design, technical direction.
11 If you look at animation, gaming, 3D design -- so
12 many, many technical areas, and many areas that
13 students can use in their community. It does not
14 have to be -- they do not have to go to New York to
15 become a great artist.

16 Is that two minutes?

17 Two minutes. Okay. I tell you, time flies when
18 you're doing this.

19 Let's take a quick look at -- this is Danielle,
20 the dancer. She's very serious about this. This is
21 our scheduling model. It's a block schedule,
22 purposely, to try to create larger blocks of time for
23 arts because, like a football team, we need quite a
24 bit of time to practice and rehearse. So we've
25 created blocks of time, 85-minute class periods,

1 Monday/Wednesday and then Tuesday/Thursday. And then
2 on Fridays we call that a Fast Friday where every
3 class is gone through in a condensed amount of time
4 and then the afternoon -- the C.A. time is Creative
5 Arts time and that allows for a block of time there.

6 Something important about the schedule is daily
7 there is an advisory time and that will not be
8 wasted, and I will personally see to that. Advisory
9 time is really handled well between the counselor,
10 the teachers, remediation, their mentor teacher.
11 When they're working on projects, performances, that
12 will be a very special time for students to work with
13 teachers.

14 We believe in student services. Obviously,
15 we're a model that deals one-on-one with students.
16 And we believe that all students should have an
17 opportunity to be in this school. And so we will
18 work very diligently to meet all of the federal
19 guidelines, legal guidelines to handle any kind of
20 student services that's required. I would not want
21 any student turned away. I want their needs met.
22 And we're going to hire a faculty and a group of
23 people that will handle that.

24 Our enrichment is, of course, a big deal because
25 that's our arts side of things. We're working

1 diligently on transportation because we reach out to
2 20 communities outside of Fort Smith. So we're going
3 to work in those areas and try to figure that out.

4 There's -- you can see our enrollment
5 projections -- enrollment projections. I realize
6 those are just projections.

7 We have a very robust and comprehensive student
8 recruitment plan, because I think we're ahead of the
9 game because we already have CSA and students
10 interested in these 20 communities who are already
11 involved in what we do. And so we already have a
12 good plan in place and we'll be working very
13 diligently at that.

14 I want to show you the most exciting -- one of
15 the most exciting things. This is our new facility.
16 This is owned by CSA. CSA has classes after school
17 and evenings and weekends. ICA is going to be housed
18 in there from 8:00 in the morning till 4:00 in the
19 afternoon, and potentially beyond those times. But
20 that's where it will be housed. It is a state-of-the
21 art 40,000 square foot facility that's set up like a
22 college fine arts model, and it just happens to be on
23 a riverfront right next door to the United States
24 Marshall's Museum. I think the kids will ignite the
25 riverfront, in terms of festivals, activities. The

1 Children's Museum is coming as well down there. This
2 building is set up in such a way that on your right
3 side downstairs is culinary and music; upstairs is
4 art and film; to the left is theater and dance, and
5 there is a theater in there and many state-of-the-art
6 rooms. The core classes will be in there, as well.
7 So that is where we're intending to house that. It
8 is a gem for our community. Our community is
9 overwhelmed at what's going on now on our riverfront.
10 These are the renderings that -- you can see that the
11 building actually looks like the rendering. The
12 image in the lower left is the grand lobby where
13 we'll have a lot of performances and events and
14 exciting things. The lower right is the 350-seat
15 theater -- will be used constantly.

16 And, finally, just a bit about the governance --
17 and I'm sure we'll probably talk further about this.
18 We will have a separate board of directors, the ICA
19 board, an independent board that will not be
20 answering to CSA in any way. We'll have a Head of
21 School that we have named as Dean, again, after a
22 college model. The Dean, as you can see, is over
23 everything and over the day-to-day; but the Dean will
24 personally be over the instructional side, so all of
25 the department directors, counselor, special

1 education. And the Director of Operations, which is
2 Ms. Deana, will be over other personnel and she'll be
3 learning the APSCN system and over -- over marketing,
4 over our registrar, our child nutritionist. And as
5 we go, we will add layers to that.

6 And, finally, I know you all will have
7 questions, but I did want to mention that the photos
8 that you've seen in this presentation -- our past
9 kids, current kids in CSA, we've kind of built a
10 legacy and we want to move forward. I can't
11 personally stress enough how important a performing
12 and visual arts high school is for kids across the
13 area. All of us have creative abilities and some
14 want to, you know, explore those, and that's what
15 we're about. And we're about helping a lot of these
16 kids in these rural areas get connected to the arts.
17 This is not a school just for smart kids or rich
18 kids; this is for everyone. And the time is right.
19 It's a good time to do this.

20 So we really appreciate your time. I know
21 you're going to have questions, and we thank you for
22 that. Did I go way over? 24 minutes. We had it
23 down to 20.

24 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much.

25 DR. RUSSELL: Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So we have public comment.
2 Senator Boyd, are you online?

3 SENATOR BOYD: Yes, I'm here.

4 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Whenever you're ready.

5 SENATOR BOYD: Okay. Well, first of all, thank
6 you for the opportunity to be here and present and
7 make just some quick comments to you today.

8 So, you know, I thought a lot, what do I want to
9 say, what can I add to this. And, you know, so in my
10 non-legislative job I'm a pharmacist and it comes
11 back to pharmacy is both an art and a science. And
12 we get real focused these days on being a science and
13 that seems to be the -- you know, past couple of
14 decades, you know, there's been this big focus on the
15 science aspect. But the arts are important too. You
16 go back to the Renaissance and it was both an
17 explosion in the arts and the science. The two are
18 together and they don't need to be separated. And I
19 just see this as an opportunity to really bring back
20 some of the arts and refocus it in our state and in
21 the greater Fort Smith community. So as a charter,
22 you know, CSA will provide an excellent opportunity
23 for students who wish to focus on the arts, music,
24 theater, both on stage -- and what -- as I've learned
25 more, I didn't think as much about, but also the

1 behind-the-scenes, what's going on back there, you
2 know, whether it's makeup or sound. There's a lot
3 more to it than just what's going on on the stage,
4 which gets our focus when we're in the audience.
5 Culinary arts, the visual arts, et cetera -- all
6 while having access to traditional courses of study.
7 We're all gifted differently, and this provides a
8 real opportunity to develop those interested and
9 gifted in the arts to develop skills and get
10 themselves -- set themselves apart for the next stage
11 of life.

12 So, again, I wanted to focus first on what this
13 means for the students, for the kids. That's why
14 we're all here. Secondarily, I do want to reiterate
15 that this is an important economic development
16 opportunity for Fort Smith, specifically the
17 riverfront. You know, as people decide to live or
18 stay -- live in a state or stay in a state or move to
19 a state, they always want to know what's in the
20 community, what's different, what are the
21 opportunities. And I think CSA, Community School of
22 the Arts, offers something unique and different that
23 will provide some opportunities for some of the
24 families that are interested in staying or moving to
25 our area.

1 With that said, those are really all the
2 comments I have. And, again, I want to reiterate the
3 appreciation I have for the board to taking a few
4 moments to listen to what I have to say on this
5 important issue. So unless you need something from
6 me, that's all I have.

7 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
8 much. We appreciate it.

9 SEPARATOR BOYD: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Do we have a second public
11 comment?

12 MS. SUMMONS: The Charter Office received an
13 email from Mr. Carl Geffken. He's the City
14 Administrator for Fort Smith. This is part of the
15 public comment: "Ms. Summons, as Fort Smith City
16 Administrator, having a charter school for performing
17 arts in Fort Smith would be an incredible benefit for
18 the city of Fort Smith, the entire region, and the
19 state. With the growth Fort Smith is set to
20 experience due to the foreign military project and
21 the people coming from Singapore, Poland, Finland,
22 Switzerland, and other countries, this school would
23 provide what Fort Smith and Arkansas needs. Regards,
24 Carl."

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you very much.

1 All right. So we'll open it up for questions.
2 We'll start with Dr. Wright-McMurray.

3 Oh, yeah, legal review -- we've got to do that
4 first.

5 MS. WAGNER: It's fast, but we still have to do
6 it.

7 DR. RUSSELL: Do you want me to come up there?

8 MS. WAGNER: Sure. If you want to come up here,
9 you're more than welcome to.

10 So starting with the legal review, you will
11 notice that I have no concerns on 1, which is
12 Superintendent; it's fully effectuated. Principal,
13 same, fully effectuated. Teacher Licensure, fully
14 effectuated. And Gifted and Talented was also fully
15 effectuated.

16 Moving on to the next ones, 5, ALE, Alternative
17 Learning Environment, that one was fully effectuated.
18 I had no legal concerns. For Board of Directors, I
19 had no legal concerns. Library Media Specialist, no
20 legal concerns. All of the Personnel Policies, which
21 is 8, 9, 10 and 11, no legal concerns. On the
22 Website Posting, no legal concerns. The applicant
23 did confirm that they would have a salary schedule to
24 comply with LEARNS -- which that is correct?

25 DR. RUSSELL: That's correct.

1 MS. WAGNER: Okay. And then on number 13 was
2 the Licensure for a counselor, no legal concerns
3 because they will have a -- they will follow the
4 counseling program. Correct?

5 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

6 MS. WAGNER: There we go.

7 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Just to be clear, the
8 health and safety was taken off?

9 MS. WAGNER: Yes, it was.

10 DR. RUSSELL: Yes. Correct. Absolutely.

11 MS. WAGNER: So that was removed, which I can
12 allow the applicant to explain that. But, yes, she
13 removed that from her final legal review.

14 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay. Great. Thank you
15 very much.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I do have --

17 MR. WALTER: Can I --

18 MS. WAGNER: Of course.

19 MR. WALTER: Thank you, Chair, Members of the
20 Panel. Tripp Walter, Staff Attorney, Arkansas Public
21 School Resource Center. I just wanted to add one
22 more thing on the counselor licensure waiver to make
23 sure -- I think Ms. Wagner reiterated that there
24 would be the full comprehensive school counseling
25 plan that would be implemented. There is also no

1 ratio waiver and no waiver of the 90/10 time
2 allotment. Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

4 All right. So now we'll entertain questions.
5 I'll start with you, Dr. Wright-McMurray.

6 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you for your
7 presentation. And thank you, Mr. Walter, for that
8 additional explanation on the school licensure
9 waiver, because that was a question I had that was
10 remaining. So I appreciate that.

11 One question I did have -- and this is kind of a
12 point of clarification -- it looks like the schools
13 that you listed that you're planning to pull from was
14 a quite extensive list. But then when I looked at
15 the list of folks that attended your interest
16 meeting, like it was still highly populated from that
17 Fort Smith area. So can you kind of provide a little
18 bit more detail on how you plan to expand outside of
19 to those other schools you plan to pull in?

20 DR. RUSSELL: Sure. Sure. Well, let me think
21 here. Certainly, we're going to -- and I'm
22 personally going to the different communities. We
23 want to hold some community events, open forums.
24 We're going to do a big marketing rollout for our
25 current families that are in each of these

1 communities to help us get the word out. We'll hand
2 out flyers, news media, print materials. But I think
3 the personal visits to the different communities and,
4 you know, churches, boys and girls clubs, all of the
5 different areas that we can go to, public libraries
6 -- with the help of our families that are already
7 involved, I think that will help us more than
8 anything. But it's going to take a while. I think
9 we'd better get started early this fall and work at
10 it until time for the school to open. Because it's a
11 lot of legwork to go visit with people one-on-one,
12 but I think that's going to be very important. We've
13 got to help educate these smaller communities as to
14 the importance of coming to this school. You know,
15 the students that are currently coming to our
16 afterschool programs, they understand it. But we'll
17 have to educate -- help educate other kids as to what
18 this is and how important it would be to them if
19 they're, you know, in a creative field.

20 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. And then my next
21 question -- I saw a lot of detail on how we're going
22 to support students that are pursuing the arts as a
23 part of their educational experience.

24 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But can you give a little

1 bit more detail on how we're going to support
2 students on the academic side?

3 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Because, again, that is
5 going to be a huge part of their experience --

6 DR. RUSSELL: It is.

7 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and to make sure
8 they're meeting graduation requirements --

9 DR. RUSSELL: Absolutely.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- and that they're able
11 to successfully get through. If they experience
12 challenges in those courses --

13 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- how is that going to be
15 supported?

16 DR. RUSSELL: For me, and what we've -- well,
17 what our plan is is, of course, for the counselor to
18 work with -- directly with each student. But also
19 the lead teachers and the academic study department
20 director will need to work with each student and the
21 counselor -- and the lead teachers in math, science,
22 English, social studies. There will need to be
23 remediation; so one-on-one tutoring I think is very
24 important. It fits our model so that the students
25 are already ready for one-on-one mentoring. So if

1 they need additional help in a core area, they can go
2 to that teacher to get one-on-one tutoring. We will
3 not hire teachers who are not interested in doing
4 that, because I believe that they need to be very
5 available. The school across-the-board, the teachers
6 across-the-board need to engage with the students.
7 So if they need remediation, they're going to need it
8 one-on-one or small group. Then on the accelerated
9 side, we want to make sure and get started with pre-
10 AP courses, if at all possible, at the 9th grade
11 level, all the way through AP courses through 12th
12 grade, so that the students who want to accelerate
13 will have that opportunity to do that in their core
14 courses. Our goal is to make sure that they can --
15 if they are at all trying to get an academic
16 scholarship for college, that they're able to do
17 that. And we have a lot of art students that
18 typically do that. So we need to offer those
19 courses, and so we'll be looking for teachers that
20 have strong core content areas to teach these kids so
21 that they can teach advanced studies.

22 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. And so what does
23 that look like during the day? Because it looks like
24 the schedule is pretty packed.

25 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

1 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And so --

2 DR. RUSSELL: It would be.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- what would it look like
4 for a student that potentially would need additional
5 supports and would need to have tutoring or
6 remediation? What would that look like?

7 DR. RUSSELL: Right. During that advisory time,
8 that will be one time. Since there's an advisory
9 time period every day, that would be one time they
10 could go to remediation or a small group of them go.
11 That would have to be coordinated, again, with the
12 department directors as to how that looks. I also
13 think that teachers, if they need some extra help,
14 will need to prepare to do that after school so that
15 students could stay after school to get help. I know
16 currently in the Fort Smith district they do have
17 teachers that do tutoring after school, and we would
18 be looking at that same thing. Whatever we can do to
19 accommodate the student -- I don't want students to
20 get behind in core subjects.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And then, outside of
22 culinary arts, what other CTE programs are you guys
23 thinking about? I know you mentioned --

24 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

25 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that we are currently

1 going through some, you know --

2 DR. RUSSELL: Changes.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- redevelopment of some
4 pathways.

5 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

6 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But what are you guys
7 thinking about?

8 DR. RUSSELL: Radio broadcasting -- radio and
9 television broadcasting I believe is in that area.
10 That would fall under our cinematic arts. I'd love
11 to visit about other options. You know, we may just
12 need to sit down and talk about what might -- as
13 you're redeveloping or re- -- we're looking at some
14 of your courses, some technical fields, perhaps, that
15 they could go right into out of high school that
16 would be a great career move. But certainly, the
17 culinary program and the radio and television
18 broadcasting are all available currently.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

20 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini?

21 MS. SARACINI: Thank you for your presentation.

22 DR. RUSSELL: Oh, thank you.

23 MS. SARACINI: And thank you for working with my
24 office --

25 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

1 MS. SARACINI: -- for this presentation, to make
2 sure that you have --

3 DR. RUSSELL: We have.

4 MS. SARACINI: -- everything you need for
5 licensure.

6 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

7 MS. SARACINI: Just kind of give me some detail
8 -- I know you showed us in your presentation the new
9 building, which looks beautiful.

10 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

11 MS. SARACINI: And looking at your enrollment
12 cap, why 28-29 500 students? Is that building --

13 DR. RUSSELL: That's an interesting question
14 that you've brought up, and we've been discussing
15 this a lot. What we are looking at doing -- to
16 answer your question, yes, with -- and since we're in
17 the arts we'll have to get very creative. If we had
18 500 students to, you know, mix and match and do and
19 get a student in a math class versus a music class,
20 we would have to get very creative. What we are
21 looking at doing -- and we've already been talking
22 about it and having some architects do a little
23 design for us -- we would like to add some space so
24 that we have a full cafeteria and space above that
25 cafeteria that would give us science labs, math,

1 English, social studies -- some additional classroom
2 space that literally, right now, in the near future,
3 could be added to the building and you would never
4 know that we didn't put it on there to begin with.
5 So that's going to take us a little bit of time, but
6 that would be the goal. But we can get creative.
7 Deana will be the one to help us get really creative.
8 She's laughing because she's already created what we
9 currently do. But, yes, I think the best option
10 would be for us to continue looking at adding some
11 space.

12 MS. SARACINI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

14 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Thank you. So let me just
15 ask -- I've got a number of questions. I'm not an
16 educator --

17 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

18 MR. BALDWIN: -- and so I ask questions that are
19 --

20 DR. RUSSELL: You're a finance guy.

21 MR. BALDWIN: I'm a finance guy, and so I like
22 numbers. And -- but let me understand a little bit
23 about CSA --

24 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

25 MR. BALDWIN: -- because it looks like that's

1 where all this began at.

2 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

3 MR. BALDWIN: Maybe give us a little history on
4 the CSA and how long has that program been going.
5 You said you serve 1,000 students. I'd like to know
6 the ages of the students and kind of what that looks
7 like.

8 DR. RUSSELL: Sure. If you want to technically
9 say we've been working at this since 2006. Dr.
10 Phillip and I were both at UAFS. He was in the
11 College of Education, and I was in the School of
12 Music. And, in 2006, we through -- UAFS opened a
13 preparatory program for children and youth in 2016,
14 and I served as the director for that program. We
15 built it about to 1,000 students before I left. I
16 knew that because of my background in the arts -- and
17 I'm a pianist, a touring concert pianist, and I knew
18 because of my background in the arts and my mentor
19 teachers having worked in these performing arts high
20 schools -- I knew that before the end of my career,
21 if at all possible, I wanted to see Fort Smith have a
22 facility for performing arts and a high school
23 program. And I visited some of these national high
24 school models that I've mentioned. They're amazing.
25 And so, in 2016, I left the university, and a year

1 later Phillip retired, and we set out with a board --
2 in 2016, we opened Community School of the Arts. So
3 we're starting our eighth year -- yeah -- and --
4 seventh year. And we very quickly grew again to
5 about 1,000 students, because we had community
6 support. We set up an independent board; it's a
7 nonprofit. We began a five-year plan to start
8 building a facility; we were looking at various
9 places. There's a man in Fort Smith who wants the
10 riverfront to grow and he's all about children and
11 youth and wanted to give us that land so that we
12 could do this. And so in the meantime, we've been
13 housed in another warehouse and a school facility,
14 currently CSA is, and just developing programs for
15 children from age 3 all the way to high school, and
16 even adults -- but primarily, age 3 through high
17 school. We have a very strong high school program in
18 music and, in particular, in musical theater. And we
19 have a preschool for ages 3 and 4 that literally
20 teaches children everything they are to learn at that
21 level through the arts. It's the first arts
22 immersion -- arts integrated preschool in our state,
23 and it's very, very effective. As a matter of fact,
24 it's so effective that I will tell you that 4- and 5-
25 year-olds are reading -- and that is a solution to

1 the 3rd grade reading issues, if we could do more of
2 that. And so my goal, like many people who have
3 great football teams, is to have 3-year-olds all the
4 way through high school engaged in learning and
5 studying the arts so that they literally can go on to
6 college or into a career effectively in the arts.
7 And these great high school teams have had that
8 background of young children being in football and
9 basketball and all that to have these great teams.
10 In my particular field, I literally have had students
11 walk in the door at college wanting to learn to play
12 the piano for the first time. I cannot take them.
13 That is not a field that they can do that. And so we
14 want to engage them young and get these skills going.
15 And so that's the background. And we've been on this
16 five-year plan. We have a national consultant that
17 works with Phillip and myself and a whole team of
18 people to have this building built. And --

19 MR. BALDWIN: Let me ask you -- the building
20 looks great.

21 DR. RUSSELL: Thank you.

22 MR. BALDWIN: Tell us how you funded that and
23 how you --

24 DR. RUSSELL: How we funded it?

25 MS. BALDWIN: How you -- yeah, how you got that

1 --

2 DR. RUSSELL: We literally have been fundraising
3 a lot and we've had -- well, this is not private
4 knowledge -- Governor Hutchinson gave a million, for
5 example. We have local support. We've had the Mabe
6 Foundation. We've had the Sunderlin Foundation.
7 We've had major foundations, plus seven-figure gifts
8 from community members.

9 MR. BALDWIN: The building is paid for; there's
10 no debt?

11 DR. RUSSELL: We have a loan, but we also have
12 continued fundraising. So Phillip will continue to
13 work on that fundraising with CSA. But it's not --
14 ICA does not own that building; CSA owns the
15 facility.

16 MR. BALDWIN: How much is the debt?

17 DR. RUSSELL: By -- before the end of this year,
18 I think we may have it down to something in the five
19 to seven million range. We are in the middle, with a
20 separate consultant, working on new markets tax
21 credits. Those are fun. And if you've had any
22 dealing with that -- yeah, we have a consultant
23 working on that and that could produce us about a
24 five million -- which would put our debt down to
25 around five. So --

1 MR. BALDWIN: Are the students you serve -- you
2 mentioned an after-hours program -- are they just
3 there after-hours or is it --

4 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

5 MR. BALDWIN: -- students all day?

6 DR. RUSSELL: They're there after school --
7 unless they're home-schooled, and then we have some
8 that come during the day. That piece will change.
9 But, primarily, after school, evenings, and weekends.

10 MR. BALDWIN: How many of the students that come
11 to that program do you think would be interested in
12 this school?

13 DR. RUSSELL: Coming to this?

14 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

15 DR. RUSSELL: What do y'all think? I think a
16 pretty significant amount. I know we have students
17 -- and we can't start a waiting list, but I know we
18 have students, younger students that are, you know,
19 already thinking about this school. I don't know
20 what to say about that, the percentage, but a
21 significant amount. I mean, we have a history of
22 quality teaching and I think students will want in.

23 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. And I appreciate you all
24 coming. Who --

25 DR. RUSSELL: Yeah.

1 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. Who do you have in your team
2 that's putting this together that's an educator,
3 that's a school -- that would be a school leader,
4 that would understand the non-arts side of putting a
5 school together? That's very complicated.

6 DR. RUSSELL: Yes, it is.

7 MR. BALDWIN: I don't have any idea how they do
8 it. And I've heard a lot of these -- you know, a lot
9 of these presentations and I don't understand how
10 people actually --

11 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

12 MR. BALDWIN: -- you know, make a school come to
13 life.

14 DR. RUSSELL: You've asked a very good question,
15 and I'm glad you've asked that question, because my
16 side of things is arts. I would definitely not be
17 your day-to-day to run a high school. We have
18 identified a professional consultant who has
19 expertise in start-up charters, instructional and
20 curriculum development, the rollout of the
21 recruitment plan, the hiring of all of the
22 leadership, all of the teachers. And Ms. Cole, Dr.
23 Russell, myself, we will all be working with her.
24 Deana will be working with her on the finance side.
25 But should this get approved, we'll start working

1 with her from now until we identify the Head of
2 School. Now the Head of School -- I will tell you
3 that I believe that one of my strengths is
4 identifying people who are good at their job and
5 letting them do their job. So what I do know,
6 because I can definitely tell you I am not going to
7 be the Dean -- what I do know is we have to have a
8 very experienced Dean who understands the arts, who
9 knows how to run a day-to-day school, keep the core
10 academics going the way they're supposed to go, and
11 allow these arts teachers to do what they need to do
12 and everybody working together and everything for the
13 good of the student. And I believe those people are
14 out there. I know -- I know folks who have been in
15 the arts. We've had some wonderful superintendents
16 in our state who have been very involved in the arts
17 and they're very good superintendents. So, but
18 that's the secret: we have to have a top-level Head
19 of School who can handle this and know what they're
20 doing. And I thoroughly trust this consultant. As a
21 matter of fact, I couldn't be more excited that she
22 is coming onboard, should we get approved, to help us
23 with this entire process. And I will personally work
24 with her a lot, because I want to work on the arts
25 side and she work on all these other things -- just

1 to coordinate the whole thing, a plan.

2 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah. Yeah, there's a lot to do.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Lots to do, I know.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Especially in an innovative
5 program like what you're --

6 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

7 MR. BALDWIN: -- wanting to do.

8 DR. RUSSELL: Correct. A lot to do.

9 MR. BALDWIN: I am caught up in the passion that
10 you have, and I'm not an art -- you know, I don't
11 have any talent in that, and I've always been
12 impressed by people that do. I just -- you know, I
13 have a personal concern about the academic side --

14 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

15 MR. BALDWIN: -- especially if there's not
16 academic folks involved. And a consultant is great,
17 but I think you need more than just a consultant to
18 really put this school together.

19 DR. RUSSELL: She is an educator. She is -- she
20 has started charters.

21 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So that's a good thing.

22 DR. RUSSELL: Yeah.

23 MR. BALDWIN: But it's still -- there's still a
24 lot of --

25 DR. RUSSELL: Oh, sure.

1 MR. BALDWIN: There's a lot of stuff that you've
2 got to think through. You're coming to us for an
3 approval --

4 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

5 MR. BALDWIN: -- way before all that is
6 something that we can see.

7 DR. RUSSELL: We have a whole team of educators,
8 from principals to board members. And Phillip and I,
9 that's our careers, in education. So we will put
10 together even a larger team of educators to --

11 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah.

12 DR. RUSSELL: -- to do this, to get the right
13 people to get this set-up. I completely understand
14 setting something up, I've -- because I've done it.
15 And if you set it up incorrectly, you're going to
16 have trouble. So I take that piece extremely
17 seriously.

18 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. I appreciate your answers
19 to my questions. I'll just defer to some other ones.

20 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

21 MR. BALDWIN: My colleagues also --

22 DR. RUSSELL: Would you all like to come up
23 here?

24 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton?

25 MS. NEWTON: I too am not an educator, but the

1 application gives me pause for concern around some
2 areas that you're working on.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

4 MS. NEWTON: I would feel a lot more comfortable
5 if you could say, you know, transportation, we're
6 working on it.

7 DR. RUSSELL: Uh-huh.

8 MS. NEWTON: That, you know, the different --
9 the consultant, whether or not that plan is complete.
10 So there are some things that I need to walk away
11 with -- and I can't speak for any of the other
12 members -- knowing that there's a solid plan and
13 we're not in the process of working through it or
14 getting to it. And so that's my concern --

15 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

16 MS. NEWTON: -- or my question.

17 DR. RUSSELL: I think transportation is very
18 important. And, of course, we're going to provide
19 bus passes in Fort Smith, for students in Fort Smith.
20 What we would like to do is -- what we intend to do
21 is to go to these communities, talk with families,
22 find out about their transportation needs, to begin
23 to see how we can solve those transportation needs.
24 Now I realize we cannot formally enlist parents, but
25 hopefully there will be parents -- we have so many

1 families that work in Fort Smith -- hopefully, there
2 will be parents who would like to pick up or bring --
3 just simply on their own carpool kids. But we're
4 going to have to do a survey in each of these
5 communities and begin to determine exactly how that's
6 going to be handled, because I do know that it's
7 going to need to be. And, you know, we haven't done
8 some of these things yet because we've just been so
9 intent on seeking approval. And it's not that we
10 aren't taking it seriously; we just know that once
11 we're approved, we have to get after these things.
12 And we have a plan to go into the communities to talk
13 to the parents about transportation.

14 MS. NEWTON: You mentioned trying to reach the
15 underserved, and I think that's certainly something
16 to be complimented on. But those obstacles and
17 barriers are oftentimes the things that people are
18 anticipating.

19 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

20 MS. NEWTON: And I'll say it again; I just --
21 I'm -- I am more -- well, what I see coming before
22 this panel are people that have these things worked
23 out and have a plan, have a goal, and have a company
24 -- all those things. So that would be my area of
25 concern --

1 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

2 MS. NEWTON: -- that you're working on it,
3 you're going to try to get it there. It's not
4 something that gives me confidence at this point.

5 DR. RUSSELL: Right. As far as underserved, we
6 reach a lot of underserved students. We have a
7 history of it. We're also located in the most
8 underserved population in Fort Smith, even within
9 walking distance. So that's a positive thing,
10 because we can reach many of those underserved kids
11 on that north side of town.

12 I'm trying to think what else -- what else do
13 you need us to talk about on this line?

14 I realize you don't know us, and so you're
15 coming at this just meeting me for the first time.
16 But all I can tell you is that this isn't a hope-so.
17 I had such a long career in this and in education;
18 I've learned a lot of pitfalls and I've learned a lot
19 of things. And I -- we do have a rollout and a plan,
20 as soon as we leave here, if you will grant us
21 approval. I don't waste time and I --

22 MS. NEWTON: And I believe you do have a plan;
23 it's just communicating that plan and helping me to
24 understand.

25 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

1 MS. NEWTON: Those are some people would say
2 just a small jump over; others would say it would be
3 a hurdle, the highest hurdle.

4 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

5 MS. NEWTON: And so, those things happen, and it
6 will happen, likely --

7 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

8 MS. NEWTON: -- everything that you can imagine.
9 So that's where --

10 DR. RUSSELL: Yeah.

11 MS. NEWTON: And underserved are not necessarily
12 kids in poor communities --

13 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

14 MS. NEWTON: -- you know, and they can walk
15 there.

16 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

17 MS. NEWTON: Somebody says I can bring someone;
18 that person's car may break down or --

19 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

20 MS. NEWTON: -- they may not be responsible or
21 they just change their mind.

22 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

23 MS. NEWTON: So I think a school, as opposed to
24 -- not that the arts is not important. But a school,
25 as opposed to just the arts, is that we have an

1 obligation. We have an obligation to show our best
2 plan for getting it done.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

4 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Dr. Moore?

5 DR. MOORE: I have several questions. Thank you
6 so much for your presentation. And while I
7 appreciate that there is a definite correlation
8 between arts education and academic success, I don't
9 know that that correlation means there's causation.
10 So I feel like there needs to be a strong academic
11 plan as well, which is not evident, at least in the
12 application as it stands right now.

13 I'm looking at the chart that you shared, the
14 need of support category in the schools in the area.
15 And all but two of them -- like if I just pick out
16 one datapoint -- 10th grade math -- all but two of
17 them have over 50% of their students are need of
18 support, which shows that you are going to have the
19 challenge of meeting the needs of --

20 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

21 DR. MOORE: -- those students.

22 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

23 DR. MOORE: And the one-on-one support from a
24 teacher sounds wonderful, but I don't know that it is
25 realistic when potentially up to 70% of students are

1 in need of support. So I think there is a definite
2 need for more focus on academics.

3 Another piece, looking at teacher training and
4 professional development, I appreciate that high-
5 quality instructional materials are mentioned, and
6 that's a very critical piece. But high-quality
7 instructional materials have to be matched with
8 teacher professional development to implement those
9 materials with fidelity.

10 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

11 DR. MOORE: And especially with a waiver of
12 teacher certification, you may have some folks that
13 truly lack pedagogy, those skills.

14 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

15 DR. MOORE: So maybe you can speak to that some
16 more. But I just --

17 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

18 DR. MOORE: -- have pause.

19 DR. RUSSELL: Let me comment on the teacher
20 waiver. We are not seeking any kind of licensure
21 waiver on any core academic class. We want strong
22 core content. And I truly am big on core -- core. I
23 want these students to do really well in math,
24 science, English, social studies, foreign language.
25 So we are not at all taking that lightly -- and I'm

1 sorry it has come through in any form or fashion that
2 way. That would not be the case. I really want
3 these students to graduate and receive -- be able to
4 receive academic scholarships to college, and many
5 students in the arts do. But -- so, we are not
6 seeking any kind of teacher licensure for any core
7 content. The reason we're asking for teacher
8 licensure has to do with the arts side of things.
9 Because some of these teachers are -- have advanced
10 degrees, they are in the industry, but they don't
11 necessarily have traditional teacher licensure. So
12 they will come under HUT or HQT, but not on the core
13 side. We really want strong core content teachers
14 and we do want them to be engaged in tutoring and
15 making sure that they -- that every student does well
16 in their core content. I'm not sure what else to say
17 about that. I do not want to slight core content at
18 all. They have a pretty lengthy day each day on core
19 content before they ever get involved in their arts
20 side. I mean, we will make sure that we do
21 everything we can to help them with their core side.
22 I just know that tutoring is a good -- a good option.
23 We do it in the Fort Smith district. I'm very
24 supportive of that tutoring model.

25 DR. MOORE: Okay. In the application, when I

1 read about the request for a teacher licensure
2 waiver, it didn't state that.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

4 DR. MOORE: So --

5 DR. RUSSELL: That may be -- you know, having --
6 we thought through a lot of things as we're -- we
7 were preparing for today. But tutoring is a big
8 thing, and no -- not seeking a waiver for the core
9 content teachers.

10 DR. MOORE: Can you speak more to any plans for
11 professional development for teachers?

12 DR. RUSSELL: I -- well, the Director of the
13 Department of Academic Studies will be the lead
14 teacher, along with the Dean will insure that these
15 teachers are going to go through professional
16 development -- lead teachers in each of the areas.
17 And the lead teachers will be responsible to work
18 with the other teachers to make sure they go through
19 professional development, determine what's the best
20 choices of curriculum for these students; they'll
21 work together to do that. And I would expect the
22 Director to make sure -- to insure that happens.

23 DR. MOORE: All right. Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: I think --

25 MS. COLE: Can I --

1 DR. RUSSELL: Yeah. Come on up here for a
2 minute. I definitely need to sit down and I need to
3 get some water. I'm going to get some water.

4 MS. COLE: We have open discussions with UAFS,
5 hopefully getting some of their adjunct professors to
6 do some concurrent credit teaching with us, because
7 we do want that strong academic program there. So
8 hopefully that will work out for us. They seem very
9 interested as well. So, any other questions?

10 DR. RUSSELL: (speaking to Ms. Cole, not at the
11 mic)

12 MS. COLE: Okay. Yes. Yes, we have colleges
13 very interested in making sure that we go through
14 with this. So we -- perhaps our application didn't
15 come across as strong and that is -- as we feel like
16 we are. But, yeah.

17 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So I want to go back to Dr.
18 Moore's point. She said in the waiver request it
19 says -- and this, I think, is what she's referring
20 to; it says primarily for artist teachers. So there
21 may be teachers -- are you saying there may be
22 teachers that are in core areas that you would need
23 the waiver for? Because it just says primarily.

24 DR. RUSSELL: Right. More than likely, no.

25 MS. COLE: I assume that was worded that way to

1 give us a little wiggle room. I mean, we're already
2 getting applications from certified teachers, you
3 know. I think we've got a Spanish teacher even lined
4 up, so -- you know, but we -- honestly, we did not
5 know we were going this charter route until several
6 months ago. We thought we were going to be doing,
7 you know, a few hours a day, kind of like the career
8 tech centers; you'll get your core classes in your
9 home school, and then come to us for a few hours.
10 Well, that all shifted since we -- so we may be just
11 a little bit behind on getting all of this correct.
12 But we're -- you know, this is the route we're going;
13 this is the way everything was funneled down through
14 this charter way. So here we go and we're ready to
15 move forward. And, yes, we do have some work to do
16 on transportation and all of that. But we feel like
17 we need to get over this barrier before we can hit
18 some of these things, like transportation, and get
19 that done well, as we're doing our marketing.

20 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So can you -- and whoever
21 would want to speak to this -- can you talk about how
22 the arts are going to be integrated with the academic
23 piece? Will there be any integration there?

24 MS. COLE: Do you want to discuss that?

25 I can tell you, I can envision -- and this would

1 have helped me as a music major -- if I had walked
2 into my world history class and the first five
3 minutes -- or as I was walking in -- if there was a
4 PowerPoint going, talking about, you know, during the
5 1300s these were the instruments that were available,
6 here's the artwork from that period -- if I could
7 hear some of that music, and then move it on to the
8 16th century, and, you know, hearing all of that,
9 seeing all of that as we're discussing what's going
10 on politically, that would've put so many more
11 connections in my brain to help to understand how we
12 got to where we are in civilization. But other than
13 that, I think we're -- do you want to talk about --

14 DR. RUSSELL: Well, I mean, again, we're an arts
15 immersion, so --

16 MS. COLE: Yes.

17 DR. RUSSELL: -- the core content -- the core
18 content -- I guess that's why I'm saying our core
19 content is going to be so strong. We want very
20 serious core teachers teaching the core. And then
21 the arts side, there are very serious teachers
22 teaching the arts. Now if they do some integration,
23 great. But we're not an arts integration school.
24 We're arts immersion.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So in a lot of the high

1 schools where you do have performing arts and you
2 have -- like the Kennedy Center's research on arts
3 integration, it typically is an integrated model.

4 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

5 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So I guess what
6 collaborations are you thinking about for your
7 teachers? And would you foster collaborations
8 between your arts teachers and your academic subject
9 area teachers?

10 DR. RUSSELL: Sure. As far as collaborations,
11 what I want to see the core teachers do is I want
12 them to make sure they buy into the one-on-one mentor
13 teacher philosophy so that the kids, when they go to
14 their core classes those teachers are as engaged with
15 those students to help them through their core
16 classes as the arts teachers are engaged with the
17 students; not a passive type of teaching environment.
18 And so that's really where we are. Now, in an arts
19 immersion school kids are engaged with their
20 teachers, they're engaged with each other, they do
21 cross interconnected arts activities. There will be
22 ways for the core teachers to engage with that. But
23 as far as looking for a core teacher who can teach
24 arts integration, we're not looking for that. We
25 want strong core teachers who will engage with these

1 students and insure that these kids get their core
2 classes learned as -- to the best of their ability,
3 and most times hopefully graduate and get an academic
4 scholarship to college an, you know, beyond that.

5 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Well, I would say, you
6 know, when we're looking at this sort of silo nature
7 that you're talking about, it might be best to look
8 for that mindset of willingness to do the arts
9 integration, as well as --

10 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

11 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: -- the content --

12 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

13 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: -- expertise.

14 DR. RUSSELL: Absolutely. Because we want our
15 teachers to connect with one another and not be one
16 over here and one over there. They're going to need
17 to work together as mentor teachers to all of the
18 students and talk about, okay, this one is having
19 some trouble with math and, you know, well, okay, how
20 are we going to handle that. So, yes, we want them
21 to collaborate. Collaboration is a big deal in the
22 arts. It's a natural, you know, thing in the arts.

23 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh. Yeah. That's my
24 background as well, so --

25 DR. RUSSELL: Yes. Well, you know what I'm

1 talking about then.

2 MS. SARACINI: I do want to clarify. Dr.
3 Russell has talked in-depth with Melissa Jacks in my
4 department about art and music has to be highly-
5 qualified. I know a lot that she's saying we need
6 this waiver for the arts, and that's what she's
7 meaning, because it takes a -- music and art are --
8 have to have HQT in Arkansas. And so I know that's
9 what you are trying to articulate.

10 DR. RUSSELL: That is. Yes.

11 MS. SARACINI: So I just want to --

12 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

13 MS. SARACINI: -- follow back up with that.
14 Because I know it doesn't come across in your
15 application.

16 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

17 MS. SARACINI: But I know y'all spoke with us --

18 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

19 MS. SARACINI: -- a lot about that.

20 DR. RUSSELL: We talked with you, we talked with
21 Ms. Jacks.

22 MS. SARACINI: About making sure that if they
23 are over here in the fine arts that it can pass for
24 credit for their art and music over here, and all
25 curriculum as well. And I know --

1 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

2 MS. SARACINI: -- they talked quite intensively
3 about that.

4 DR. RUSSELL: And I've worked with Ms. Krystal
5 Nail on the, you know, pre-AP, AP, so that we have a
6 strong core. I was on a committee with her for
7 Gifted and Talented, so I've worked with her
8 personally since just a few weeks before this review
9 to talk about all of the pre-AP, AP courses, all of
10 that kind of thing.

11 MR. BALDWIN: So you guys are -- you know,
12 you're coming here to have us approve your plan and
13 send you off to the State Board for their ultimate
14 approval. But to me, it seems like the application
15 is substantially a work in process; there's a lot
16 from the academic side that you're working on and
17 thinking about -- and it's hard to approve that. So,
18 you know, I don't know what curriculum you're going
19 to use for math or science; I don't know who your
20 principal is going to be for your school. Usually,
21 when people come here they have their -- they've
22 hired the principal and he or she is standing here
23 talking to us and they have -- you know, they've
24 spent time. If you've been, you know, working on
25 this for a couple of months, you know, the school

1 part --

2 DR. RUSSELL: No, no. We've been working on
3 this for quite a while with the support of APSRC.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah.

5 DR. RUSSELL: And we're not a CMO, so we
6 certainly can't hire --

7 MR. BALDWIN: Right.

8 DR. RUSSELL: -- a Dean yet. That's all going
9 to start here immediately.

10 MS. COLE: Yeah. We understood that was a
11 future --

12 DR. RUSSELL: Yeah. And we want our core
13 teachers in so that they can select -- they can work
14 together on the curriculum. We want them hired
15 before we select -- I would not want to select a math
16 --

17 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. We have to --

18 DR. RUSSELL: -- or science curriculum for them.

19 MR. BALDWIN: But what you're asking us is to
20 vote on something without really a lot of information
21 on the academic side. And in reading your
22 application it was, to me, it's non-academic; it was
23 about 70% or 80% on the arts. And I kept looking for
24 the, you know, more rigorous educational stuff and I
25 -- admitted, it's in there; there's a couple of

1 pages. But it's primarily focused on what you're
2 going to do with the arts, which makes me a little
3 bit nervous. Because it just seems like you're so
4 focused on that and have the dreams of that, but the
5 training with kids for the requirements for the State
6 -- I just don't -- I don't see that in here.

7 And then, you know, the --

8 DR. RUSSELL: Do you want to comment?

9 MR. BALDWIN: -- schools from the cities you're
10 going to pull from -- I mean, you've got -- I live in
11 Westfork, it takes me an hour to get to Fort Smith
12 and an hour to get home.

13 DR. RUSSELL: Correct.

14 MR. BALDWIN: And the same with Bentonville,
15 same with Charleston. I mean, these are cities that
16 are so far away from Fort Smith that it's not
17 practical that the kids are going to go to your
18 school. And so I worry that you've got, you know,
19 un- -- you know, really expectations that won't work
20 out with this.

21 DR. RUSSELL: We have those kids -- some of
22 those kids come to us now. Of course, they're -- you
23 know, the parents are driving them. We've visited
24 some models outside of our state, where kids do come
25 an hour or 60 minutes away. The Arkansas Arts

1 Academy has students coming from, I believe, 90
2 minutes away. And so it is very possible for that to
3 happen. It's not an unusual thing for a performing
4 arts type of a school, for students to come from a
5 further distance.

6 Phillip, do you want to comment?

7 I don't know how to --

8 MS. NEWTON: Well -- I'm sorry.

9 DR. RUSSELL: This core, I don't know how to
10 tell you any further about how strong our core will
11 be. Because I also know how our students are, and
12 many of them are really actively seeking advanced AP
13 courses. And so I don't know how to say that
14 further, that that is not going to be a weak area.
15 They must do well in their core in order to be able
16 to do well in the other. And the arts model itself
17 lends itself to that; it strengthens their study
18 habits and study skills so that they do better in
19 their arts side. That's why these performing arts
20 high schools at the national level are talked about
21 at the national level, because the students are doing
22 so well on their academic side. So we are committed
23 to offering a very strong core. I went through a
24 strong core as an artist. So I would not have -- you
25 know, not wanted that.

1 Phillip, do you want to comment?

2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton.

3 MS. NEWTON: Okay. What I wanted to ask is --
4 and basically this question is to you and the staff.
5 What are our options here? I hear a trend of -- I
6 feel like they have the puzzle pieces; I don't know
7 that they're all pulled together to the extent that
8 I'm comfortable. What are the options in terms of
9 moving forward with this charter?

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Wagner.

11 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And as she's coming, I had
12 a question also.

13 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right.

14 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And as she's coming,
15 because that was actually part of my question.
16 Because as you mentioned, there's a consultant that
17 you plan to work with and I kind of appreciate that
18 you are getting that additional support. However, to
19 have the opportunity to know who the consultant is,
20 their track record for opening a charter, their
21 success rate of being able to do so I think would
22 provide some additional information as well.
23 Because, you know, potentially they could've opened a
24 charter, but was it a successful one that they
25 opened? We're not quite really sure of that, so --

1 MS. SARACINI: I'd like to see their track
2 record.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

4 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

5 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Wagner.

6 MS. WAGNER: So you have a couple of options.
7 You can vote to deny the application, which is not
8 necessarily sounding like that. It sounded like
9 you're wanting more information. We could defer the
10 vote for a month, until September. We have more
11 applicants coming for hearings next month. They
12 could come back in September to offer you more
13 information on the questions that you have posted to
14 them. We could defer the vote or we can table the
15 vote. Those are the three options. Tabling it is
16 not necessarily -- it's really up to you. Tabling it
17 is just until -- it takes -- it has the Panel take it
18 under further advisement -- under advisement until a
19 further meeting. Deferring, though, in this option,
20 we just set a timeline for when we're going to defer
21 to.

22 MR. BALDWIN: So if we defer to give them more
23 time to gather information, I guess I'd have a
24 question for them -- is how long would it take you to
25 gather this information? And then, the legal

1 question is how long can we defer it? Is it -- it
2 can be any time? Can it be a two-month period or
3 three-month period or --

4 MS. WAGNER: So there's nothing in the rules
5 that require you to set -- it can be a two-month
6 period, it can be a three-month period. Yes.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Uh-huh.

8 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

9 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any further questions?

11 MR. BALDWIN: You know, let me -- can I --
12 before we -- before we make a motion and act, I think
13 you need more time. And I think you've got to dig in
14 more to the academic side of it and figure out the
15 students that you're really going to serve, you know,
16 and really tighten this up. How long would that --
17 how long would that take? If we wanted to defer this
18 to a future --

19 DR. RUSSELL: Could we come back in a month?
20 Could we come back?

21 MR. BALDWIN: Can you do it -- I don't -- I
22 don't think you can do it in a month.

23 DR. RUSSELL: Well, I -- we would start
24 immediately working with our -- this -- she served as
25 the Head of School.

1 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah. So if she can't --

2 DR. RUSSELL: And I can --

3 MR. BALDWIN: If you -- if you try to do it in a
4 month and you come back and it's still not where we
5 want it, then that's probably a bad outcome. And so
6 give yourself time to really -- because I think
7 you've got a lot of work to do. I mean, I think
8 you're about halfway there. I think you've got --
9 you've got, you know, a lot of work to do.

10 DR. RUSSELL: Well, I don't -- I don't know what
11 -- I don't know what question to ask. What kind of
12 timeframe -- what would you like us to do? Because I
13 would -- I would start on this tomorrow with the --
14 you're talking about the K-12 -- you're talking about
15 that core piece that I think you want some more
16 information from.

17 MR. BALDWIN: Let me look at the -- at the
18 professional educators --

19 DR. MOORE: Yeah. And I'm sure -- have you
20 looked at the applications from other --

21 DR. RUSSELL: Oh, sure.

22 DR. MOORE: Okay. Okay. And I realize those
23 that are coming from a CMO that has, you know,
24 experience --

25 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

1 DR. MOORE: -- in multiple schools, obviously
2 they're able to copy and paste a lot of things that
3 they've been successful.

4 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

5 DR. MOORE: And you're starting from a different
6 point. So I appreciate that. But when you compare
7 those applications to what yours is, you can see the
8 gaps and holes and why we have so many questions.

9 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

10 DR. MOORE: Because there are a lot of hopes and
11 dreams and we think this will happen. But without
12 having a solid plan --

13 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

14 DR. MOORE: -- it's -- it's asking us just to
15 like, well, we'll see if it works. And while I don't
16 doubt your fortitude in that, I can't get behind
17 something that there's not a little more evidence on
18 the planning side.

19 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

20 DR. MOORE: So I would think that would -- to do
21 that to the extent that we're wanting I would think
22 would take a minimum of two months. Because --

23 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

24 DR. MOORE: -- there's a lot -- a lot more that
25 we need at this point.

1 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

2 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you. I would have
4 to agree with my colleagues' comments on that. And I
5 would be better encouraged if -- I'm not trying to
6 tell you who to work with.

7 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

8 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But whomever you work with
9 that they have experience with opening similar
10 schools.

11 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

12 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Not just a charter school,
13 but opening similar schools that have an arts focus
14 and have a strong academic component --

15 DR. RUSSELL: Yes.

16 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- as well. So I think
17 that's where, you know, there's still the discomfort.

18 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

19 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And then, also, I think
20 taking that time to work with that individual and
21 just having a better sense of what that plan needs to
22 look like --

23 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Because I'm not saying
25 that it was intentional, but just -- it seems like

1 that our focus is arts, which we do know that is the
2 case.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

4 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And then, in the end if
5 they also get a high school diploma then that's, you
6 know, a bonus. Which it should be -- you actually
7 were reverse. And so I'm not saying that was
8 intentional --

9 DR. RUSSELL: No.

10 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- but that's just almost
11 kind of how it was almost --

12 DR. RUSSELL: That's not at all.

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah. But I'm saying --

14 DR. RUSSELL: But I get what you're saying.

15 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yes. So we just want to
16 have that being in place, because we know definitely
17 there will be -- even if we do move forward and say
18 yes you could do this, you would be back in front of
19 us on a negative side --

20 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

21 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- when your academic
22 outcomes are poor.

23 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

24 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And, you know, and then in
25 that case that's hurting our kids and we can't have

1 that happen.

2 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

3 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So --

4 DR. RUSSELL: I understand.

5 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- that's why we're just
6 being very intentional, that we want to see a
7 stronger plan on the application.

8 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

9 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And then whoever you're
10 working with has a track record of having success in
11 that particular space --

12 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- will be helpful.

14 DR. RUSSELL: That makes sense.

15 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Ms. Saracini.

16 MS. SARACINI: I concur with my colleagues that
17 -- just to be more articulate on the side of the
18 academics.

19 DR. RUSSELL: Sure. So can we come in two
20 months?

21 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Well, we'll have to see if
22 there's a motion.

23 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

24 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: But I just wanted to say
25 something really quickly, and that is I think you

1 might be doing yourself a disservice from totally
2 disconnecting from that arts integration model.

3 DR. RUSSELL: Uh-huh.

4 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: I think you can be both
5 arts immersive and arts integration, because --

6 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

7 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: -- you can meet those
8 evolving objectives for both. And so, if you can
9 kind of think through that.

10 DR. RUSSELL: Uh-huh.

11 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Because if we give equal
12 importance to both, then both succeed.

13 DR. RUSSELL: Right.

14 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: And so when we're thinking
15 about academics and arts, I think if we can look at
16 it from that perspective of both of these things are
17 equally important, how do we make sure we succeed in
18 both, I think that will help your application.

19 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

20 MS. NEWTON: I've heard 30 days and 60 days.
21 And I think you have a wonderful idea and concept,
22 and I'm concerned that that's not enough time to
23 effectually assemble a plan for transportation, for
24 the construction you talked about, and then the other
25 areas, the consulting and so-forth and so-on. So I

1 am concerned about the timeline and not -- I'm
2 impressed with the idea, the concept. I think it's a
3 very good idea. But I think that that might -- you
4 know, it might be a good idea gone bad absent time to
5 do it. So --

6 DR. RUSSELL: Sure.

7 MS. NEWTON: -- that -- I'm concerned about even
8 60 days.

9 DR. RUSSELL: Okay.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any other questions?

11 Ms. Wagner.

12 MS. WAGNER: As you consider when to make your
13 motions, I just want to kind of tell you what your --
14 what we look like for the rest of the year. So next
15 month -- which you guys are not considering 30 days
16 anyways, but we have applicants next month. In
17 October is when district conversion applicants are
18 coming. In November is when we are doing our review.
19 And then in December is when we will do charter
20 renewals. So we have -- there are plenty of times,
21 if you want to think about four months. We're going
22 to be doing renewals this whole time. So just
23 letting you guys know what your schedule looks like
24 going forward.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So would they still be able

1 to follow the same timeline of 2024?

2 MS. WAGNER: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay.

4 MS. WAGNER: Yes. It doesn't have to interrupt
5 that, unless the CAP decides it needs to.

6 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yeah.

7 MS. WAGNER: That will be at your discretion.

8 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay. If there's no
9 further discussion, I'll entertain a motion.

10 MS. NEWTON: I move that we defer a decision on
11 this charter application and schedule reconsideration
12 no earlier -- no later -- or earlier than October.

13 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay. Do I have a second?

14 MR. BALDWIN: I second.

15 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. All those in
16 favor?

17 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

18 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

19 Any abstentions?

20 Okay. The motion passes.

21 Ms. Wagner, do you want to fill us in on what
22 that means?

23 MS. WAGNER: So I need you guys to clarify what
24 that means. So does that mean that you are asking
25 them to come back in November?

1 MS. NEWTON: I mean November.

2 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

3 MS. NEWTON: Because October would not even be
4 60 days.

5 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

6 MS. NEWTON: Yes. November.

7 MS. WAGNER: Let's do another motion --

8 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Another motion.

9 MS. WAGNER: -- if you don't mind.

10 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Okay. All right. Ms.
11 Newton, can we have another motion?

12 MS. NEWTON: I would move that the charter
13 application be deferred until no earlier than our
14 November meeting.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

16 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All those in favor?

17 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

18 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Any opposed?

19 All right. Motion passes.

20 MS. WAGNER: And I would like to make one
21 clarification. So they will basically just come and
22 enhance their current presentation to you guys.
23 They're not going to change; they're just going to
24 enhance, answer your questions, and things of that
25 nature. That is what the Panel is asking for;

1 correct?

2 MS. NEWTON: Uh-huh.

3 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Yes.

4 MS. WAGNER: All right. I just wanted to
5 clarify that on the record.

6 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: So during that time are
7 they able to work with the Charter Office to work on
8 that application?

9 MS. WAGNER: Yes. We can provide technical
10 assistance during that time. Yes.

11 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I have a --

12 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Dr. Wright-McMurray.

13 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I would also like to ask
14 that whomever they're going to be working with is
15 identified at that time and that individual comes
16 with them and helps to lead that presentation.

17 MS. WAGNER: Okay.

18 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

19 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you very
20 much.

21 Is there any other business?

22 Oh, yeah, you do need to fill out your voting
23 sheet.

24 DR. MOORE: How do we mark that on the voting
25 sheet?

1 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: Do we need to fill out the
2 voting sheets, Ms. Wagner?

3 MS. SARACINI: Since we're not technically
4 voting.

5 MS. WAGNER: So since you deferred the vote, no.
6 It's not a vote on the application right now because
7 we're deferring it until the October 14th meeting.

8 DR. MOORE: Yeah. One more question that might
9 be legal. Would it be beneficial or would it be
10 appropriate to provide any written feedback, or are
11 we just going to assume that they took notes based
12 upon our conversations today?

13 MS. WAGNER: So the transcript will be available
14 for them to find --

15 DR. MOORE: Okay.

16 MS. WAGNER: -- in a timely manner. So they'll
17 be able to use that, along with their written notes
18 as well.

19 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

20 MS. WAGNER: You're welcome.

21 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All right. If there's no
22 further business, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

23 DR. WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So moved.

24 MS. SARACINI: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: All those in favor?

(UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

CHAIRMAN SUTHERLIN: We're adjourned.

(The meeting was concluded at 12:18 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)
) ss.
COUNTY OF SALINE)

I, SHARON K. HILL, CCR, a Certified Stenomask Reporter and Notary Public before whom the foregoing proceedings was taken, do hereby certify that the same is a true and correct transcription before the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Charter Authorizing Panel, in Little Rock, Arkansas, on August 16, 2023; that the said proceedings was reduced to typewritten form by me or under my direction and supervision; and that the foregoing pages constitute a true and correct transcription of all proceedings had in said matter.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I have no contract with any parties within this action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial agency, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties to the action.

WITNESS, MY HAND AND SEAL, THIS DATE: August 29, 2023.

SHARON K. HILL, CCR
Certified Court Reporter
Certificate No. 670