

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

JULY 16, 2024
9:00 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

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

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

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

LOCATION:

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

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P R O C E E D I N G S

I. CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Good morning. The July 16, 2024, meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is called to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Department of Education and ask that you all please silence your -- excuse me -- electronic devices. The goal is to facilitate a fair and responsible hearing. So therefore I ask that each person speaking, speak clearly, state your name and title for the record. I ask that you continue to speak clearly into the microphone throughout the presentation for the benefit of this Panel, this audience and the viewing audience. This meeting is being live streamed and recorded and a transcript of the meeting will be posted on the DESE website.

So good morning to those of you on Zoom and then good morning, Mr. Scott.

MR. SCOTT: Good morning, sir.

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Yeah. All right.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So we do have a consent agenda item before us today. If there are no questions, then I'll accept a motion to approve the consent agenda.

1 MR. DAVIS: Motion to approve.

2 MR. SCOTT: So moved.

3 DR. MOORE: I second.

4 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So motion by Mr. Scott. Dr.
5 Moore, was that you seconding?

6 DR. MOORE: I think I and Mr. Baldwin both
7 second at the same time.

8 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I believe I have a second
9 from Dr. Moore. All right. All those in favor?

10 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay. Any opposed?

12 All right. The motion passes. All right.

13 **III. ACTION AGENDA**

14 **III.1. VILONIA PATHWAYS ACADEMY**

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Reynolds, would you come
16 forward to review the procedures?

17 MR. REYNOLDS: Good morning.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Good morning.

19 MR. REYNOLDS: Stephen Reynolds, staff attorney
20 for the Department. Dr. Sutherlin, you'll want to
21 swear all the parties except for attorneys that will
22 be giving testimony. The Applicants will then have
23 20 minutes to present. To my knowledge, there's no
24 opposition for any of the Applicants so after the
25 charter presentation you all can move into questions.

1 Again, all parties, please state your name before you
2 speak, even if you've talked before so we can have a
3 clear record. Any community members or community
4 partners that are here to speak on behalf of the
5 Applicant will need to speak during the 20 minutes.
6 Any elected officials that are here to speak before
7 the hearing, during the 20 minutes, or at the
8 conclusion of all the testimony, that's up to the
9 official and the applicant on how they want to
10 proceed. Excuse me. Following the presentations
11 we'll go through legal concerns and waivers, if any,
12 and then you guys can address any remaining concerns
13 outside of legal.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you.

15 Ms. Summons?

16 MS. SUMMONS: Good morning. Dorie Summons,
17 charter office. This morning we have with us Vilonia
18 Pathways Academy and they're requesting to change
19 the grade levels served from grades K-12 to grades
20 9-12 and they're asking to rescind the waiver of
21 Arkansas Code § 6-18-213(a)(2) and we do have
22 representatives from the district here this morning.

23 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you.

24 Will those from the district who plan on
25 speaking on behalf of the charter, please stand and

1 raise your right hand? Do you swear that the
2 testimony you are about to give is the truth, the
3 whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

4 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

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

7 MR. BREWER: Good morning. I'M Jody Brewer,
8 Director of Vilonia Pathways Academy. Like Ms.
9 Summons said, we are looking to rescind -- well,
10 we're looking to change the grade band of our charter
11 from K-12 to 9-12. The reasoning behind this is our
12 K-8 program this past year had 50 students enrolled
13 in it. With overall cost to the district around
14 \$630,000 in salary and benefits which put us in the
15 red as a district, a little over \$200,000. Whenever
16 the charter was developed right after COVID, we were
17 expecting that the K-8 program would grow due to
18 bringing in home schooled students and the likes of
19 that. However, that has not been the case. If
20 anything, the program has declined over time in
21 enrollment and as a district we cannot continue to
22 spend \$230 -- lose \$230 -- \$230,000 every year,
23 especially with ESSER funds running out at the end of
24 the -- in September of this year. So that is the
25 reason for the narrowing of the grade band.

1 Also, the Vilonia Pathways Academy, the focus on
2 that is a construction base -- commercial
3 construction pursued to go into the commercial
4 construction industry. K-8 students, you know, our
5 feeling is that they really at that age, their
6 education -- general education -- is more important
7 than learning about core construction and that type
8 of thing. So that is why we're coming to the
9 community to ask to change grade levels there.

10 As far as our second request, going as far as
11 waiving the attendance waiver for 9-12 -- or
12 rescinding the attendance waiver for 9-12 -- what we
13 have found is this past year 62 percent of our
14 students that were enrolled in the charter from 9-12
15 decreased from the beginning of the year to end of
16 the year in their Star reading scores. You know, as
17 Arkansas LEARNS Act, everything that has been placed
18 on the reading component within our school, we feel
19 like that we are not providing through the charter
20 rigorous enough academics for these students. Also,
21 what we've found is how this was set up in the past
22 was students would come to campus one to two days a
23 week. The rest of their education was being provided
24 virtually through Blackboard, Google Classroom, and
25 so on. Students were not logging in. They were not

1 receiving the academics that we feel is necessary for
2 those kiddos to be successful in the future. And
3 what we're wanting to do is to provide a strong
4 academic base for these students in 9-10. They'll
5 still be introduced through the pathways of
6 construction, and they'll still have the opportunity
7 to participate in that. But in 9-10, what that would
8 look like is they would take construction classes
9 through CTE programs within the school. Once a
10 month, the 9th graders would go on site to
11 construction -- different construction sites,
12 different construction jobs -- and gain that
13 information. Tenth grade students would go to two
14 on-site visits per month. And the reason for the
15 difference between the two -- we're looking at 10th
16 grade, 11th/12th grade year, we're hoping that those
17 students are actually in the job field on a
18 construction site either in an internship,
19 apprenticeship, something along those lines to where
20 they can grow. Another thing that we've run into is
21 transportation for students, 9th grade especially.
22 Those students are unable to drive so them getting to
23 and from where they're supposed to be is -- just
24 isn't feasible. And also, what we've run into with
25 our attendance policy within the district, students

1 are allowed ten days per semester. Well, students
2 are required to show up one day per week in person.
3 They miss ten days, that's ten weeks of school that
4 they've missed. And used to, you know, over a
5 semester that is 18 weeks. Well, since we've gone to
6 minutes instead of days, that's actually shrunk down
7 so students are missing a lot of in person
8 instruction through that. I know, you know, it's
9 kind of a shift in mindset if you will, getting
10 kiddos in school, but I think we're seeing it across
11 the nation as far as, you know, companies as well,
12 pulling their employees back to the workplace because
13 what we're seeing is, we do not feel that we're
14 preparing our kids for the future that they need to
15 be.

16 But those are the two things that we're
17 requesting --

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh.

19 MR. BREWER: -- and I'd be more than happy to
20 answer any questions for you guys. With me today is
21 Dr. Adams; he's our superintendent of Vilonia Public
22 Schools. So if you have any questions for myself or
23 Dr. Adams, either one of us will be more than happy
24 to answer those questions.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you.

1 And then Mr. Reynolds is just going to clarify
2 some things on the record.

3 MR. REYNOLDS: Stephen Reynolds, staff attorney
4 with the Department. On the charter's application,
5 they listed the waiver to be rescinded as § 6-18 --
6 Arkansas Code § 6-18-213(a) (5). I've went through
7 and checked, and that subdivision of the Code doesn't
8 exist. So I went back and checked again, and I think
9 that the charter meant § 6-18 -- Arkansas Code §
10 6-18-213(a) (2) and I spoke with the charter prior to
11 the meeting, and they confirmed that to be the case.
12 I'll just have them confirm that on the record.

13 MR. BREWER: Yes. Jody Brewer of Vilonia
14 Pathways Academy. Yes, we do confirm that.

15 MR. RENOLDS: Okay.

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you.

17 MR. REYNOLDS: Thank you.

18 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. On the Zoom, Mr.
19 Davis, do you have any questions?

20 MR. DAVIS: Yes. A couple of questions from me.
21 First of all, I want to -- appreciate and thank you
22 for your transparency around what's happening and how
23 you all are thinking about making the outcomes better
24 for students and families that you are serving. I
25 also consider this body to be a learning organization

1 so with that in mind, you know, I have a couple of
2 questions to help us think about learning when these
3 situations come before us again.

4 Can you give me an understanding of what the
5 original plan was in regard to kind of the K-8?
6 Like, what was the thinking there because clearly
7 that was something that didn't catch hold. I
8 appreciate you recognizing now that, you know, we're
9 probably better serving 9-12. But talk to me about
10 what those conversations were like and why originally
11 folks thought K-8 might be an area in which you could
12 serve.

13 MR. BREWER: Yes, sir. I'm actually new to this
14 position as of July 1, but I was involved in the
15 conception of this program. The idea was for K-8,
16 the thought of serving those kids as coming back from
17 COVID was okay, we wanted a way to ease the kids back
18 into school, I guess you will, and also make it more
19 convenient. Our thought was, you know, there were --
20 so many people at that time were working from home,
21 want their kids with them, being able to travel, go
22 to different jobs and provide those experiences for
23 kids. And we thought, okay, this would be -- this
24 would be a great way to attract home school students
25 out of home school and back into school. And it's --

1 it hasn't worked. I mean, and that's -- I don't know
2 any other way to put it. But that was the thought
3 behind it was it was more of a promotion, if you
4 will, to try to get kids out of home school and back
5 into the school setting. Also a way to ease students
6 back into the school setting as of -- after COVID and
7 to help calm those fears that parents had with the --
8 with everything that was going on with COVID.

9 MR. DAVIS: Yeah. Thanks for that. I'll hold
10 on any additional questions for now.

11 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Mr. Baldwin?

12 MR. BALDWIN: All right. Sorry about that.

13 Yes, I agree with Mr. Davis that I do appreciate
14 the honesty of the discussion you guys just had with
15 us and just the straight answers and the straight
16 stories. I don't really have any questions. It
17 makes sense to me what you're doing and I just -- I
18 guess, I would just say that I've rarely seen
19 management teams that were -- recognized quickly that
20 they need to change, and they just plow ahead, you
21 know, for many years trying to make something work.
22 But I appreciate you guys quickly seeing that this is
23 not working and being willing to come to us to
24 request a change. So that was my thought while we're
25 talking.

1 Really no questions, Mr. Chair.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Dr. Moore?

3 DR. MOORE: Hello. Can you hear me okay? Okay.
4 I just have a couple of questions. One, in regards
5 to 8th graders not being part of this anymore. I
6 know that with our CTE Programs of Studies, it's not
7 being made available that most, if not all of them, I
8 guess -- I would have to confirm with my CTE partners
9 -- that those can start in eighth grade. Did you
10 have students starting their pathway in 8th grade
11 prior? And if so, are they still going to be able to
12 start their pathway in 8th grade or is that changing?
13 That's my first question.

14 MR. BREWER: As far as our charter is concerned,
15 we're looking to just amend that to 9-12 because of
16 the way our campuses are set up. Seven-8 is a middle
17 school and 9-12 is our high school campus there. We
18 will be providing CTE programs for our 8th graders.
19 It will provide an introduction if you will to the
20 program moving forward. But as far as being a part
21 of this Vilonia Pathways Academy, we're really just
22 looking for that to be 9-12. Did that answer your
23 question?

24 DR. MOORE: So just to confirm, 8th graders may
25 still have access to year one CTE courses, but just

1 on the middle school campus?

2 MR. BREWER: Yes, ma'am.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. All right. And then I know
4 that I have attended one of the graduation award
5 ceremonies of your Pathways Academy prior and I know
6 many of those students had significant amount of
7 concurrent credit through UALR and many of them had
8 completed lots of internship type experiences with
9 different industries; and also, WorkKeys was a big
10 focus which we've really tried to increase WorkKeys
11 assessments across the state -- and at higher
12 organizations we have recommendations for prior
13 learning credit. Now there's legislation for prior
14 learning credit with WorkKeys and Vilonia has really
15 been a strong implementer as the legislation intended
16 for everyone to take the WorkKeys assessment for the
17 NCRC I should say. So on those things that were
18 really successful in your program, do you see any
19 pumping the brakes on those with this change or do
20 you feel that those will still -- you'll still have
21 those same outcomes?

22 MR. BREWER: No, ma'am. We're still going to
23 offer those same outcomes. We've been in
24 communication with UALR as well for concurrent
25 classes. Everything there, you know, has been --

1 it's a great, great program. In fact, last year we
2 had four students who achieved their associate degree
3 through UALR and concurrent classes through the
4 Pathways program. So yes, we will continue that.
5 WorkKeys has been a major component of this and that
6 will continue as well. We presented -- I presented
7 it in front of the school board last night, and there
8 were actually some community partners there within
9 the construction industry and they're on board. And
10 I really think that, you know, after talking to the
11 community, talking to our stake holders about the
12 academic side of the 9-10, they're really on board
13 and think that's a great idea. As opposed to what we
14 had going on before. You know, we -- you know, we
15 just feel like -- that academics wasn't a strong suit
16 and wasn't being pursued. You know as far as the
17 college credits and stuff, we're all about that. We
18 want that to be successful. We want those kids to
19 have those opportunities. But we also felt like that
20 we were limiting those kids' opportunities whenever
21 we weren't providing that same education if you will
22 that the students on campus were getting as those
23 that were taking place virtually or in a hybrid
24 environment if you will.

25 DR. MOORE: Well, thank you for that and I do

1 think that core instruction should never suffer in
2 just trying to promote career education; they both
3 have to be prioritized and I do think you may
4 increase opportunities for students who have
5 concurrent credit in core courses because although a
6 certain ACT may not be required for CTE concurrent,
7 it is required for your core courses of math,
8 English, social studies and science; and with
9 students receiving better core tier one instruction
10 in those core courses, they are more likely to have
11 an ACT score required to have those concurrent
12 courses. So I applaud your efforts there and thank
13 you. I have no more questions.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Thank you. Ms. Newton?

15 MS. NEWTON: I don't know. I just have a
16 general statement, not a question. But I want to
17 echo Dr. Davis's remark about making the pivot and
18 the importance of recognizing that something needs to
19 be adjusted. So is it -- I understand that the
20 primary reason was economic. What methods will you
21 use in the future -- I guess, I do have a question.
22 What methods will you use in the future to evaluate
23 the progress in the areas that you need to
24 concentrate on and to look toward the time when you
25 can say this is not working and we'll turn -- we need

1 to make a pivot? So that's my -- I guess, it's my
2 question. So how do you -- the question is, how do
3 you evaluate and is it done on a regular basis -- the
4 progress looking at the K-12 which you said it wasn't
5 going to work. Was it simply economics -- I know I'm
6 just going around and around. Was it simply
7 economics or -- and I know -- or was economics
8 primary or was it just a combination of things that
9 had you address this differently?

10 DR. BREWER: I had a little trouble
11 understanding -- or hearing the question there. Do
12 you mind rephrasing or restating the question?

13 DR. NEWTON: I don't. Was it a combination of
14 things that caused you to reevaluate or was it just
15 primarily economics? That's my question.

16 MR. BREWER: Yes, ma'am. It was a combination
17 of things that made us evaluate this.

18 Number one, our district has a strong emphasis on
19 reading and reading success, especially in our
20 younger age, K-3. And our students -- our K-3
21 students come to school two days a week to have
22 in-person instruction. What we were seeing with
23 those students is that they were ended up having to
24 get some remediation, either parents bringing those
25 kids to school on another day or two to have

1 remediation reading be that through dyslexia
2 interventionist or the teacher themselves providing
3 small group intervention there for reading or doing
4 that on-line and virtually. You know, that was K-3
5 input there is reading, No. one.

6 Also, No. two, one of the main components or one
7 of the goals within the charter was to provide soft
8 skills for students and soft skill training for
9 students. Well, whenever students were at school
10 those two days, let's say K-3 there were eight
11 students within the classroom with four grade levels,
12 one and a half teachers in there, those students
13 really didn't get the opportunity to interact. They
14 would have recess and lunch with their classmates,
15 peers, at the same age level, but we weren't seeing
16 much soft skill development due to the amount of time
17 that they were spending at home on -- in front of
18 technology.

19 You look at the -- then, in the 4th through 8th
20 grade level is really whenever we started seeing
21 those star scores decline. You know you start
22 looking at it and I don't know, you know, you could
23 say, it's just one test. Well, it's the one test
24 that we have to look at that -- and that's the data
25 that we have to use. And so we were looking at that

1 as well and you know, the kids were declining in
2 their reading level, declining in their skill scores
3 on those tests. Yes, it could have been from effort.
4 It could have been from whatever, but at the same
5 time that's what we have to base our decision on are
6 those test results there.

7 Also, the opportunities that we thought might be
8 available for kids to participate in on those grade
9 levels, K-8 specifically, they just aren't there. No
10 one wants five-year-olds to 12-year-olds running
11 around a construction site, you know. And then there
12 was the thought of well, we can have them plant a
13 garden. We could do this, you know, a community
14 garden. We could do all this stuff. Well, the time
15 and the labor that's involved in all that, we just
16 don't have the -- we don't have the manpower. My
17 teachers don't want to be out there working in the
18 hot sun every -- all summer working in a garden. A
19 garden -- they didn't sign up for that. So the
20 opportunities there for students just wasn't
21 happening.

22 But we looked at a variety of information, a
23 variety of data to determine what we feel like is the
24 best moving forward and I feel like that it's going
25 to continue to be a fluid process and that's what it

1 has to be in order for us to be successful. You
2 know, if we sat there and we -- you know, someone
3 made the comment earlier about us making a change so
4 quick in the process. If we sit back and wait and
5 just hope things are going to work out, we're missing
6 out on a whole group of kids. You know, we could
7 potentially be missing -- hurting or harming 100 plus
8 kids, 200 plus kids, however many they are. And our
9 goal is not just to get numbers up and to make it
10 look good from the outside and say oh great, look at
11 Vilonia Pathways. They're really growing. We've got
12 -- they've got 400 kids. Well, we want to have 100
13 successful kids. We want to have the kids that can
14 be successful whenever they leave school, whether
15 that is if they follow -- choose to go into a
16 construction pathway or if they decide hey, I really
17 don't like getting up at 4:00 in the morning and
18 going to work in the construction industry. I've got
19 the education from high school that I can fall back
20 on and go to college and go into a different trade or
21 a different skill there. And that's our goal.

22 MS. NEWTON: Okay. Thank you. I just -- a
23 follow up to my colleagues, I guess, and the
24 Department and Ms. Summons, if we can use this and
25 the whole point -- well, not the whole point, but one

1 of the points of charter is opportunity for us to
2 learn for -- from the experiences of schools. So I
3 want to take this as a learning lesson for other
4 charter applications or charters that, you know,
5 biting off -- I don't want to say more they can chew,
6 but biting off what is rational and logical according
7 to what the needs of the students are and what can be
8 accomplished. So I think that's something you will
9 look at in the future when the broad -- broader plan
10 like yours has to be paired down to a smaller one and
11 I think it's very effective the approach with the
12 grades that you're serving now is going to be better
13 -- have better outcomes.

14 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Thank you.

15 Mr. Scott?

16 MR. SCOTT: Well, of course -- how about now?

17 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Seems okay.

18 MR. SCOTT: Okay. All right. All right.

19 First, I want to commend my colleagues who kind of
20 nailed out all of my questions. So that's one -- I'm
21 not sure it's an advantage or disadvantage coming on
22 last, but all of them are very key points. But what
23 resonates really big in your --

24 MS. NEWTON: I'm sorry. I can't hear Mr.
25 Scott's comments.

1 MR. SCOTT: Okay. What about now?

2 MR. NEWTON: Yes. That's better. Thank you.

3 MR. SCOTT: Is that on my end? Can you hear me?

4 MS. NEWTON: Yes. It's better. Thank you.

5 MR. SCOTT: Okay.

6 DR. MOORE: It's quite an echo now though.

7 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: We're pausing for just a
8 moment.

9 MR. SCOTT: Can you hear me online? Can my
10 colleagues hear me?

11 DR. MOORE: It's pretty quiet, but we can hear
12 you. At least I can. I don't know about Ms. Newton
13 or others.

14 MS. NEWTON: Actually, I can. I can hear the
15 voice. I can understand what he's saying.

16 MR. SCOTT: Okay. So you can hear me now,
17 Toyce? Ms. Moore can hear me.

18 MS. NEWTON: It's still very faint.

19 MR. DAVIS: I'm wondering -- I know the
20 microphone at the podium here -- I don't know if
21 that's a handheld. Could we just hand him that
22 microphone to use? Not necessarily for you to go to
23 the podium, but I'm wondering if that would be
24 helpful.

25 MR. SCOTT: How about now?

1 MR. DAVIS: That's great.

2 MR. SCOTT: That's better?

3 DR. MOORE: Thank you. Much better.

4 MS. NEWTON: Yes.

5 MR. SCOTT: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you.

6 I just want to commend the Academy for your
7 request and in particular, typically you plan the
8 flight, and you fly the plan. And it's mentioned by
9 my colleagues for you are to be commended for taking
10 action to make some quality changes. It's kind of
11 tough because what I've heard from your presentation
12 is on one hand, it was a fiscal deal; right? Where
13 in serving K-12, you had some challenges budget wise.
14 I certainly understand that. But also, I've heard
15 that from a practicality standpoint, you have K-8 and
16 it's set up for construction and it's kind of tough
17 to get -- have a presence of the young kids with your
18 community partners. So I want to commend you on No.
19 one, recognizing that. So you plan, you implement
20 but you assess, and part of your assessment is hey,
21 we need to make some changes. So commending you on
22 that; and I appreciate also understanding the journey
23 of the lessons learned as we have other requestors in
24 the future who simply plan to implement certain
25 innovative approaches to educating our children. So

1 I thank you for that.

2 My only comment is that you did speak to an
3 arrangement of engaging community partners in
4 construction in particular. That's pretty awesome.
5 If you could speak to how -- the manner in which you
6 approach those community partners and how that
7 journey was -- ended up with a measure of success,
8 No. one. And No. two, is relative to the LEARNS Act
9 and community service learning. Now you have a
10 valued effort to have some of those ninth through
11 twelfth graders take a part in getting those
12 community service hours.

13 MR. BREWER: Yes, sir. We are big partners with
14 Nabholz Construction Company, NABCO Electrical,
15 Weaver-Bailey Construction, H & D Tucker or Harley
16 Tucker Farms which is -- they do their work such as
17 that. Also, among our community there are even
18 residential construction workers that we are with --
19 contractors that we are with just because we want
20 kids, you know, especially I talked earlier about our
21 9th and 10th grade students going on those on-site
22 visits. What our goal is there is so that those
23 students can see a various range of the construction
24 industry. Not just hands on, you know, building
25 things. You know we want them to see electrical. We

1 want them to see plumbing; we want them to see
2 welding. Whatever else is involved within the
3 construction industry. You know it's -- if all they
4 see is okay, we're going to erect a building. We're
5 going to build buildings all day or we're going to
6 lay block or brick or whatever, they may not be
7 interested in that. And if that's all they're
8 exposed to, then they will not know. But through our
9 partners, they allow us to go to different job sites
10 and interact and see different things from, you know,
11 pouring concrete, from plumbing rough-ins to
12 finishing and everything like that. And that's kind
13 of how we integrate our community partners there.
14 There was two parts to that question, and I think I
15 answered one of them.

16 MR. SCOTT: You -- the other one was simply
17 relative to the community service-learning hours
18 associated with LEARNS Act.

19 MR. BREWER: Yes, sir. And that's one thing,
20 you know, is through our construction piece and
21 especially 9-10 we're going to involve -- include
22 some service learning in that as well through the
23 community, going to different places, you know. One
24 project that in the past, I believe it was two years
25 ago that our students done, is they actually built or

1 designed a pavilion for our community -- one of our
2 community parks -- and were actually involved in
3 building that pavilion for the community -- there
4 with the community service. But that's also, you
5 know, within those construction trades, being out on
6 the job sites and understanding that. That's some
7 community service work there that those students will
8 be doing as well through the LEARNS Act.

9 MR. SCOTT: And my final question is, it's not a
10 flip of a switch that you engage a community partner.
11 You can google construction companies. Help us
12 understand your approach to building that
13 partnership.

14 MR. BREWER: Well, it's -- you know, everything
15 is based on relationships. We are -- Vilonia is a
16 bedroom town. Everyone kind of knows that and
17 there's the school, you know, to work at in Vilonia.
18 Everyone else comes to work in Little Rock or Conway
19 or wherever. The majority of our residents are in
20 blue collar type jobs, whether that's construction,
21 factory type work, whatever there. And the -- one of
22 our main supporters of the district is an owner of
23 Weaver-Baily Construction Company and they've always
24 been a big supporter of our school district and they
25 have ties within the industry -- within the

1 construction industry -- and that has allowed us to
2 take advantage of that. Nabholz -- they're huge in
3 -- they're located in Conway. Nationwide
4 construction company and they are looking for help.
5 You know that's the thing about it is these
6 construction companies -- Kinco Construction --
7 they're looking for employees and if we can get
8 students their safety certificates by the time they
9 graduate high school, they're way on their way
10 whenever they step on a jobsite after they graduate
11 high school or even before they graduate high school.

12 Another thing that we've -- I talked to one of
13 our teachers from UALR about his -- she teaches plans
14 and how to read plans and how to look at plans and
15 measure and decipher what the plans are actually
16 meaning and one thing she said is, you know, with our
17 students getting that training now they have such a
18 huge step above a general laborer whenever they first
19 hire onto a job because they can actually look at a
20 plan, look at the diagram and say okay, this is what
21 this is needing as opposed to being taught every step
22 of the way along the way. And that's, you know, with
23 everything if we put out a good product, they're
24 going to come to us more and more and that's where
25 I'm wanting, you know, where we're wanting is our

1 students to grow and to take this program to the next
2 level is we have to have some accountability tied to
3 it as well. I mean, we've got some students that are
4 just enrolled in the program and I'm being very
5 honest with you guys, just because they can come to
6 school one day a week and that's unacceptable in our
7 opinion. So we're looking to make change and make a
8 change for the better. Thank you.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So I would just echo
10 everything that everybody else has said. And it is
11 -- it's very nice to see a district come forward and
12 say, you know, we're going to do what's best for our
13 kids. So I appreciate that. Are there any other
14 questions from the panel?

15 (NO RESPONSE)

16 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I'm not seeing any. All
17 right. If not, I will entertain a motion.

18 DR. MOORE: I move that we accept Vilonia
19 Pathways Charter's request to amend the request for
20 -- to go from K-8 to 9-12 and to change the waiver --
21 amend the waiver for 9-10 students as requested.

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. I have a motion.
23 Do I have a second?

24 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

25 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: So a motion by Dr. Moore and a

1 second by Mr. Baldwin. All those in favor?

2 (CHORUS OF AYES)

3 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Any opposed? Any abstentions?

4 All right. Motion passes.

5 Give us just a few minutes to fill out our
6 voting sheets.

7 Mr. Davis?

8 MR. DAVIS: Yes. I voted for. I support the
9 school's request to amend the current charter to
10 provide fiscal response -- to provide fiscal
11 sustainability and create a stronger academic base
12 for students enrolled.

13 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Mr. Baldwin?

14 MR. BALDWIN: Yes. I voted in favor of the
15 amendment request -- the charter amendment request.
16 I think it's in the best interest of students and
17 will also relieve financial burden on the school
18 district.

19 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. Dr. Moore?

20 DR. MOORE: I vote for Vilonia Pathways Charter
21 request to amend the current charter as requested to
22 best meet academic needs and improve college and
23 career readiness of their students. I applaud their
24 efforts to evaluate the program in taking it into
25 action with transparency.

1 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Okay.

2 Ms. Newton? Ms. Newton, if you're speaking, I
3 think you're on mute. All right. We'll come back to
4 Ms. Newton.

5 Mr. Scott?

6 MR. SCOTT: I voted for the Vilonia Pathways
7 Academies amendment request to change grade levels
8 from K-12 to 9-12 because of the significance between
9 balancing the fiduciary responsible responsibility of
10 the district and meeting academic needs of the
11 students they serve.

12 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right.

13 We'll return to Ms. Newton. All right. Maybe
14 she stepped away for just a minute.

15 I voted for the Vilonia Pathways Charter
16 amendment. I believe the district has the best
17 interest of students at heart and is seeking to make
18 their educational experience rigorous and meaningful.

19 So congratulations.

20 Anybody else have anything else to say?

21 (NO RESPONSE)

22 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Ms. Newton? All right. She
23 must have stepped away.

24 All right. Well, congratulations and we're
25 looking forward to seeing what you do moving forward.

1 MR. BREWER: Thank you.

2 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: Uh-huh.

3 All right. Any new business?

4 (NO RESPONSE)

5 **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

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

8 MR. SCOTT: So moved.

9 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: I have a motion. Do I have a
10 second?

11 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

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

14 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

15 CHAIR SUTHERLIN: All right. The meeting is
16 adjourned.

17 (The agenda was concluded at 9:42 a.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

) ss

COUNTY OF PULASKI)

I, Miranda McEntire, Certified Court Reporter #852, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me in the caption on the foregoing proceedings are true; and that the foregoing proceedings were reported verbatim through the use of the voice-writing method and thereafter transcribed by me or under my direct supervision to the best of my ability, taken at the time and place set out on the caption hereto.

I FURTHER CERTIFY, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or employed by the parties hereto, nor financially interested or otherwise, in the outcome of this action, and that I have no contract with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an interest in the action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original deposition transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial attorney, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties in the action.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 30th day of July, 2024.



MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #852

