

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

NOVEMBER 20, 2025

9:00 A.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

PANEL MEMBERS:

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LOCATION:

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I N D E X

	Page
I. Action Agenda	3
1. Arkansas Outdoor Academy - Open-Enrollment Charter Application	4
2. LISA Academy Amendment Requests	103
3. KIPP Amendment Requests	125
4. Titan Learning Academy - District Conversion Charter Application	172
Court Reporter's Certificate	197

P R O C E E D I N G S

I. ACTION AGENDA

CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Good morning. The November 20, 2025, meeting of the Charter Authorization Panel is called with order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Arkansas Department of Education Auditorium and ask that you please silence all your electronic devices. The goal is to facilitate a fair and responsible hearing, so for the record, I ask each person speaking to please state your name and title each time you speak into the microphone. I ask that you continue to speak clearly in the microphone throughout the presentation for the in the Panel, this audience and the viewing audience. This meeting is being live streamed and recorded, and a transcript of the meeting will be posted on the DESE website. So again, good morning.

Good morning to my Panel members. I believe that everyone is in person; we don't have anybody online.

So I've checked in, there are no changes to the agenda.

So we can just move down to our action agenda which is item No. 3.

And I will ask Ms. Raney to please come forward.

1 If you please could come forward and provide an
2 overview for the proceedings and procedures for
3 today's action agenda.

4 MS. RANEY: Hi, thank you.

5 So we will just go over the -- the actions and
6 you all will take vote and then we will ask for any
7 comments -- or ask for comments and then you'll take
8 a vote.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay, thanks.

10 **I.1. ARKANSAS OUTDOOR ACADEMY - OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER**
11 **APPLICATION**

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: All right. So on to
13 item number three, open-enrollment charter school
14 application.

15 Doctor Darrell Smith will please come forward
16 and begin this section of our agenda?

17 DR. SMITH: Good morning, Panel. Welcome on a
18 nice, bright, sunny day. Appreciate everybody being
19 in attendance today.

20 Darrell Smith, the Office of School Choice.

21 This morning we have the Arkansas Outdoor
22 Academy presenting an application for an
23 open-enrollment school here in Central Arkansas. The
24 Arkansas Outdoor Academy proposes a the new
25 place-based educational model that integrates outdoor

1 learning, career and technical education,
2 social/emotional learning and leadership development.
3 The school aims to serve rural, underserved students
4 and align education with Arkansas's growing outdoor
5 recreation economy. Its focus on equity, real-world
6 readiness and community partnership reflects a
7 mission to connect academic achievement with hands-on
8 experiential learning rooted in the natural
9 environment.

10 At this time, I'll turn it over to the Arkansas
11 Outdoor Academy for their presentation.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you.

13 So before we begin, all those getting testimony
14 today on behalf of Arkansas Outdoor Academy, both in
15 person and anyone that is online, please stand and
16 raise your right hand. All right. Do you swear that
17 the testimony you're saying that you are about to
18 give is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
19 truth?

20 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And do we have anybody
22 online? No?

23 MS. BENNET: I don't think so.

24 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you.

25 MS. BENNETT: Thank you.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So again, I just want to
2 remind you that you have 20 minutes for your
3 presentation and each time you come to the mic please
4 and restate your name and titles so that we have it
5 for the record. Thanks.

6 MR. HORTON: Good morning. My name is Chris
7 Horton. I'm one of the founders and potential
8 director of schools. Good morning, Chair and members
9 of the Charter Authorizing Panel. My name is Chris
10 Horton. I'm one of the founders of the Arkansas
11 Outdoor Academy.

12 Arkansas does not need another school with a
13 nice idea. Arkansas needs schools that deliver
14 results, honor standards and prepare students for the
15 world that they're incoming. AOA will be a rigorous
16 public school for grades 6 through 12, where students
17 master Arkansas academic standards through structured
18 instruction applied in real environments. Outdoor
19 learning in our model is not recess, not free time.
20 It is teacher led, standards-aligned instruction with
21 the same expectations and accountability as any
22 higher-performing classroom. Our state has made
23 clear -- this a clear priority. The Natural State
24 Initiative launched by Governor Sarah Sanders aims to
25 expand outdoor access, strengthen conservation

1 leadership and triple the economic impact of outdoor
2 recreation by 2035. AOL -- AOA directly supports
3 that vision by preparing students with the knowledge
4 and skills needed for this growth sector. Our model
5 is an intentional answer to workforce needs in
6 conservation, outdoor recreation, public safety and
7 environmental systems. These fields require highly-
8 trained candidates who understand the landscape of
9 our state.

10 Our leadership team brings strong instructional
11 expertise, school leadership experience and deep
12 outdoor and conservation programming experience. I
13 will serve as director of schools. I have over 21
14 years of educational experience with a background in
15 leadership and program development. I also have a
16 background in building partnerships and relationships
17 within the outdoor community and across state
18 agencies. Our principal, Hallee Hughes, brings a
19 strong foundation in literacy and instructional
20 systems. Our assistant principal and counselor, Teal
21 Lovelady, brings trauma-informed expertise and
22 student support experience. And Sharon Bennett will
23 lead our board of directors. She is a statewide
24 experience and outdoor leadership, conservation
25 partnerships and organizational development. We

1 project an opening date of August 2026.

2 Our model begins with academics. Students learn
3 through rigorous standards-based teaching in both
4 indoor and outdoor environments. Expectations stay
5 consistent. The setting expands, but the rigor does
6 not. Outdoor learning is structured, guided and
7 teacher led. Students complete real academic work
8 that deepens mastery. The purpose is not novelty.
9 The purpose is relevance and retention. Our mission
10 is to help Arkansas students achieve at high levels,
11 think critically and build confidence through
12 intentional instruction paired with meaningful
13 application. Students learn more deeply when
14 concepts are experienced and applied. Outdoor
15 learning increases engagement, strengthens
16 comprehension and supports long-term retention.
17 Students see science, math, writing and social
18 studies come to life in real environments.

19 In regards to an evidence of need, Arkansas data
20 continues to show gaps in engagement, attendance and
21 academic persistence. Many students struggle not
22 because they lack ability, but because learning feels
23 disconnected from purpose. AOA responds through four
24 research supported elements: hands on
25 standards-based instruction that improves retention,

1 culturally-responsive teaching practices that affirm
2 identity and strength and relationships, a career
3 connected curriculum that links standards to real
4 pathways and conservation, outdoor recreation,
5 tourism and public safety and structured supports for
6 belonging, including mentorship, project based
7 learning and strong community partnerships. This
8 model is built for high achievement, real engagement
9 and long-term success.

10 In slides five and six, we've included some ESSA
11 scores from the last two years. So you'll see here
12 in the first one, this is scores from the 23-24
13 school year, from schools in the area that we are
14 looking for potential students.

15 At the time, we did not have a building
16 location, but we knew the types of students that we
17 wanted to introduce to our school. We have included
18 percentages of races along with students that require
19 special services. In slide six, we did an updated
20 one from the year 24-25. So currently we have a
21 location that we're wanting to serve and so the
22 schools that we drew from were within a five-mile
23 radius of -- of our location. AOA's experiential
24 outdoor-based instructional model is designed to
25 provide a rigorous, supportive and engaging

1 alternative for students in an area where academic
2 outcomes continue to lag.

3 In slide seven, you'll see our academic plan.
4 This blends a structured schedule with project-based
5 learning. We will use a four-and-half-day
6 instructional week, double blocks for core subjects
7 and advisory periods focused on SEL, student success
8 plans. Every lesson is standards aligned and
9 supported through tools like STAR, ATLAS, SSPs,
10 capstone projects and CTE competencies. Our
11 philosophy is simple: indoor time is explicit
12 instruction, outdoor time is applied learning
13 students take what they learn inside, and they'll
14 bring it to life in the outside.

15 In slide eight, we give a week-in-the-life
16 schedule. Monday through Thursday, students
17 experience four structured, double-block classes.
18 Fridays will be seminar days focused on reflection,
19 goal setting, presentations and leadership. Outdoor
20 learning is strategically built into all four core
21 subjects through planned rotations. Outdoor learning
22 follows a consistent structure of modeling, guided
23 practice, application and assessment. Students will
24 conduct investigations, record field notes, apply
25 mathematics and connect social studies content to

1 real environments. Indoor learning days look like
2 any high-performing school. Teachers deliver direct
3 instruction, small-group learning, targeted
4 intervention and laboratory science. Students will
5 spend two instructional days outdoors and three
6 indoors each week. This predictable rhythm
7 strengthens retention and supports deep learning. In
8 regards to indoor and outdoor learning integration,
9 we know that outdoor work is not enrichment; it is
10 part of the core academic sequence. Students gather
11 data outdoors, then interpret, write, model or
12 discuss indoors. Every outdoor experience directly
13 reinforces standards and contributes to measurable
14 academic outcomes. In regards to fallback plans, we
15 know that every instructional block includes three
16 aligned lesson plans. There will be an outdoor plan;
17 there'll be the indoor continuation; and then we'll
18 also have an indoor fallback plan depending on the
19 weather. This ensures that weather safety or
20 accessibility challenges never interrupt learning or
21 create inconsistencies between student groups.

22 In slide ten, we have our three CTE pathways
23 that we would like to incorporate. That includes
24 environmental science, outdoor tourism and
25 recreation, and Public Safety Health Science. Each

1 one has two H2 jobs connected to its pathway. As
2 outdoor recreation and conservation CTE frameworks
3 are approved, AOA will shift to those pathways to
4 maintain full alignment with Arkansas's emerging
5 outdoor workforce initiative.

6 In slide 11, we have an example of our budget --
7 projected budget. I've also included an updated
8 version to that, so I was -- after we submitted our
9 things, I talked to Nick Hill, and he had a concern
10 about the -- one of the lines involving the lunch and
11 the lunch revenue. So I went back and fixed that.
12 Also -- actually, I think that was it. I think that
13 was the one thing that I switched around. So it
14 might have changed our ending balance just a little
15 bit, but that's adjusted in the monthly cash flows as
16 well. Also, within that, you see a projected 120
17 student if we're not able to reach the 300 that we
18 want. But our financial model is conservative. It's
19 sustainable. We operate with five to ten percent
20 reserves and benefit from a facility with no lease
21 cost. Enrollment scales from 200 students to 700
22 over five years across, grades 6 through 12. We'll
23 pursue CSP grants, philanthropic partnerships and
24 maintain strict transparency through monthly report.
25 And financial emergencies, we protect core

1 instruction and safety first using reassignment and
2 cross training before staffing reductions. Our
3 model's built to remain stable and mission aligned
4 through growth.

5 Slide 12, you'll see our cash flow chart and
6 like I said, you should have an updated one for the
7 300-student one and also one for the 120. I will
8 also say within that budget, we did not include any
9 grants, we didn't include our -- include our startup
10 money; we are only basing our budget off of funding
11 from the state and also a \$500,000 bridge loan
12 startup. Other than that, it's just based off the
13 money that we would get for our kids.

14 In slide 13, we have our facilities. We are
15 currently looking to be at 1500 Riverfront Drive.
16 This will be our permanent home, and it's centrally
17 located along the Arkansas River corridor with
18 immediate access to Murray Park, Two Rivers Park,
19 Knoop Park, Allsopp Park and the wetlands downtown.
20 You'll notice on the slide that all of those little
21 red trees that are surrounding our location, those
22 are all Little Rock parks that we'll be able to use
23 through our partnership with Little Rock Parks and
24 Rec. And so, even though our building might be in an
25 area that looks like a commercial area, we have

1 access within -- literally, within a five-to-ten-mile
2 radius of all of those parks.

3 This location is unmatched in Arkansas for an
4 outdoor-based public school. The facility includes
5 flexible classrooms, science labs, movement spaces,
6 ADA compliant access and adjacent green space for
7 outdoor instruction. Safety and compliance meet all
8 ADE standards.

9 In slide 14, we discussed student services and
10 special populations. We will use a multi-tiered
11 system of support for academic, behavioral and
12 social/emotional needs. Resource services, co-
13 teaching accommodations and modifications are
14 implemented consistently. AOA is designed for
15 inclusion from the beginning. Universal design,
16 culturally responsive practices and planned
17 accommodation ensure full participation in both
18 indoor and outdoor settings. We will meet all
19 requirements for special populations, including
20 special education services, gifted supports, English
21 language development and Section -- Section 504
22 accommodations. Differentiation is planned across
23 both instructional environments.

24 In Slide 15, you'll see our indoor versus
25 outdoor planning. We intentionally design lessons so

1 that students with mobility limitations, sensory
2 needs or other conditions can fully participate.
3 Both environments maintain the same standards and
4 assessment expectations. Every student with an IEP
5 or 504 plan will also receive an outdoor appendix
6 attached to that. This includes mobility supports,
7 behavioral supports, medical plans, adaptive tools,
8 safety considerations and any needed staffing
9 adjustments. This ensures that all students can
10 participate safely and fully in outdoor instruction,
11 and that equity remains essential priority.

12 In slide 16, we have equity supports for the
13 homeless, foster care and low-income students. All
14 of our gear, meals, hydration supplies and field
15 materials will be provided at no cost by AOA.
16 Students in transition receive mentoring, clothing,
17 hygiene supplies and additional resources under
18 McKinney-Vento. This eliminates barriers to
19 participation and ensures equitable access.

20 In slide 17, we begin talking about safety. We
21 know that this is a non-negotiable. Safety for us
22 will be foundational. Outdoor days begin with
23 readiness procedures that include communication
24 checks, site-condition reviews and student readiness
25 confirmations. Our safety standard operating

1 procedure outlines weather monitoring, hydration
2 protocols, communication steps, emergency response
3 and supervision expectations. It functions as a
4 detailed operational guide for safe instruction.
5 Within that SOP -- it's about -- it's pretty intense,
6 it's about 200 pages and we provided that to the
7 Department of Education as well. Every staff member
8 at AOA will be trained in wilderness first aid and
9 CPR. Every outdoor instructional day has a
10 designated wilderness first responder on site. This
11 person oversees medical decision making and response
12 until emergency services arrive. This approach
13 exceeds national standards for outdoor education
14 programs and gives families confidence that students
15 are cared for by trained professionals.

16 In slide 18, we discussed just a few of those
17 examples that might be included within the SOP. One
18 example could be strangers, custody issues or medical
19 protocols. With us outdoor safety demands clarity.
20 We'll have tier responses for stranger contact
21 custody conflicts and medical emergencies.
22 Communications protocols ensure families receive
23 immediate notification and full documentation. We
24 also have examples of elopement and wildlife safety.
25 So students at risk for elopement will have

1 individual safety plans. And it depends on maybe
2 their history of elopement and at the highest level,
3 we could use GPS or badge tracking with parent
4 permission. Wildlife procedures include
5 identification training, safety zones and staff
6 carried medical kits.

7 In slide 19, we discussed risk management,
8 crisis response and auditing. AOA will conduct
9 quarterly safety dashboards, monthly audits and
10 annual external reviews with Little Rock PD, MEMS and
11 Arkansas Game and Fish. Safety will continuously be
12 monitored, evaluated and improved.

13 In slide 20, we also discussed some outdoor
14 safety drills. So just like in the indoors where
15 we'll be doing tornado drills, we'll be doing active
16 shooter drills. We'll be doing lockdown drills.
17 We'll also incorporate those within the outdoors as
18 well. So within that, they'll be practiced in every
19 outdoor learning environment. This will go beyond
20 traditional school safety expectations and will
21 demonstrate the thoroughness of our model.

22 In slide 21, we discussed school climate and
23 culture and what we call G.R.I.T. G.R.I.T. stands
24 for growth, resilience, integrity and teamwork. Our
25 culture is structured and supported. We will use

1 PBIS, MTSS, restorative practices and trauma-informed
2 strategies to build a consistent, calm environment.
3 Outdoor learning naturally supports regulation,
4 teamwork and problem solving. In regards to family
5 engagement, we prioritize transparency and
6 partnership through weekly communication, community
7 events, family adventure days and advisory councils.
8 Families that we have talked to have asked for this
9 model and they stay -- and they will stay engaged
10 because it will be meaningful to them. Also within
11 that, we have our community interest and feedback
12 through the events that we have been a part of over
13 the last couple months, and we also had events at
14 libraries around the area where our school will be
15 located. We've had more than 275 interested families
16 that have signed up and potentially 240 students who
17 have completed the interest forms. This level of
18 demand prior to opening demonstrates a clear need and
19 strong community support. And I will tell you that
20 there was an update because we -- we also we just
21 took place in the Chili Fights in the Heights and so
22 we were able to cook chili for the community and talk
23 to them. And so currently we're up to 403 families
24 that are interested in our school and potentially 256
25 students. And I think that speaks for the fact that

1 we -- we do not yet have our charter, and we haven't
2 started yet and we have an interest in the community
3 that that sees what we're doing is important.

4 In slide 23, we talked about our organizational
5 plan and our leadership structure. Our governance
6 structure aligns with Arkansas law. The board
7 provides oversight. The director of schools manages
8 operations. The principal oversees instruction. And
9 outdoor safety coordinator leads risk management
10 protocols.

11 In the next slide, we'll see our actual
12 organizational chart that has the kind of hierarchy
13 tier -- hierarchy that we have. And with that, every
14 staff member knows who they report to, and every
15 department has accountability structures aligned to
16 LEADS and to TESS.

17 Our governance transition plan. We are fully
18 compliant with Arkansas governance requirements. The
19 founders are currently serving on the board, but as
20 they move into paid roles, they will slide off. We
21 currently have two advisory members that will
22 transition into board seats, and we'll also add legal
23 and financial experts to complete the governing
24 board. AOA is governed by an independent board with
25 clearly defined roles. We will follow all

1 requirements for open meetings, public documentation,
2 conflict of interest filings and compliance with the
3 Arkansas Freedom of Information Act. Transparent
4 governance supports accountability and public trust.

5 In slides 26 and 27, we talked about our
6 partnerships and potential ones. Currently, we're in
7 the process of MOUs with Arkansas Heritage and
8 Tourism and with the Little Rock Parks and Recreation
9 to support our curriculum, internships, stewardship
10 projects and student research. These are
11 high-quality partnerships, unique for a school not
12 yet open. We also have -- are partnered with Round
13 Table Funding who will support long-term
14 sustainability with our charter school and also
15 helping us with financial acquisition. These
16 partnerships show confidence, credibility and broad
17 community interest -- investment in AOA. Our
18 potential partnerships that we're looking to develop
19 will include forest and natural resource industries,
20 hunting and wildlife, outdoor recreation, community
21 organizations, higher-education institutions and
22 philanthropy and sustainable partners.

23 In regards to transportation, we've developed a
24 two-phase transportation plan to eliminate barriers.
25 Phase one supports voluntary carpooling. Phase two

1 uses bus routes focused on high-need neighborhoods.
2 Both contracted and in-house options are financially
3 viable and compliant. Our technology plan is layered
4 -- is a layered technology system that includes
5 ratios, GPS beacons, satellite communication,
6 adaptive tools, digital dashboards and indoor
7 research tools.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: You're at time.

9 MR. HORTON: Okay.

10 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: You can just wrap up,
11 and if there's other things you want to cover as we
12 have questions, I'm sure we'll be able to do that.

13 MR. HORTON: I'm won't -- I swear I have one
14 more slide.

15 With counseling and SSPs, our counseling program
16 includes SSPs beginning in 8th grade trauma, informed
17 services, college partnerships, internships and SEL
18 integration. This will ensure every student has a
19 plan for graduation and beyond. We'll follow our
20 enrollment lottery policy just like the state
21 requires using § 6-23-306.

22 And then I will say in closing that the Arkansas
23 Outdoor Academy is a serious academic model built on
24 strong instruction, strong systems and strong safety.
25 We're prepared to open a school that delivers high

1 achievement, clear structure and real pathways for
2 our Arkansas students. Every lesson is planned.
3 Every procedure is defined. Every student is
4 supported and every public dollar is managed with the
5 stewardship that you will expect. We're ready to do
6 the work. We're prepared to open responsibly, and
7 we're committed to serving the students and families
8 of Arkansas with excellence. On behalf of our
9 founding team, thank you for your time and for your
10 commitment to high-quality public schools. We look
11 forward to earning your confidence in opening the
12 Arkansas Outdoor Academy.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you.

14 I think legal just stepped out and so we will
15 need them to come forward.

16 MS. RANEY: Hi, Julie Raney, ADE. I apologize.
17 We have no legal concerns.

18 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

19 MS. RANEY: Thank you.

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thanks.

21 Okay. So with that, again, thank you for your
22 presentation.

23 So we will open it up to questions from the
24 Panel. Okay. And I will start with Ms. Stewart.

25 MS. STEWART: Okay.

1 Good morning and thank you all so much for such
2 a thorough, terrific presentation. And do appreciate
3 you addressing some specific things that you probably
4 knew we would have questions about, so thank you for
5 that. I had just a couple of questions.

6 You touched on recruitment of students and --
7 and I do appreciate you all breaking out the budget
8 because that was a concern. From 300 to -- and now
9 we've got a 120 number as well. When -- when you're
10 talking about things, I noticed that you, you know,
11 had talked about serving rural and underserved
12 students. So can you talk a little bit about how
13 you're going to bring those groups to the table as
14 well? I think some of your current recruitment
15 efforts are fantastic. The numbers speak for
16 themselves, but I wonder about, you know, that --
17 those specific populations.

18 MR. HORTON: Chris Horton, director of schools.

19 I believe it was actually supposed to say urban
20 on there. I mean, we would love rural kids as well,
21 but I know that the environment in the area that
22 we're serving, that -- it will be primarily
23 underserved and urban kids. And so to answer that,
24 I'll say it will be a lot of us not just educating
25 the community more but educating the parents. So

1 when we are talking to them more about our plan and
2 what we want to accomplish, it's kind of letting them
3 know how important this is. And so I'll -- I'll use
4 some of the kids that I've taught as an example. A
5 lot of the kids that I currently serve are those same
6 types of kids and they really -- to them outdoors is
7 going in the backyard. It's not doing these things
8 and getting out into the Little Rock parks, and I
9 think that's just because they haven't experienced
10 it; they haven't seen it. And so those specific
11 kids, we've created an indoor climbing league that we
12 have been having them come to. Through that we've
13 been able to get them to the parks and get them to do
14 some outdoor climbing as well. And so they went from
15 scared to nervous, to apprehensive, to loving it and
16 thriving. And so we're showing them not just the
17 outdoors and hopefully connecting them to things that
18 Governor Sanders is looking to accomplish in -- in
19 the next few years, but also we're giving them those
20 durable skills. And so with that, we're teaching
21 them how to fail and to keep going. We're teaching
22 them how to build social skills with one another
23 because a lot of this stuff that we're going to do is
24 going to be group activities. It's not just them by
25 themselves. And so they've got to learn to build

1 those things. And through the colleges that we have
2 talked to, they have said similar things where
3 they're getting kids who -- they're -- they're
4 getting into these outdoor pathways in college. But
5 when they come away from it, they don't necessarily
6 have those durable skills because they haven't
7 learned them. And so long answer short, I would just
8 say it's really going to be us doing a good job
9 within the marketing of being able to educate them
10 about what the state has to offer.

11 MS. STEWART: Well, that's super helpful to talk
12 about what you're already doing, you know, bringing
13 folks to the table. So that -- that really helps
14 kind of underscore that. So I appreciate. That --
15 and you know, I have to say, I do love this idea as a
16 natural state, you know. I mean, this is -- this is
17 where we hang our hat. And I'm the mom of two boys
18 and the wife of -- all three boys. I'm going to
19 throw my husband in that. They are outdoor
20 enthusiasts. I mean, like, crazy time. So having
21 young people have this opportunity to get engaged
22 with, you know, really the heart of our state and
23 what we hold dear is super exciting.

24 MR. HORTON: Yes, ma'am.

25 MS. STEWART: So that -- all of that said,

1 thinking through staffing a little bit because, you
2 know, as we know, even staffing any school can be a
3 challenge. Thinking about the extra things that
4 might be required of teachers, you know. I'm
5 thinking about myself as an educator. I couldn't do
6 a climb the wall. So, you know, those types of
7 specific skills that educators might need in addition
8 to all of those --

9 MR. HORTON: Correct.

10 MS. STEWART: -- pieces of teacher licensure,
11 just if you could speak to that.

12 MR. HORTON: I can address that --

13 MS. STEWART: Or --

14 MR. HORTON: -- and then -- then, Hallelee might
15 be able to piggyback off of that.

16 MS. STEWART: Yeah.

17 MR. HORTON: So with our -- with our staff that
18 we're looking to incorporate, they will all be
19 certified within the state as teachers. They will
20 have experience with curriculum. They will have
21 experience with Arkansas standards and developing
22 lesson plans as well. But on top of that, within our
23 PD, we'll include wilderness first aid training, CPR
24 training. Through the AEA, they have something that
25 is -- it's a professional development for outdoor

1 educators. We will require all of our teachers to go
2 through that as well. And then, we currently -- or
3 we will be having an outdoor safety coordinator. He
4 is wilderness first responder trained and then we
5 will also require all of our admin to be wilderness
6 first responders as well. That way we will have
7 multiple people on site if anything were to occur.

8 MS. STEWART: Okay. Thank you.

9 MR. HORTON: Do you want piggyback off that?

10 MS. HUGHES: Yeah.

11 Hello. Hallee Hughes. I'll be the -- I'll be
12 the principal at Arkansas Outdoor Academy.

13 You know, one of those -- that's a very good
14 question. You know, we feel like teachers already
15 experience burnout and overburden; right? How do we
16 take care of that when we know we're putting some
17 different things on their plate? Maybe not more, but
18 different. Chris mentioned professional development.
19 That's going to be the cornerstone of making sure our
20 teachers are prepared and that won't necessarily be
21 traditional professional development. That could be
22 -- that -- or will be that wilderness first -- first
23 aid where they will have a high -- they will have
24 more knowledge in first-aid response at that point
25 than any other public school in the state. You know,

1 we will be setting a new standard for how teachers
2 can respond to things out in nature, but also in the
3 classroom. And then, just support. So the schedule
4 that we will have is that 4.5-day week. There will
5 be A Fridays and then B Fridays. And our plan is we
6 will emphasize, or focus on, math and science on one
7 Friday, then English and the humanities and social
8 studies on the next. Our staff will have those as a
9 rotation off-campus day. So staff that is not on the
10 focus of math and science, so that English, that --
11 that staff will have that day off campus. So that's
12 to prepare lesson plans, some self-care, whatever
13 they need to do, they will be off campus on those
14 Fridays that are not their rotation Friday. So if
15 I'm a math teacher and I'm on the A Friday, just give
16 you an example, on the B Friday, I will be working
17 from home.

18 MS. STEWART: Okay. And I noticed you have --
19 you've got that -- and I promise I'm going to do just
20 one more question.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Ask as many questions as
22 you like.

23 MR. HORTON: Could Sharon add something to that
24 real quick?

25 MS. HUGHES: Musical chairs.

1 MS. BENNETT: Yes. I'm so sorry. We're musical
2 chairing.

3 Hello. Sharon Bennett, Outdoor -- Arkansas
4 Outdoor Academy, board president -- presumptive.

5 So I just wanted to answer your question. What
6 I heard when you were saying, is that -- how can a
7 teacher be expected to be a climbing wall instructor
8 and possibly lead bike rides and implement all of
9 these things that are required of outdoor recreation;
10 and I think the answer is that not every teacher will
11 be required to have those elements; right? There
12 will be people like, you know, the -- the outdoor
13 safety coordinator also will serve as a recreation
14 leader in those instances. And so they are person
15 who is trained in climbing-wall instruction and
16 they're a person who is trained in those recreational
17 elements. If a teacher wants to incorporate those
18 recreational elements within their lessons, in that
19 outdoor space, I think that's great and it's based on
20 their comfort level in delivering that; right? So
21 not -- just to answer that, they are not required to
22 go down all of these individual pathways to get these
23 accreditations and knowledge.

24 MS. STEWART: That's super powerful.

25 MS. BENETT: Yes, thank you.

1 MS. STEWART: Thank you. Yeah, no, that --
2 that's very, very helpful.

3 So along staffing lines and then I'll hand it
4 over. I noticed -- which I appreciate your
5 reflection on special education and what that would
6 look like because that was a concern initially, but
7 -- and you did address it from the perspective of
8 guaranteeing, you know, all-terrain wheelchairs, you
9 know, a variety of accommodations. How -- how will
10 that work? If you could just kind of explain how
11 that would work. And then, you know, we've got a
12 one-to-ten staffing for low-risk activities outside
13 which is terrific. Will that number of students
14 decrease if it's, you know, around someone that might
15 need some -- some additional accommodations.

16 MS. SHELTON: Lydia Shelton. I'll be the
17 student services coordinator.

18 So with special education within the classroom,
19 it's going to look the exact same. We're going to
20 apply accommodation; we're going to give that student
21 what they need. Outdoors, yes, we're going to just
22 continue the application of accommodations of
23 everything they need. Wheelchair, example, maybe we
24 go one to one. Maybe we have check-out services.
25 Are they physically able for that student to go?

1 Every student, obviously, we're going to have to look
2 at individually, what do they need and we will supply
3 it and it may look completely different. It will
4 just be individualized. We will follow their IEPs.
5 We will have our outdoor addendum to match what they
6 need. And so, honestly, every single student what
7 they need, we will give because they deserve that
8 education.

9 MS. STEWART: And so will you have special
10 education staff for the, obviously, the educational
11 portion inside?

12 MS. SHELTON: Yes, ma'am.

13 MS. STEWART: And then, the -- did you say
14 coordinator or director of --

15 MS. SHELTON: Yes, ma'am.

16 MS. STEWART: -- special education that are
17 going to oversee all of that?

18 MS. SHELTON: Yes, ma'am. We will follow the
19 inclusion setting, push-ins, pull-outs if needed.
20 All of that.

21 MS. STEWART: Okay.

22 MS. SHELTON: So, yes, ma'am.

23 MS. STEWART: Awesome. Thank you.

24 MS. SHELTON: Yes, ma'am.

25 MS. STEWART: Yeah. I think that's all I've

1 got. Thank you.

2 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

3 Dr. Bacon.

4 DR. BACON: Thank you.

5 I appreciate your presentation and I definitely
6 appreciate the detail that you all have provided. I
7 don't think I've ever seen someone put together this
8 much detail for a application. So thank you for all
9 the time you put into this. I know you started by
10 saying we don't need another school with a great
11 idea. I would say this is a phenomenal idea and so I
12 appreciate that. I would say we also don't need
13 another school that struggles with enrollment and
14 financial issues. So for me the biggest pieces are,
15 you know, how we can be sure that this school is
16 going to have enough student capacity to make the
17 financial side work. So I would love to hear more --
18 I think I wrote down a number, the last -- highest
19 number, 256 potential students of interest. Sort of
20 go more in detail on what does that mean? Does that
21 mean that you met them and they gave you their
22 information? That's possible contact. Does that
23 mean they seriously -- just sort of walk me through
24 so we can sort of wrap our learnings around what the
25 potential is for actual student enrollment and then

1 sort of what you've done today that has built that --
2 that possible interest pool?

3 MR. HORTON: Chris Horton, director of schools.

4 So what we -- at every event we went to -- which
5 to this point we were at Main Street Food Truck
6 Festival. We've been to the -- it's called the Orojo
7 -- Vestido de Rojo, which was the Spanish community
8 mothers. There was like 400 mothers that were there,
9 to talk to them and their kids. We have been to
10 Chili Fights in the Heights. We have been to four
11 different public libraries around the area. We've
12 also -- trying to remember. It's -- we've --
13 honestly, we've done four or five specific things
14 that we have tried to -- Day of the dead at Plaza de
15 Frida, Fiesta de Independencia at Plaza de Frida.
16 And so within that, what we did was we had an
17 interest form and the kids that we listed are all
18 potential 6th through 9th grade next year. So the
19 way that we would like to start is 6th through 9th
20 grade, year one. And then add 10th grade the next
21 year, 11th and then 12th. And so we anticipate to be
22 in that five to 600 range by the time we get to year
23 four. So those kids, those were actually specific
24 kids. We also had others that were elementary age
25 and siblings. And so that's kind of -- we've been

1 working with that as well. So through those events,
2 it wasn't just talking to the parents, but we talked
3 to them and then ones that wanted to go a little bit
4 further, they're the ones that gave us their emails.
5 They're the ones that answered our questions from our
6 sheet as well.

7 DR. BACON: Okay. Do you have any sense on that
8 group where they are now? Traditional? Public?
9 Charter? Private? Homeschool?

10 MR. HORTON: Most of the ones that were
11 interested were either public school or public
12 charter school. It's weird because a lot of the kids
13 that we talked to that they're like, oh, we're in a
14 private school. We'd love for them to offer that,
15 which is also -- kind of helped us. In the summers,
16 we want to be able -- and it was a parent that told
17 us this. It was a great idea. They said we wish you
18 had something like this in the summers that we could
19 go to. And so what we're going to start thinking
20 about is a summer program that pulls from these
21 things that we're going to do throughout a school
22 year and introduce it to those kids and let them see
23 what a day in the life would be through the summer.
24 So not only are we giving them an opportunity to do
25 something this summer, but also potentially draw from

1 those kids. And so most of them were -- that didn't
2 want to sway were those -- were those private school
3 kids. But there wasn't -- there's probably maybe ten
4 of them that were around the area.

5 DR. BACON: With the location you chosen -- and
6 I appreciate you hit on transportation. I know we
7 were running short on time. Talk to me about the
8 transportation plan and these options that you have
9 and how you're going to get this underserved
10 population to sort of, you know, not an underserved
11 part of Little Rock I wouldn't say in terms of the
12 residents there.

13 MR. HORTON: Right.

14 DR. BACON: Just talk with me about how that --
15 you're going to get people there and convince them
16 that they need to make that commitment.

17 MR. HORTON: So we've offered normal drop off
18 just like any school would if they -- if they're able
19 to. But what I've noticed with a lot of charter
20 schools is that they don't offer bus routes and so
21 some kids that want to come to a charter school are
22 not able to get there. And so the carpooling route
23 would be one that we would talk about. But within
24 the bus route we'd have -- where we're looking at an
25 option for two buses. Two bus routes, one that would

1 go towards the North Little Rock side and one that
2 would go to the Little Rock side. And within that --
3 I think in the application we included those bus
4 routes as well. But it would be, instead of a
5 door-to-door drop off, it would be maybe five or six
6 pick up/drop offs within that area. And I think it
7 was like a 12-mile radius on both sides. So that way
8 it just gives them another option to be able to get
9 to our school if they -- if they wanted to. And I'm
10 not going to talk to it, but within our MOUs, we're
11 working on something as well that could really
12 benefit us with that.

13 MR. HORTON: Can I talk on that?

14 MS. BENNETT: Yeah. You can talk on it.

15 MR. HORTON: I just don't want to -- any privacy
16 things. But so one of the things that we're working
17 with Little Rock Parks and Rec right now is also
18 incorporating the community centers. And so
19 essentially that -- that route might change. It
20 might end up being three, four, five community
21 centers that are around our school and then we'll
22 still keep the North Little Rock side the same where
23 we have our five to six drop offs. And what that
24 would hopefully do is if they are able to create
25 their after-school programs that they're looking to

1 do right now, we'd also be able to give those kids
2 access to that after school. So in case parents are
3 not happy with them, go -- walking from a community
4 center to their house, then they could still drop off
5 and be a part of the community center and then also
6 be a part of building that program that they're
7 wanting to put.

8 DR. BACON: And I -- I know -- I appreciate that
9 you all have two budgets. You have the 300, sort of
10 the dream; and then you did 120. That just -- I
11 guess, about half of the families or students that
12 you have -- expressed serious interest. So I think
13 that's a good way to go. Tell me what looks
14 different from your school support-wise, staff-wise
15 program-wise with 120 in year one than what you would
16 have if you if you are at 300.

17 MR. HORTON: So our 120 budget, we were able to
18 pretty much stay the same as far as services and as
19 far as the other things go. It would be more of our
20 staff would change. We also have a potential budget
21 for 80 to 85 and to us that would be bare minimum
22 that we could probably be able to serve. And then,
23 in that instance, our -- some of the services --
24 standards and education services, special services
25 would all stay the same. That wouldn't change, but

1 we might go more towards a cohort route. Our
2 staffing would be reduced. We might have one admin
3 instead of three. So really it's -- the only things
4 that would really change as far as the school goes is
5 probably -- maybe special services -- or not special
6 services, professional services. Sorry. So that
7 might change a little bit. It's really just going to
8 be more of a staffing thing. We still want to keep
9 everything educationally and safety-wise the same.

10 DR. BACON: So if you have 120 or 75 -- it
11 sounds like that's sort of a fallback -- you would
12 feel good about and able to provide not just the
13 special stuff, but the core Tier 1 instruction that
14 everybody needs to provide to --

15 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir

16 DR. BACON: -- to meet the ATLAS?

17 MR. HORTON: Because to us, the education would
18 stay the same, so any public charter school that
19 opens -- that might open with low enrollment, the
20 educational side, the alignment side, all of that
21 stays the same. The only thing that might change is
22 just how we offer it outdoors. That would be -- that
23 would be it, but they would still -- still they would
24 still get the same experience, and they would still
25 have a safe experience as well.

1 DR. BACON: The last thing I had is just sort of
2 thinking about curriculum. I know you all have done
3 this, but I would just love to hear -- so today's a
4 rainy day that you're not going to be outside. So
5 specifically, how would -- how does that shift on a
6 cold rainy -- because there will be a lot of those.
7 A lot of cold days in winter that you're not going to
8 be able to go outside. So just sort of talk to me
9 specific on the shift of -- how curriculum really
10 shifts on a outdoor day as a pouring down rain day.

11 MR. HORTON: Is that you or is that Teal?

12 MS. BENNETT: Either one is fine.

13 MR. HORTON: You got it?

14 MS. BENNETT: Yeah.

15 So hi. Sharon Bennett, Arkansas Outdoor
16 Academy, board president -- presumptive.

17 So we do have within our model -- one of the
18 first things that I want to say is that often there
19 is a kind of a misconception, right, that if there's
20 rain, things of that nature that outdoor instruction
21 can't happen; it actually can. And it adds a
22 different element to the experience. Obviously,
23 within safety protocols. We're not going to take
24 children out into the pouring, cold rain because we
25 all know what a wonderful experience that would be

1 for all of us. So with that, there are additional
2 things that we have to look at. You know, Arkansas
3 is a very temperate state. We do have some hot
4 starting days in August. We do have a monsoon
5 season. So we have strict protocols in which there
6 are triggers for indoor instruction; right? And
7 those calls are made by the superintendent and the
8 safety officer. In particular, what we, you know,
9 look at, just thinking ahead and how we're
10 structuring things, if we're delivering outdoor
11 instruction in the morning and there is a heat
12 trigger for the afternoon, we would then shift that
13 indoors into our indoor learning labs where we would
14 offer kind of -- a same quality assignment; right?
15 We would -- we would shift the same principles, the
16 same hands on. We would just bring that indoors and
17 that could be through pre-collected samples; right?
18 It might be students building, for example, maybe,
19 like, just a runoff system with materials, right, and
20 testing how that looks and charting that. So we'll
21 leverage our indoor learning labs.

22 DR. BACON: Well, I would say with the detail
23 and thought you all put into it, I have no doubt that
24 you will be able to accomplish that.

25 MS. BENNETT: Now, the key is -- the key is that

1 we are still delivering the hands-on experience and
2 the like-quality instruction.

3 DR. BACON: Thank you.

4 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

5 Mr. Baldwin.

6 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

7 So yes, very, very innovative. Probably one of
8 the more interested proposals I've seen sitting on
9 this panel. And I -- and I guess my first question
10 was who came up with the idea? And is there -- is
11 there an example out there nationally that you are
12 following? Or is this something that's new to
13 Arkansas?

14 MR. HORTON: I'll start with the personal level
15 and then I'll let Sharon finish with the -- with the
16 other part.

17 Chris Horton, director of schools.

18 So it -- it's crazy that we came up with this.
19 We've looked across the country and there are schools
20 that offer programs similar. There are private
21 schools and boarding schools that are doing things
22 similar, but there is not a school that we have found
23 in the country that is doing anything like this and
24 so that is -- to answer or to kind of piggyback on
25 what you said, that is why it's been so detailed

1 because we want to make sure that we're hitting
2 everything and being overly prepared for everything
3 that could happen, since this is innovative and it is
4 brand-new. And so I will say that I have a passion
5 for the outdoors that's developed over the last five
6 years and what -- I have seen it benefit me
7 emotionally and mentally. And so wanting to bring
8 that to the kids and see it -- is it -- is it just me
9 or is it someone else? And so being able to
10 introduce just a small portion of it to the kids that
11 I serve currently, it has just done wonders. And
12 it's things that make them not just enjoy it in the
13 moment, but I have already seen some that are saying
14 they're going to be lifelong outdoors people just
15 because of it. And so when we worked on this,
16 honestly, it's been -- it's been about two years that
17 we have been working on this. It was before Governor
18 Sanders had even brought forth her initiative. And
19 so when she did that, it almost, for us, just
20 reaffirmed what we were wanting to do because it
21 showed that it brought -- it brought meaning to it,
22 and it showed that what we're wanting to do is -- is
23 important. So I would say that it -- it has been a
24 brainchild of us four. And -- and I will say that I
25 know that Sharon can -- she can detail some things

1 that are happening a little bit different.

2 Go ahead.

3 MS. BENNETT: Okay, sure.

4 I am Sharon Bennett, Arkansas Outdoor Academy,
5 board president -- presumptive.

6 So my journey is a little bit different in
7 meeting these folks and coming together for this. So
8 for the last decade I've served in outdoor leadership
9 here in Arkansas, in the climbing community and in
10 the Ultra running community. I'm race director for
11 one of the largest outdoor Ultra races here in
12 Arkansas, one of the oldest. It sees approximately
13 400 to 500 people every year running. And so it is
14 seeing that joy of connecting adults to recreation.
15 And I'm also the state director for the American
16 Scholastic League of Arkansas, which Chris mentioned
17 that connects middle school and high school kids to
18 climbing and lead climbing excursions for kids
19 outdoors and it's seeing that meaningful connection.
20 So within all of that, I've had the opportunity in
21 bringing recreation forward with city individuals
22 such as Big Rock Quarry's new climbing area with the
23 city of North Little Rock, you know, as one probably
24 my more recent projects. In working with the Office
25 of Outdoor Recreation and working with the First

1 Gentleman and a lot of those entities and just
2 knowing kind of where this was coming, I started
3 preparing a CTE program about two and a half years
4 ago. I met with various states in regards to what
5 they're doing in the CTE space for outdoor education,
6 conservation and recreation. I met with CAST, which
7 is a designer of universal learning constructs and
8 implementing CTE programs. Their latest would be New
9 Hampshire. I studied that model very clearly and I
10 produced one for the State of Arkansas which I then
11 donated to the Arkansas Game and Fish and the
12 Arkansas Department of Education, and it's currently
13 being used as part of that process. So I also too,
14 though, like Chris, believe in what that connection
15 provides in the outdoors. And so Chris and I met
16 through the climbing league, and we just started
17 talking about these ideas and how important and
18 pivotal it is to really find a way to connect kids to
19 the outdoors to make them realize career
20 opportunities that might never have been, you know,
21 something they thought of in previous. And really
22 just, hopefully, connecting them with something that
23 they find a passion for in life. And so I think
24 that's kind of the start of the journey and it's been
25 really exciting. So --

1 MR. BALDWIN: So in -- in -- so thank you for
2 that. I was really curious whether there was someone
3 somewhere that did this and you are kind of inventing
4 this as you go. And I'm a big believer in outdoor
5 activities for kids. I've got -- I've got two sons
6 who went through Boy Scouts, their Eagle Scouts, and
7 did a lot of this. And they end up becoming the
8 people they are because of that outdoor experience.
9 So in -- and I saw your map that you're looking at
10 city parks around Little Rock. Talk to us a little
11 bit about that. And what -- and then, maybe help us
12 understand what kind of climbing because there's a
13 lot of different kinds. And when you're talking, I'm
14 thinking sure (crosstalk) and I'm thinking 6th
15 graders are going up and down. So talk to us about
16 that and what you can do in the city parks and in
17 would you ever transition to, like, a Pinnacle
18 Mountain park --

19 MS. BENNETT: Yeah.

20 MR. BALDWIN: -- or a Buffalo River?

21 MS. BENNETT: Sure.

22 MR. BALDWIN: I mean, talk to us about the
23 different difficulties.

24 MS. BENNETT: Yeah.

25 MR. BALDWIN: And then, also, how do you manage,

1 I mean, you're going to have grade 6th through 12, so
2 there's a big difference between a 6th grader and a
3 senior. So how you're going to manage the different,
4 you know, physical capabilities of the kids?

5 MS. BENNETT: Absolutely.

6 So I'll start with some of this.

7 And then maybe, Chris, who do you think for the
8 later managing -- I can -- I can probably speak to
9 some of that.

10 So to answer your question, we are -- currently,
11 there's -- there's a couple of things that we're
12 doing as part of this MOU process with Little Rock,
13 Parks and Recreation and state parks. Part of that
14 process is going through and designating instruction
15 areas and backup instruction areas in each of these
16 areas. Now, that's kind of crucial so we can set our
17 boundaries for classroom management. This will be
18 clearly outlined before we get on site. Teachers
19 will know where to go. They'll be able to instruct
20 the students where to go. We will have those areas
21 coned off and kind of explicitly laid out. So that's
22 one of the things. The other thing is we're going
23 through there -- is we're looking at each park
24 individually and the type of lesson and instruction
25 we can deliver there. The Presidential Wetlands,

1 obviously, will have a different biome and different,
2 you know, things and activities that we can do there
3 with water sampling, aquatic wildlife observations,
4 things of that nature. Whereas, like another park,
5 like, if you're thinking about Allsopp, it may be
6 more like nature journaling and learning about
7 erosion on trails and, you know, applying principles
8 like that. So I would just say that that's something
9 that we are currently working through with our MOUs,
10 which sites deliver the best. So in terms of areas
11 like Rattlesnake Ridge, you know, which is owned by
12 The Nature Conservancy -- great, wonderful place here
13 in Arkansas. Love that area. Pinnacle. Lake Sylvia
14 Recreation area. Those would be not kind of weekly
15 trips, but those would be trips -- you know, just
16 solely based on the distance it is to get to those
17 places, those would be just more like when we have,
18 like, a different type of learning element that we
19 have. We will plan those. You know those will be
20 all day's affairs with like a specific tax that we're
21 trying to accomplish there.

22 So if you want to talk about the safety in
23 classroom management or --

24 MR. HORTON: Well, I'm just going to piggyback
25 just off of -- just little bit.

1 MS. BENNETT: Yeah. No. Please do.

2 MR. HORTON: Yeah.

3 Chris Horton, AOA, director of schools.

4 And I -- I would just say that as far as -- to
5 answer to your question about the age, everything we
6 do is going to be scaffolded and age appropriate to
7 whatever they're able to handle. And so it -- that
8 could essentially, like -- like Sharon said those
9 core five parks that are around us, those are the
10 ones that we would potentially stick with just
11 because they will help us make sure we get our
12 instruction time, make sure we're not deviating from
13 anything along those lines. But then like she said,
14 if we go to Rattlesnake Ridge or we go to Lake
15 Sylvia, those are things that it might be more of a
16 day trip; It might be more we're still educating, but
17 it'd be more like a field trip type thing. But as
18 far as, like, what children can do, like, everything
19 we have within our SOP, we'll -- we'll make sure that
20 it sticks to what they're capable of. And we can --
21 we can do accommodations for -- for everyone. It's
22 not just going to be special services. So if it's a
23 -- just a normal -- normal child that might -- or a
24 child that doesn't need special services and the --
25 and they can't handle something, I wouldn't mind them

1 trying it; but at the same time, you know, you're
2 going to learn from the failure, but nothing
3 dangerous. Safety is our number one.

4 MS. BENNETT: Do you want me --

5 MR. BALDWIN: I figured you had -- you would
6 answer that like that. So that's -- that's good.
7 And my final question would be: in looking at your
8 budget --

9 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir.

10 MR. BALDWIN: And I guess, we have the revised
11 budget that shows 120 students, is that -- is that
12 like a breaking budget more or less?

13 MR. HORTON: I don't think it's --

14 MR. BALDWIN: I don't think you're going to have
15 300, but --

16 MR. HORTON: I think our -- if we were calling
17 it a breaking budget, I think the 80 to 85 is
18 probably where we -- we would still be able to break
19 even. But it's going to -- it's going to change the
20 way that our staffing would go tremendously. But the
21 120, we could still comfortably -- we could not just
22 survive, but we would -- as you can see, we -- we'd
23 still have a -- a good ending balance with 120 kids.
24 And that can be adjusted depending on if we need to
25 add more special services or, like, transportation

1 might be a little bit different than what we have
2 listed, but it gives us wiggle room.

3 MR. BALDWIN: Again, in year zero, you guys in
4 the 120-student example, you're showing \$500,000
5 other funding. And then in the other handout we
6 have, where you have the 300 -- you show 300,000 in
7 other funding. So what -- what is that and who is
8 that? Is that --

9 MR. HORTON: So the -- yeah, so for the 300 --
10 that 300,000 would be a bridge loan that we would
11 acquire. And so, initially, that would help us with
12 just start up. And -- and so that would help us with
13 maybe some staffing in the beginning, but also help
14 us with technology, professional services,
15 transportation, that type of thing. And we did
16 adjust that to 500,000 just because of the lower
17 number of kids.

18 MR. BALDWIN: Is that a credit facility that you
19 currently have a commitment on or is that just
20 something that you think you can get?

21 MR. HORTON: So talking with Round Table,
22 our funders, they said that's something that we could
23 get and they're going to help us with that. I have
24 been in talks with a couple of banks as well, but
25 it's -- and as you know, it's hard to get money from

1 someone when you don't have a charter. So that's --
2 that's one of those things that, like, once -- once
3 we have an idea on that, then we can start pursuing
4 that.

5 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah. And I am a banker, so I --

6 MR. HORTON: Yeah.

7 MR. BALDWIN: -- I understand that. Is this --
8 is the money philanthropic? Is it a philanthropic
9 organization?

10 MR. HORTON: Round Table?

11 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

12 So Round Table once we -- once we acquire our
13 funds through them, we will have to give them, I
14 believe it's a one percent -- 1.5 percent back off of
15 those funds, but it doesn't affect the -- the money
16 that we get. It's just kind of off the top.

17 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Okay.

18 MR. HORTON: And then, that was one thing I
19 wanted to make sure of because, I mean, y'all know
20 how charters work and so there is a good chance that
21 we'll be able to get grants and be able to get some
22 philanthropic money. But I did not want to include
23 that because I didn't want it to look like a pipe
24 dream. I wanted to be as realistic as we could.

25 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So -- so then in the

1 budget, we have a line item called Facilities
2 Building. So is this something that you are going to
3 -- anticipate renting space or building space? Talk
4 to us a little bit about that.

5 MR. HORTON: Yeah. So what's great about Round
6 Table is not only do they help with the start-up of
7 the charter school and especially with the financial
8 side, like back-office support and other things of
9 that nature, but they also -- their primary thing is
10 facilities. And so what we're -- we have someone
11 right now, and same thing, they're waiting on charter
12 approval, but we have a -- we have a building that we
13 assigned; it would be to own; it would not be -- it
14 would not be to lease or to rent. And so at that
15 point, once we get our money, that will also let us
16 be able to start in hopefully January, possibly
17 middle of January, to start renovating and get it
18 ready for the school.

19 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So that's where you --
20 that's why you have a debt-service coverage ratio, is
21 you're going to borrow money and --

22 MR. HORTON: And be paying that debt.

23 MR. BALDWIN: -- buy a building?

24 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir. And that's why year
25 three looks pretty lean. That's because by year

1 three, we're hoping to finish out the renovation. So
2 it's a -- the building that we got is 52,000 square
3 feet. We want to be able to keep all of our
4 classrooms on the first floor, maybe some admin
5 offices on the second. What has hurt us recently is
6 we know we're going to have to have a storm shelter
7 now and so that is something that we are -- we're
8 working towards putting in. And so that will also
9 give us -- we were going to do, I believe it was
10 three classrooms on the second floor. But now we're
11 going to put those more -- we were able to -- we've
12 been able to kind of push it out where we can use the
13 storm shelter, multi-purpose room; and then by year
14 three, we would hope to finish out the second floor.
15 And so that's why you see our facilities went up so
16 high.

17 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So the facilitates expense
18 of \$850,000 in year three can be debt service, it
19 could be utilities. It would be basically everything
20 or is there --

21 MR. HORTON: It's more -- it would be more
22 renovations.

23 MR. BALDWIN: Renovations?

24 MR. HORTON: And more debt service. Yes, sir.
25 As far as the utilities go, that's kind of a separate

1 line. So --

2 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. So that -- is that -- I
3 guess, I'm looking for that somewhere in here. I just
4 want to make sure you had captured all your costs of
5 owning building because it's always --

6 MR. HORTON: Yeah.

7 MR. BALDWIN: You want to do that.

8 MR. HORTON: And that's where we're so thankful
9 for Round Table. And they're based out of Utah, or
10 they would be here today. And I thought they might
11 be able to join us virtually, but I don't think they
12 -- I think they're little busy. But what's great
13 about them is they've helped us with the budget;
14 they've helped us with the building itself and so
15 they've got that experience and so they're --

16 MR. BALDWIN: I would require of them -- I would
17 get details of what's in that 850 --

18 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir.

19 MR. BALDWIN: And, you know, part of what
20 probably was not in there is the principal payment;
21 it's probably just interest and some other things
22 like that. And then a 1.01 debt service ratio is
23 kind of scary. So I would -- I would really work
24 with them on that. I know that's a few years away.

25 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir. Thank you.

1 MR. BALDWIN: But just some advice and
2 counseling.

3 MR. HORTON: Thank you.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. And then that's my -- the
5 end of my questioning.

6 MR. HORTON: Yeah. It's in the -- well, yeah, I
7 think it's in the year one monthly cash flow, but not
8 in the year three.

9 MS. BENNETT: Okay.

10 MR. HORTON: We didn't do a monthly cash flow
11 for year two, year three. So --

12 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Thank you.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Dr. Moore.

14 DR. MOORE: Good morning. I reiterate what my
15 fellow board members said about the presentation and
16 all in many details you provided and it's very
17 exciting to see. I worked with the Division of
18 Higher Ed and outdoor recreation has been -- I mean,
19 just last month we approved an associate, a technical
20 certificate and, like, seven certificates of
21 proficiency for National Park College related to
22 outdoor --

23 MR. HORTON: Yes.

24 DR. MOORE: -- recreation and tourism. So
25 certainly a push throughout our state and this is

1 very novel, very -- something very much new -- well,
2 apparently new to all of us. So trying to wrap my
3 head around it. In the past working with K-12 and
4 working in mathematics and looking at project-based
5 learning tools, especially focused on STEM learning
6 -- which you know this doesn't say "STEM", learning
7 in this --

8 MR. HORTON: Yes, ma'am.

9 DR. MOORE: -- inextricably. You can't
10 disconnect from this type of learning. But all that
11 to say, I can see how it works very well in the
12 earlier grades, it becomes a real challenge to be on
13 very level in the higher grades, especially in
14 mathematics and science. And because there's not a
15 curriculum necessarily developed for this. You know,
16 we have our list of HQIM that we have. Could you
17 just tell me more about that? Because you outlined
18 you're going to align to Arkansas standards, you give
19 some examples. Even the examples of the curriculum,
20 it's examples of students will be able to do these
21 things. But if you're going to have to create this
22 -- because we really moved away from teacher created
23 resources to high-quality instructional materials
24 that have been vetted by the Department here. Could
25 you just speak more to that? Because I'm struggling

1 to understand how logarithmic functions, you know --

2 MR. HORTON: Yes, ma'am.

3 DR. MOORE: -- unit circle and trigonometric
4 ratios will be taught --

5 MR. HORTON: Yes, ma'am.

6 DR. MOORE: -- just on the fly or how that's
7 going to work.

8 MR. HORTON: So we will be using -- as far as
9 for math, McGraw Hill; for English Solis; Pearson for
10 history; and for science, we'll be using Imagine
11 Learning, so I believe it's Twig and Traverse. And
12 so, essentially, what we've kind of done is we have
13 taken those HQIMs and we have applied standards and
14 aligned standards; and then that's where Shannon --
15 or Sharon has worked with being able to not just
16 build the curriculum within that but incorporating
17 all the outdoor things to that HQIM. And I'll let
18 her speak a little bit more to that. But then what I
19 also kind of say is that --

20 Did you have something you want to piggyback and
21 then I --

22 MS. BENNETT: Sure.

23 MR. HORTON: I'll think of it in a second. I
24 had it and then I started talking about HQIMs. I
25 didn't want to mess up the -- the word.

1 MS. BENNETT: Do you want to -- I'll leave this
2 here for later. Okay.

3 All right. Sharon Bennett, board president --
4 presumptive anyway.

5 So I can talk to that a little bit more and I
6 can completely understand, like, your -- your
7 question; right? It's like how do we continuously
8 deliver this; right? And I think the first thing is
9 that we start out with the standard and the
10 high-quality instruction material; right? Those --
11 those are the things that we're always going to start
12 with in contemplating a lesson. And so really it's
13 looking at how we can deliver that; right? There's
14 -- there's a couple of ways that we can do that. You
15 know, we're going to go with the templated approach
16 where we can produce these templates of, like, these
17 instructions that aligns to standards and tasks. And
18 the teacher can select those. You know, they'll be
19 indoor, you know, fallback, and of course, the
20 outdoor instruction. And so with that, just to speak
21 to a little bit that it's always aligned; the outdoor
22 activity for the week is connected to the indoor;
23 right? And so really it is learning that in
24 principle, but then the indirect application in,
25 like, a real-world setting outside. And I hope

1 that's answering a little bit of that. And so with
2 that, I think we're looking as we build that out, it
3 is like what are the perfect areas to deliver that?
4 Is it measuring this? It -- even a climbing
5 activity, for example. And just with -- not every
6 student would have to climb, but if you look at,
7 like, applied force in a climb and the fall for that,
8 you know, calculating that from the distance of the
9 fall. There are a lot of activities that you can
10 really connect in that way that still make it
11 meaningful even -- no matter the grade level or
12 experience level. And I hope that's a little bit of
13 what you --

14 DR. MOORE: So a little bit. But, like, to your
15 point, it's not like at any grade level, like there
16 are specific things that need to be taught once
17 you're in 11th grade, 12th grade --

18 MS. BENNETT: Yes.

19 DR. MOORE: -- in those courses. So who is
20 going to be the person looking at the high-quality
21 instructional material, even if you go and McGraw
22 Hill, that's going to look at that lesson and figure
23 out what matching -- because you're doing
24 multidisciplinary lessons, I'm sure?

25 MS. BENNETT: It will already be laid out for

1 them through a templated approach.

2 MS. BENNETT: Oh, go ahead.

3 MR. HORTON: Yeah. That's --

4 MS. BENNETT: I'm taking your stuff.

5 MR. HORTON: No. You're fine. Yeah.

6 Chris Horton, AOA director of schools.

7 That's what I went blank on all of a sudden. So
8 as far -- because that was one thing, we know that
9 we're trying to get away from teacher creating those
10 materials. And so the templates that we'll have in
11 place, those things -- it will give them an idea of
12 how to incorporate the outdoor side to it. We don't
13 want to make it where we're giving them everything.
14 We want them to still have the lesson, be their own,
15 but we want to be able to help them as much as
16 possible with the outdoor aspect of it; and so that
17 could be giving them examples within math where it
18 could be the fall -- fallback ratio of trees and just
19 give that as an example. And then that will
20 incorporate within what their specific lesson was.
21 But we want our teachers to be able to still create
22 their lesson plans, but we don't want them to feel
23 like they have to do everything. And so those
24 templates that we'll create they -- they will all be
25 aligned with -- with the curriculum like McGraw Hill,

1 and then whatever the unit plan is; and then also
2 aligned with the state standards. And so I think we
3 included that in some things, definitely in our
4 application, where we'll make sure that everything
5 within -- we've got, I believe, yearlong pacing
6 guides for some examples of it. And then we have a
7 nine weeks, a semester, a day, a week, that kind of
8 thing just to kind of give y'all kind of an idea of
9 what we want to do. But like you said, this is --
10 this is brand-new and so this is something that we
11 know that we're going to have to --

12 DR. MOORE: Right. And right now, I believe,
13 you have a six through nine since that's where you're
14 starting. And ten --

15 MR. HORTON: And --

16 DR. MOORE: And my concern is sort of in the
17 future when you add in 10th, 11th and 12th grade to
18 make sure that they're -- I can't talk today --
19 reaching that level of rigor is just a concern. So
20 could you elaborate on who is creating the template,
21 then?

22 MR. HORTON: So, currently, it's most of us,
23 yeah. We're working on -- because where Sharon has
24 the expertise in the outdoor and how to relate it
25 back, Hallee and I and Teal also have experience with

1 creating lesson plans and designing programs and that
2 kind of thing. And so we're all kind of working hand
3 in hand, where she's like -- Sharon will be like I
4 want to incorporate this. What would this align
5 with? And so as we're creating it, we're plugging
6 that stuff in. But it --

7 Teal, did you have anything you want to add to
8 it?

9 MS. LOVELADY: Yeah.

10 MR. HORTON: Yeah. I'll let her --

11 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

12 MS. LOVELADY: Teal Lovelady, I'll be serving as
13 one of the assistant principals and kind of over the
14 counseling program.

15 But we will align anything that is along with
16 the accreditations we need for our 11th through 12th
17 grade as well. I know there's certain credits that
18 they need to have for graduation, that kind of thing.
19 So anything that we need to have for classes and
20 added into the -- the layout of their education, we
21 will have. It will just kind of incorporate in a
22 different way within the outdoor setting. We also
23 are going to have instructional coaches as well. So
24 they're going to kind of be over -- making sure
25 everybody is aligned in the right way. And so we'll

1 make sure we have the right people in place for that,
2 for each grade level, and then also for each subject
3 matter. So --

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. And I don't want to belabor
5 it and I know I am, but this is just -- was the big
6 question for me as I looked at your application. And
7 I think -- it -- it's merited to just dig a little
8 deeper. So, for example, if you're using a
9 high-quality instructional material, it has a lesson.
10 The lesson is very thorough. I mean, it's, like,
11 start to finish everything in between, extra,
12 supplemental. To what extent would you be using that
13 along with the activity that you're doing outdoors?
14 And because, typically, we even, like, suggest
15 following the same scope and sequence that that's
16 already delivered in, and to do that alongside
17 multiple content areas, they -- how are they going to
18 match up? I don't understand how the template's
19 going to work because you're not supposed to just
20 pull random lessons.

21 MS. LOVELADY: Yeah. And --

22 DR. MOORE: There's, like, coherent scope and
23 sequence.

24 MS. LOVELADY: And so that's where we'll come
25 into play when we are able to align those -- those

1 lessons with the -- the high-quality instructional
2 materials. And so using those programs that we plan
3 on using, we're going to lay out, okay, what's next
4 in this -- this lesson here? Okay, how can we use,
5 you know, our outdoor day to incorporate within this
6 lesson here? And so it's more so just the
7 instructional coaches and us being able to support
8 our staff being able to incorporate those together.

9 DR. MOORE: So potentially the outdoor activity
10 will be made to fit the --

11 MS. LOVELDAY: Yes.

12 DR. MOORE: -- HQIM --

13 MS. LOVELADY: Yes. Yes.

14 DR. MOORE: -- not the HQIM --

15 MS. LOVELDAY: Yes. Yes.

16 DR. MOORE: -- to fit the outdoor curriculum?

17 MS. LOVELADAY: Yes.

18 MR. HORTON: Correct. Yes, ma'am.

19 MS. LOVELADY: Yes. So it's the incorporation
20 of the two, yes. Yes.

21 DR. MOORE: Okay. That's helpful. Thank you.
22 And then another question I had: some things say
23 that 50 percent will be instructional time outdoors,
24 some say 50 to 70 percent. Could you just clarify?

25 MS. LOVELADY: It'll be 50 percent.

1 DR. MOORE: Fifty percent? So the two --

2 MS. LOVELADY: That was -- that needed to be
3 adjusted because 70 percent, we realize, no, that's
4 going to be too much. We'll just stick to 50. So
5 that's where we are at.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you. And then, could
7 you speak a little more about opportunities for
8 concurrent credit. It was -- limited mention of that
9 in the application and just wanted to know more about
10 those opportunities for concurrent credit, not just
11 for CTE pathways, but for gen ed, what that looks
12 like?

13 MS. LOVELADY: Yeah. When we -- when we get to
14 the grade levels that are going to be able to do
15 concurrent credits, we'll be able to, like, work into
16 the -- that curriculum as well. So partnerships with
17 higher ed is one of our goals. We have some
18 coordination with them right now. And so that'll be
19 -- part of that is -- for our 12th graders at least,
20 to be able to incorporate that -- earn concurrent
21 credits.

22 DR. MOORE: So the latest legislation in
23 Arkansas for concurrent credit allows the ACCESS
24 Acceleration Scholarship to cover up to 15 hours a
25 semester starting in 9th grade. So I encourage you

1 to do that sooner than later.

2 MS. LOVELADY: Okay.

3 DR. MOORE: 12th grade is way too late --

4 MS. LOVELADY: Okay.

5 DR. MOORE: -- because we have students who will
6 start taking concurrent credit much earlier --

7 MS. LOVELADY: Okay.

8 DR. MOORE: -- than 12th grade.

9 MS. LOVELADY: Okay. Yes, ma'am.

10 DR. MOORE: And then along those same lines with
11 higher ed partnerships, I'm wondering -- and this is,
12 like, crystal ball -- what are what are your future
13 plans? Like, if everything goes wonderful, this
14 opens, just total success, do you look at having
15 other locations across the state? Because I'm
16 thinking about Northwest Arkansas Community College
17 --

18 MS. LOVELADY: Yes, yes.

19 DR. MOORE: -- and their outdoor rec program,
20 National Park College in Hot Springs, like where the
21 actual places are that people are engaging in this
22 outdoor activity.

23 MR. HORTON: Chris Horton, AOA director of
24 schools.

25 Yes. And that's -- from the very beginning,

1 we've been reaching out to those colleges. And that
2 -- it's -- we -- we're calling them potential
3 partnerships. But we love Chuck at National Parks
4 College. And the ones that we have that have
5 expressed interest with us they would be able to help
6 us with aligning them to their pathways. And so that
7 -- that's one of those things that we want to be able
8 to develop, is not just partnerships with them, but
9 being able to do intern/externships and being able to
10 bring their kids in to help or us send their -- our
11 kids to them once we graduate. But what we want for
12 right now, to be completely honest, is we want to do
13 this the right way here because we know that it is a
14 brand-new concept and it's very innovative; and so we
15 want to make sure that we're doing everything the
16 right way and if that takes three to five years, then
17 awesome; if it takes ten years, awesome. But our end
18 goal would be five schools, one in Central Arkansas
19 and then four on each corner of the state. We really
20 want to be able to put one in the delta because we
21 know that that is a -- that's a need, and that's
22 something that the state is really looking to build
23 up in the outdoor scheme as well. But of course,
24 Northwest Arkansas would be one. But we want to
25 grow, but like I said, we want to make sure we're

1 doing things here the right way first.

2 DR. MOORE: Okay. And final question, if this
3 comes through fruition, how would I sign up to be a
4 chaperone? Sounds -- sounds pretty fun.

5 MR. HORTON: We -- we definitely have to put you
6 through a background check, but as long as you pass
7 that, we would love to have you.

8 DR. MOORE: Thanks.

9 No more questions at this time.

10 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay, very good.

11 Dr. Beshears-Duncan.

12 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yes, thank you.

13 So this is so exciting. And I'll just say a
14 little bit more about what I mean by that. I was a
15 part of a team in 2019, pre-2020, and all that
16 happened then, from north and North Central Arkansas.
17 After hearing from students and businesses and
18 tourism leaders and who were interested something
19 like this; I'll say it's reminiscent. This is much
20 more comprehensive and coherent than -- than we ever
21 got. A part of that team, we learned about the
22 importance of informed risk-taking taking on brain
23 development.

24 MR. HORTON: Yes.

25 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: We got deeper into the

1 importance on those social/emotional skills for
2 kiddos, particularly the perseverance. And then, you
3 all have already mentioned the importance of transfer
4 and experiential learning, when transferred well to
5 the classroom, really supports mastering. So this is
6 not so much as a question of consideration. Although
7 I've lost touch with that team, I'm hopeful that I
8 may be able to drum up some of those names and
9 connections and offer them to you all.

10 MR. HORTON: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. That
11 would be amazing.
12 We would love that.

13 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Great. Okay. Thank you.
14 I will definitely do that. The second is more of a
15 consideration and it's a bit of a crystal-ball
16 consideration. I'm thinking about kiddos, in Central
17 Arkansas, word is going to spread when you are
18 successful. Kiddos who may want to be involved in
19 some of these outdoor activities, but they're not
20 quite ready to take the lead to enrolling in academic
21 modeling, what might be some ways you can engage them
22 and help them and their families learn about this
23 model?

24 MR. HORTON: I know that, especially, with the
25 community that we want to be able to have these days

1 or weekends where we involve the community to come in
2 and just kind of celebrate what we're doing; but also
3 at the same time, be able to show others, like,
4 things that we would be incorporating and what we
5 want to do. And I kind of touched on a little
6 earlier, like, my dream would be to -- I mean, I'll
7 just be completely honest with you, there's a piece
8 of land that's in Little Rock, that that we wanted
9 from the very beginning, that -- that has everything
10 that we would need for those experiential learnings.
11 And if we were able to get that, we would love to be
12 able to do summer camps where we're -- yeah, it's a
13 -- you're getting to go and experience all those
14 great recreational things, but we're also
15 incorporating the stuff that you're going to see in
16 our school. And so they're going to get a taste of a
17 little bit of everything and then hopefully go back
18 and tell their parents, this was actually school.
19 Like, we actually learned something. It wasn't just
20 kayaking or climbing or whatever. It's -- like, it
21 is actually educational. And so we're hoping that
22 that will kind of stir that interest.

23 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you. And so
24 consideration in that -- and that's great to hear. A
25 consideration in that too might be to continue to

1 consider how we might involve kids who don't want to
2 leave a more traditional academic model, yet want to
3 be involved. So summer camps, days, other schools
4 that maybe have flexible schedules --

5 MR. HORTON: Yeah.

6 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: -- just thinking
7 innovatively about that.

8 MR. HORTON: Yeah. And we're hoping with our
9 partnerships with Little Rock Parks and Rec --

10 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yes.

11 MR. HORTON: -- that we're going to be able to
12 not just serve the kids from our school, but we want
13 to be good stewards to the city as well. And so I
14 believe that that's where you can also offer those
15 extracurricular things or those different
16 after-school programs or summer programs where you
17 can involve these kids that go to other schools.

18 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yeah. Thank you so much.
19 No further questions.

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: All right.

21 Well, again, thank you for your presentation.
22 It always does my heart good to see CTE focused
23 charter schools. And so, again, echoing my charter
24 members that appreciate the thoughtful process that
25 you went through to come up with your supplication

1 and the idea. It was -- definitely came through in
2 the wording of your application and what you included
3 in there. I do have a couple of questions just for
4 clarification so I can get a better understanding of
5 the implementation of this model.

6 So I believe it was on slide ten. And I don't
7 know if you can pull that back up? Would that help
8 you? Or if you will look back at that one? So on
9 slide ten and then if I compare it to what's in your
10 application on page 29, which is the list of pathways
11 that you're planning to offer, trying to figure out
12 exactly which ones you're wanting to. Because it
13 looks like that you're wanting to start off with the
14 minimum of three with an addition of the other
15 pathway. I'm keeping in mind that the outdoor rec
16 and conservation pathways will be in -- written at
17 this point. And we are only creating level one, so
18 we're very early stages on that. But just trying to
19 get a better sense of which pathways you'll be
20 wanting to include in your school.

21 MS. BENNETT: So Sharon Bennett, board
22 presumptive president, AOA.

23 So just to speak to that a little bit further, I
24 know on the application there was a lot of different
25 materials presented CTE-wise. I think they even

1 included my CTE program that I created originally
2 with a lot of industry recognized credentials that
3 necessarily don't line up to the current CTE
4 pathways. But just to clarify that slide -- this
5 slide, is the correct one.

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

7 MS. BENNETT: Those are the -- the pathways and
8 clusters that we are planning to align to. Now, I do
9 understand what you're saying and I'm part of that
10 CTE committee along with Dr. Moore for outdoor
11 recreation and conservation. So I do serve on that
12 committee. So I know that progress there. So --
13 yes. So when it becomes relevant and the time for us
14 to adopt those, we will -- we know some of these
15 items will roll actually into those programs or there
16 will be overlap with those CTE pathways. But the
17 ones on these slides, these -- these are the ones we
18 were connecting to.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. And so thinking
20 back to the teachers that are going to be teaching
21 these courses, what is your plan to make sure that
22 you have the appropriate teachers, teaching the
23 pathway appropriately, with the appropriate
24 credentials in that system?

25 MS. BENNETT: Teal, do you want to talk to that

1 a little bit or --

2 I mean, essentially, we're going to be looking
3 for different ways to implement it; right? That --
4 that could be bringing in industry partners, right,
5 who have teachers involved, like Arkansas Game and
6 Fish, they do have, you know, educators that are
7 involved with that. It could be, you know, employing
8 our own. We do have several people who've reached
9 out to us that have worked in CTE certification
10 programs and taught CTE courses that want to be a
11 part of the school. So it is looking in those spaces
12 to recruit them.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So what I hear
14 you saying is that you're going to target CTE
15 teachers to teach the appropriate pathways?

16 MS. BENNETT: Yes.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Okay. And then,
18 we look at going back a little bit, following up on
19 Dr. Moore's question about concurrent credit. So
20 outside of that opportunity, what other opportunities
21 will students have for accelerated learning through
22 these pathways in your model?

23 MS. BENNETT: Teal, I think that would be you.
24 I'll let Teal come up here and --

25 MS. LOVELADY: Teal Lovelady. I will be the

1 assistant principal and then also incorporation of
2 counseling program.

3 So we're going to be involving
4 internships/externships with our partnerships that we
5 have. We will have appropriate -- just the
6 partnerships in general that we -- we're going to be
7 making with higher education. We haven't made MOUs
8 with them yet. So we don't want to say anything
9 along the lines of who we're going to be partnering
10 with. And so we'll be able to have, you know,
11 appropriate -- we got the Parks -- Parks and Rec.
12 And so we'll be able to do internships/externships
13 with them as well, allowing them to be able to --
14 sorry, essentially just partnerships in general is
15 going to allow us to have more of -- I'm sorry. I'm
16 going blank.

17 Do y'all want to speak on anymore of that?

18 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And so, I guess, maybe
19 to help with that answer.

20 MS. LOVELADY: Yes.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So as a student that's
22 in the classroom that's, you know, receiving
23 instruction, what opportunities are going to be
24 provided to them to have them have opportunities for
25 accelerated learning through that process? So I

1 understand and I appreciate work-based learning
2 which, you know, definitely supports the pathway,
3 allows students to be able to demonstrate what
4 they're learning in the classroom is great. But as
5 they are going through the instruction, what
6 opportunities will they have for accelerated learning
7 that way?

8 MS. LOVELADY: I mean, there's additional
9 certifications as well. And so as we get further
10 into that incorporation of outdoors and the -- the
11 CTE programs that we were hoping to -- to be a part
12 of, we're going to be able to have students have
13 certifications and different levels of -- you know,
14 we can even do a -- the CPR, and then wilderness
15 first aid. And they're going to have -- before they
16 graduate, we're hoping that we'll be able to have the
17 incorporation of that as well.

18 But I'll let you guys speak on it. Yeah.
19 Sorry.

20 MS. HUGHES: Hallee Hughes, principal.

21 So on -- to speak to that, also, of course, we
22 -- we would like to -- we've already kind of been
23 thinking about how to create a robust gifted and
24 talented program, so -- through the GT program.
25 Industry credentials will be very important. So that

1 is also for, you know, when we think of pathways and
2 we think we'd like to have our pathways where there's
3 kind of exit ramps. So if that pathway is medical
4 sciences and maybe you go all the way from, you know,
5 kind of idea our student thinks they want to be a
6 nurse, but we're able to give them CNA training and
7 things like that. So if they take those off ramps.
8 Or if, like many of us in Arkansas, they have to work
9 during school to pay for higher education, they have
10 those abilities. Another one of those is our
11 partnerships in higher Ed for the -- for the dual
12 concurrent -- for the concurrent courses. We have
13 spoken to quite a few institutions. And we would
14 like -- that are using these same pathways and are
15 bringing these same pathways to their institutions to
16 be able to connect to them and do dual credits, so
17 they might be virtual that might be on site for them.
18 We're able to offer those dual credit courses so
19 they're they already have credits in those programs
20 once they attend that school.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So a capstone
22 project, what would that look like?

23 MS. HUGHES: So a capstone project, okay, well,
24 one of the things that we have really kind of had fun
25 with when we thought about it and we -- we started

1 thinking about this was trail design. And so what we
2 would like to do, and what we'd like to see -- and
3 we've already talked to even Little Rock Parks and
4 Rec -- is your seniors, your juniors may be designing
5 mountain bike trails for, you know, different at
6 different levels and -- and different -- for
7 different, maybe a beginner like me if I'm going down
8 one. I just need pavement. But you know we've got
9 the ramps, and we've got the side curves and all of
10 those things and that's math; that's science; right?
11 And so they're creating that project and designing
12 that trail. The cool part of that is what we would
13 like to see is maybe our 10th and 9th graders are out
14 there putting it together; right? So they're getting
15 that hands on part of it, but it's all student led
16 student driven inside the classroom where we're
17 designing and we're preparing and then outdoors where
18 they are putting it together. So that is an example
19 of what a capstone project may look for an AOA junior
20 or senior.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Your counseling plan.
22 So I noticed in your waivers that you have requested
23 a waiver for a licensed school counselor, but on one
24 -- in your slides on your organizational chart, it
25 showed school counselors.

1 MS. HUGHES: Yeah.

2 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So can you explain a
3 little bit how that's going to work, that model, what
4 that -- what that supports going to look like for our
5 students?

6 MS. HUGHES: I'll let Teal speak to that. She's
7 over that part.

8 MS. LOVELADY: Teal Lovelady. I will be
9 assistant principal then also at the counseling
10 program as well.

11 So I am a licensed school counselor,
12 professional school counselor. And so I will be
13 licensed. But within the additional, like, student
14 services -- or excuse me, the student success plans
15 that we'll be making, when we have additional
16 staffing with counseling, that would be part of the
17 -- the role. So it wouldn't just be me, it would be
18 part of -- it'd be -- the other counselors that would
19 be involved that may not have the full accreditations
20 just yet, will be in that that process.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So you're leading the
22 team and then you'll have a team --

23 MS. LOVELADY: At this point, yes.

24 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: That will -- may not be
25 licensed counselor --

1 MS. LOVELADY: Yes.

2 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- but they'll be
3 working under --

4 MS. LOVELADY: Yes.

5 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- a licensed counselor
6 increasing that support?

7 MS. LOVELADY: Yes, ma'am.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. What about
9 leadership opportunities for our students, what does
10 that look like -- or leadership development
11 opportunities for our students?

12 MS. HUGHES: Hallee Hughes, principal.

13 So that falls under a couple of things for us.
14 Within our core values is G.R.I.T. and that growth
15 resilience, I'm going to blank on the I --

16 MS. BENNETT: Integrity.

17 MR. HORTON: Integrity.

18 MS. HUGHES: -- integrity. That's not one to
19 blank on. Integrity and teamwork. And so, you know,
20 I think we -- I'll speak to unsupervised play for a
21 minute and some research on unsupervised play. And
22 you'll have to forgive me if I can't give the exact
23 citation on that, but that's a good question. So,
24 you know, what we've seen with unsupervised play and
25 with student interaction is when they're stuck

1 behind, maybe in -- like, technology for so long or
2 they're not -- they're not being able to -- what am I
3 looking for here -- kind of speak to each other and
4 socialize, you know, within the classroom, they're
5 kind of -- they're -- they become -- it's a lone
6 wolf, is kind of what you see that maybe schools are
7 kind of creating. That -- kids that are able to
8 focus on themselves and focus ahead, but they cannot
9 work well with peers. And so I don't know. I think
10 leadership and teamwork are -- are very closely
11 aligned. I think you can't have a good leader
12 without a team -- good team member. And that is kind
13 of the vision for putting these students outdoors,
14 where they're doing outdoor activities together, is
15 it's, like, that goes back to that unsupervised play.
16 Leadership skills are learned through trial and
17 error. We want our students to fail. We want them
18 to fail. We want them to fail under our guidance and
19 with one another where they can build each other up
20 and grow. Because, you know, growth is -- only comes
21 from when they're uncomfortable. And so our big
22 belief on team is leadership and teamwork is that
23 they're going to learn those things kind of in that
24 unsupervised play, just in that natural classroom.
25 But our structure for that, the idea for well how we

1 will offer support to that as a school or office, you
2 know, we will have clubs and courses and leadership.
3 Our pathways will include leadership courses. And
4 then we will also student governance. And I think
5 that there are programs out there that maybe other
6 schools in Arkansas are using that are good for those
7 sorts of things, as in character schools, Leader in
8 Me, those sorts of things that we have looked at as
9 well. But it comes back to the G.R.I.T. and the
10 resilience and that growth that they're just going to
11 learn doing things, right, and that sounds very,
12 like, okay, kind of crunchy and granoley; right? But
13 it's -- there -- there's science behind that, in that
14 unsupervised play. And that's kind of where we want
15 that to happen organically with guidance and
16 structure from us. So clubs, student governance. We
17 really -- a big part, if you look at our engagement,
18 is student feedback and student surveys. So we
19 aren't just asking parents how is your learner -- how
20 is your kids learning going? We plan to reach out to
21 students and ask students, how's your learning going?
22 What can we do? What can we do better? And --

23 MS. BENNETT: Hallee, can I offer something in
24 addition to that?

25 MS. HUGHES: Yeah.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

2 MS. HUGHES: I'll let Sharon --

3 MS. BENNETT: I think that's an excellent
4 question.

5 Sharon Bennett, board president, AOA.

6 So in our trips themselves, there are leadership
7 opportunities available and that will include, you
8 know, even GT students. Everyone has a role and a
9 purpose at these -- these excursions outdoors.
10 Someone may be a timekeeper; someone may be over, you
11 know, managing hydration within the group; someone
12 may be, you know, helping assist the teacher with an
13 exercise. So there's different leadership roles
14 within the group. I'm a big believer in the way that
15 we keep students engaged is everybody has a role. So
16 I think that kind of blends into the leadership they
17 were saying. But in addition to that, I think with
18 this type of school, there are wonderful
19 opportunities, kind of to what Hallee was saying, for
20 the kids to create their own formations, like
21 conservation groups and direct kind of what they care
22 about individually, organized within themselves.
23 Obviously, with our guidance. But with just
24 activities like that. If we have a little branch of
25 climbers' coalition there, things of that nature.

1 Really bringing in those concepts that we see in
2 nonprofits and outdoor communities in here and
3 creating their own formations of those communities.

4 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you.

5 And, just briefly, sorry. So just circling
6 back. So from the conversations of you're working
7 with folks in our division and working through
8 development of the pathway, it is your intention to
9 offer -- which you have listed as three different
10 ones, but you're going to offer really rec and
11 conservation is the pathway and first responders is
12 not going to --

13 MS. BENNETT: So we will continue with first
14 responders because we believe that, as part of that
15 -- Arkansas' growing outdoor community and as we
16 increase recreation, that first responders are a core
17 component; right? We'll definitely need people who
18 are trained on terrain and have, you know, expertise
19 outdoors to care for people who are recreating in our
20 state. And that will, you know, it's going through
21 that EMT, paramedic track, but also looking at things
22 like SARs rescue, additional components like that
23 that's really tailored to the needs of recreation and
24 outdoors in Arkansas.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

1 If there's additional questions -- so I believe
2 Dr. Moore first and then Dr. Beshears-Duncan.

3 DR. MOORE: So I want to ask a question as a
4 little bit of follow up to that. As I was looking at
5 your CTE Pathways, one point of clarification, you
6 list, like, two Arkansas H2 jobs connected to this
7 pathway. I just want to be clear that as you've
8 worked with our CTE folks, that you realize that a
9 CTE pathway is not based upon individual jobs? Like,
10 to be an H2 pathway, just having one H2 job in there.
11 Like, it's two different things.

12 MS. BENNETT: Yes.

13 DR. MOORE: Okay. And that you're required to
14 offer an H2 pathway --

15 MS. BENNETT: Yes.

16 DR. MOORE: -- not just pathways that --

17 MS. BENNETT: An H2 pathway, yes.

18 DR. MOORE: -- have H2 jobs.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So if you wouldn't mind
20 coming --

21 MS. BENNETT: Oh, yes, I'm so sorry.

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: It's okay.

23 MS. BENNETT: Sharon Bennett, AOA board
24 president.

25 Yes. We realize that we actually do have to,

1 you know, provide that pathway for that career. And
2 we think those are great careers to engage in here in
3 Arkansas. So we are committed to that.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. But to be clear, that you
5 have to offer one CTE pathway --

6 MS. BENNETT: Yes.

7 DR. MOORE: -- itself that is designated by the
8 state as an H2 pathway on the --

9 MS. BENNETT: Yes. Correct.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay.

11 MS. BENNETT: That is -- that is our goal, yes.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: That's what I was trying
13 to get you to be clear --

14 MS. BENNETT: I'm so sorry. I think I did
15 everything but actually answer your question.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I was trying to lead you
17 to --

18 MS. BENNETT: I appreciate it.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: That's okay.

20 DR. MOORE: And then also in relation a little
21 bit to the CTE pathways in your business and industry
22 partners, when you list your partners -- and this is
23 more of a comment than a question. But when you list
24 your partners, your industry partners are limited to
25 forest and natural resource industry, which those are

1 great, but I would highly recommend that you ensure
2 that for any CTE pathway that you have strong
3 industry partners for each of those. So if you're
4 doing something with hospitality and tourism, you
5 know, local partners with hotels. And if you're
6 doing EMS, MEMS partnerships. And just to extend
7 your business and you may already have them and just
8 didn't --

9 MS. BENNETT: And we are working through those.

10 DR. MOORE: -- put it on the many slides that
11 you have.

12 MS. BENNETT: Yeah. And some of them, they're
13 still being solidified, honestly. And so part of our
14 hesitation is just, you know, they're -- they're not
15 fully in fruition yet. We're talking through the
16 process. Obviously, a lot of them are very
17 interested, but it -- it it's also dependent on our
18 charter acceptance. So we are working with those.
19 We have lots of opportunity, we think, within the
20 area. Just an example, for Little Rock tourism, to
21 engage with them as a -- as a partner for the school.
22 That's, you know, a really exciting opportunity. So
23 it is definitely looking further just outside of
24 those and just outside of the terms of state parks
25 and really looking at like community partners in

1 industries that can help us drive our career-ready
2 labs and give meaningful feedback onto what's
3 important to them in the workplace.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

5 MS. BENNETT: Thank you for the question.

6 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: So this may be a question
7 for the Department internally supporting or it may be
8 a request. I'm not sure. It's related to the
9 instructional templates and what you'll be planning
10 for grades ten through 12 once you get there. And
11 just to, for the record, would really like the
12 opportunity to hear more about that when the time
13 comes.

14 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

15 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: That's it.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Do you have a question?
17 You have a question from Mr. Baldwin.

18 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

19 Just final question from me. And it's really
20 more of a thought I would like to add that you also
21 hear from the Panel or ADE on this. So one thought.
22 And we talked about Round Table when we were looking
23 at the budget and some of that. I don't really know
24 who that is, and it would be good, I think, for the
25 Panel to have more information on Round Table to see

1 what their capacity is. And I know you don't have --
2 you probably don't have that today, but that might be
3 good to have -- to be sent. I think that's part of
4 what we should consider for -- at least staff an
5 opportunity?

6 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir.

7 Chris Horton, director of schools.

8 And we can provide more information to you
9 regarding them, but just a short synopsis, they're
10 based out of Utah. They have served the -- the help
11 of creating charter schools as far as, like, startups
12 in Arizona, Utah, Oklahoma, Ohio, New Hampshire. And
13 so it -- they're someone who -- they're not just
14 someone who's going to help with the start up, but
15 they're going to also stick around and make sure that
16 we're supported as well. But if that's something
17 that's necessary, we can have you talk to them.

18 MR. BALDWIN: I think I -- they're important to
19 you all.

20 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir.

21 MR. BALDWIN: So I'd like to see who they are and
22 what they are and really see their financial capacity
23 and how much they can support, and do they have the
24 capacity for that?

25 MR. HORTON: Yes, sir.

1 MR. BALDWIN: So that was one -- that was one
2 question -- comment. And then, the other is --

3 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So before we move to
4 your second --

5 So I guess my -- for clarification, are they
6 serving as your CMO or no?

7 MR. HORTON: No.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: No. Yeah, okay. So
9 you're --

10 MR. HORTON: No CMO.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

12 MR. HORTON: They're just helping us with
13 startup money and helping us with facilities and
14 helping us set up budget for the next three to five
15 years. But they -- they work with us to help us
16 sustain, but also to grow. So they'll be with us for
17 a long time.

18 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

19 MR. BALDWIN: And then the -- the final thought
20 would be -- and I guess I'm sitting here thinking how
21 do we support you all in your innovation when a lot
22 of what you've talked to us about today is under
23 development, to be developed. So we didn't -- we
24 have really seen the outcome, the output. You talked
25 a lot about that. And then, I'm just going back to

1 the lesson plans and how you're teaching math and
2 science in the context of all this. And I'm not an
3 educator, so that's -- that's beyond me, but when we
4 have a school coming to request a charter, usually
5 all this is done and we're looking at the actual
6 program notes maybe even curriculum.

7 MR. HORTON: Correct.

8 MR. BALDWIN: And so in the process of
9 supporting you, I guess, is question about how do we
10 go forward? But then also have the opportunity to
11 look at finished curriculum and finished process
12 before you start, you know, before you jump out and
13 start educating kids.

14 MR. HORTON: And I know we didn't want to
15 overwhelm you with five classes worth of curriculum.

16 Is the 6th grade one, is that in the ADE
17 responses or in the file?

18 MS. BENNETT: Yeah. It's -- we just have a
19 sample, I think, we have provided in responses, but
20 it's not really kind of the template approach or
21 probably what your -- I probably need to --

22 MR. HORTON: Yeah.

23 MS. BENNETT: Sorry about that. Sharon Bennett,
24 AOA board president.

25 So we have developed a lot of the -- a lot of

1 the templated curriculum that teachers would use
2 already. We've developed it out for the 6th and 7th
3 grade. And so we did provide, I think, in the ADE
4 response packet kind of a sample of that, but I don't
5 think it probably rises to the rigor of what you're
6 wanting to see. So we -- we can definitely work with
7 the Department of Education on submitting that and
8 making sure there's oversight on those items because
9 we hear -- and it's important for us too; right? We
10 want to -- I mean we -- you know, our -- our core
11 principles are safety and standards; right? And so
12 it's very important for us to adhere to them to.

13 MR. HORTON: And I -- Chris Horton, director of
14 schools.

15 And I would just kind of piggyback off of that
16 and just say that, I mean, as far as, like, what
17 y'all can do to help us, like, we -- we want to work
18 with you and work with the Department of Ed
19 throughout this entire process. And so that's one of
20 those things where, as we're developing our
21 curriculum, we're -- we're going to work very closely
22 with them to make sure that not only are we meeting
23 the scope and the sequence and the standards, but
24 that we're getting our kids the outdoor aspect of it
25 as well.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

2 Dr. Bacon.

3 DR. BACON: Can I ask the question? Earlier
4 about those resources and support, I know you
5 mentioned you made a budget adjustment in a
6 conversation with Nick Hill at APSRC. Have you all
7 engaged with APSRC? And, you know, when you thinking
8 about building out curriculums, an incredible
9 instructional resource; if you're talking about
10 financial questions, incredible financial -- I just
11 want to make sure you all have connected there.

12 MR. HORTON: They -- they have been tremendous.
13 Amazing. I think from day one Ms. Baroni has -- has
14 been working with us and talking with us. And we
15 have been able to talk with Tripp and talk with Nick
16 and talk with everyone. And that's another line of
17 support that we're going to lean on heavily because
18 they have the experience that we might not
19 necessarily --

20 DR. BACON: Yeah.

21 MR. HORTON: -- have in some of those aspects.

22 DR. BACON: Yeah. That's what I was going to
23 say. So I would really encourage that because --
24 another question. Stepping back, I was just curious
25 from you and the principals, sort of what's your

1 educational background, leadership background? I
2 know how incredibly complicated it is and started
3 school from scratch, so I'm just curious in terms of
4 what kind of leadership, school leadership
5 backgrounds you all have.

6 MR. HORTON: Right. So within that 21 years of
7 education, at another school, I was on a leadership
8 team which helped oversight of pretty much everything
9 within the school, scope and sequence. I have my
10 Master's in Educational Leadership. I have my
11 building, principal license, superintendent license
12 -- or certification. But then, I also have over, oh,
13 ten year -- ten years of athletic director experience
14 where I've started teams from scratch. At the last
15 school that I was at, I created curriculum for
16 English and for Health and PE and for Bible and for
17 speech. And I was at a small private school. And so
18 if you know anything about those, you're -- you're
19 wearing many, many hats. And so if you have vending
20 machines that you need me to stock and/or fix, I can
21 also do that as well. I learned that over the years.
22 So, I mean, just -- I -- I would think my time at my
23 private school has given me a lot of experience and
24 opportunities to be able to lead kids and -- and to
25 build those relationships with those kids. And so

1 tie that in with lack of resources and lack of
2 curriculum and being able to have to create it from
3 scratch, that kind of gives us a -- a good idea of
4 that.

5 MS. HUGHES: Hallee Hughes, principal.

6 So my background is I was, out of college, a
7 Little Rock police officer for 13 years where I
8 worked on patrol, high of high -- or apprehension
9 squads and narcotics. I went to law school and while
10 I was going to law school, I'm going to tell you the
11 truth, I thought I don't really want to be a lawyer.
12 But I'm not a quitter either. So I finished law
13 school in 2018/19, while I was going to prepare for
14 the bar, I started substituting it at my current
15 school and I fell in love with teaching. I fell in
16 love with education. And the difference that I
17 thought I was going to make in law, I saw I could
18 actually make in the classroom. So I've been with my
19 current school since then, seven years. I'm -- not
20 to brag, but I think we're currently, probably, the
21 best charter school in the state where I am
22 currently. And I am now dean of students there, so
23 assistant principal. I planned on going back to
24 school during all of this as well and going ahead and
25 getting my Master's in Building Leadership. So

1 again, my upper -- my graduate level experience is
2 actually in law. And then, I also provide training
3 for the current school I'm at in some areas,
4 restraint care and yeah, a little -- you know, as an
5 assistant principal you do a little bit of
6 everything.

7 DR. BACON: Thank you. I appreciate both of
8 you. And in light of that, I would just -- I would
9 implore you to work with people like DESE, APSRC
10 people that can help you --

11 MR. HORTON: Yes.

12 DR. BACON: -- through all the quagmire of
13 starting a school. It is not easy. There is so much
14 you don't know. And so having not been in those
15 positions at that highest level of superintendency,
16 assistant, I would -- if you get a -- I would say --
17 I would implore you to work with these two resources
18 and make sure --

19 MS. HUGHES: APSRC has been amazing.

20 DR. BACON: Yeah.

21 MS. HUGHES: Yeah.

22 DR. BACON: Yeah.

23 MS. HUGHES: Really, really great to work with.

24 DR. BACON: Yeah. Thank you.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Any other

1 questions?

2 MS. STEWART: Okay. I just have a very quick
3 question. As I was looking back over some of the
4 waivers -- and I appreciate the fact that for the ALE
5 specific waiver you wanted flexibility in that. And
6 so I -- it just brought some questions to mind
7 thinking about, again, student supports and special
8 populations. Looking at how you're delivering that
9 with, you know, the variety of -- a combination of
10 supports -- I guess it would been more along the
11 counseling piece of it. What are your specifics,
12 knowing that -- that you are going to be delivering
13 specific services to, you know, a wide variety of
14 students and perhaps needing supports? What is that
15 going to look like from an -- basically, the ALE
16 lense?

17 MS. LOVELADY: Teal Lovelady, assistant
18 principal, counseling.

19 Essentially, we will have culturally responsive
20 staff members and those staff members -- staff
21 members are going to be trained to be able to support
22 student services and also the -- the counseling
23 program as well. We'll have partnerships with many
24 programs outside of the scope of what we can have at
25 our campus. So like OT, PT, mental health services,

1 that kind of stuff, they'll be rolling into our
2 school to -- to support along with the counseling
3 services that will be able to support those programs
4 as well.

5 MS. STEWART: Okay. And so along with my
6 colleagues, I would definitely suggest leaning into
7 supports with DESE, supports with, you know, the --
8 the Office of Special Ed, APSRC just around that in
9 particular. Just, you know, to ensure that any, you
10 know, barriers or -- or landmines that might come up,
11 you are able to navigate through those.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: All right. Any other
13 questions or comments for the charter?

14 (NO RESPONSE)

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Seeing none,
16 okay. If there's not any other questions for charter
17 in regards to the application, I will now entertain
18 a motion.

19 DR. MOORE: I have a question --

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

21 DR. MOORE: -- just for --

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Sure.

23 DR. MOORE: So every time this comes up, I'm
24 never sure what we're supposed to do here. So Mr.
25 Baldwin asked about seeing things on down the road a

1 little bit before they actually start. What would be
2 the -- the operation -- order of operations if we
3 wanted to move to approve the pending them coming
4 back in the spring after they've developed a little
5 more to bring back some examples to us?

6 DR. SMITH: Absolutely. Great question.

7 Darrell Smith, assistant commissioner,
8 Department of Education.

9 So part of -- after the approval process, there
10 is a pre-opening checklist, a pre-opening procedure
11 that all charters must go through in order to kind of
12 fulfill -- make sure they're on track to open. One
13 of those things, obviously, is finances. And so you
14 can certainly, as part of your approval to ask for a
15 greater -- you know, in greater detail the -- those
16 that will be managing the finances of the charter
17 school and of a greater report at some point as part
18 of the pre-opening checklist. So we will almost
19 always -- we have a report back somewhere within
20 three to six months of the charter being approved as
21 they just to report on where they are in the process
22 of through -- going to the checklist to get ready for
23 the opening of the 20 -- in this case the fall of
24 '26. So --

25 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

1 MR. BALDWIN: And I appreciate that question. I
2 think it would be good if we want to go ahead and ask
3 you guys to come back at some point in time and kind
4 of fill in blanks on what we have right now, relative
5 to Round Table, budget and your curriculum.

6 DR. SMITH: So we can certainly put that as part
7 of your -- as part of your motion. But we'll also
8 make sure it's part of The pre-opening checklist as
9 well.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay.

11 DR. BACON: Is that your motion?

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: No, no. We're -- I
13 think we're still asking questions and clarification
14 before we present a motion.

15 DR. BACON: Okay.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

17 DR. MOORE: That answers mine.

18 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

19 So are there any other questions or discussion
20 needs to take place?

21 (NO RESPONSE)

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Seeing none, so
23 again, if there are no further questions or
24 discussions, then I'll accept a motion on the
25 open-enrollment charter school application of

1 Arkansas Outdoor Academy.

2 MR. BALDWIN: So I -- I will make a motion to
3 approve the charter and to ask them to come back
4 three months, four months, some the period of time
5 before they start, to provide us information --
6 detailed information -- on Round Table, financial
7 capacity with that organization and contractual
8 support for that and then also the scope of the
9 lesson plans and detailing the academic curriculum.

10 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Is your
11 preference three or four months?

12 DR. MOORE: Can we just say be part of the
13 checklist?

14 MR. BALDWIN: Could be part of the checklist.
15 Yeah.

16 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: What is the timeline for
17 the checklist? Sorry, Dr. Smith, get your steps in
18 today.

19 DR. SMITH: I need my steps in this morning
20 anyway, so you're good.

21 Darrell Smith, Department of Education.

22 So the checklist basically begins upon a final
23 approval. So at that point, they basically have up
24 till, like, June of -- June 1st of 2026 to complete
25 the steps. Obviously, certain things have to be done

1 in order. And so, typically, we would have the group
2 come back in about four to six months. And so in
3 this case it would probably give them a little time
4 to kind of work through some of the things that need
5 to be worked through. Now, that -- once they have an
6 approved charter in their hands and that way they can
7 start working with some of these other entities and
8 the partnerships developing out the curriculum a
9 little bit as they start seeing what type of students
10 they're going to have as part of their school. I
11 would recommend maybe February, January or February
12 return back to the Panel for a report.

13 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you.

14 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Let's say February.

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

16 MS. STEWART: I second.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: All right. So there is
18 a motion by Mr. Baldwin, a second by Ms. Stewart that
19 we approve the application for Arkansas Outdoor
20 Academy with the expectation that they will return to
21 us in February with additional information about
22 Round Table's partnership with their organization, as
23 well as providing a scope of lesson plans for us to
24 review at that time.

25 Okay. Is there any further discussion or

1 questions on the motion?

2 (NO RESPONSE)

3 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Seeing none, all in
4 favor?

5 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Opposed?

7 Any abstentions?

8 Okay. Very good. Motion passes.

9 Congratulations.

10 So I would say let's take a ten-minute break.

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

13 **I.2. LISA ACADEMY AMENDMENT REQUESTS**

14 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. I guess we are
15 all back. We are ready to get started. Okay.

16 So next up, we have open enrollment charter
17 school amendment request LISA Academy, and Dr.
18 Darrell Smith is going to come forward and get us
19 started.

20 DR. SMITH: Darrell Smith, Department of
21 Education.

22 LISA Academy, a high-performing STEM -- STEM-
23 focused K-12 public charter school dedicated to an
24 academically rigorous college preparatory program, is
25 respectfully requesting of the board approval of a

1 charter amendment that realigns their grade
2 configurations and facilities to better serve
3 students and families across both Northwest Arkansas
4 and Little Rock. Specifically, the amendment would
5 convert the LISA Springdale to a K-5 campus, with
6 grades 6-8 merging into the LISA Fayetteville campus.
7 And in Little Rock, the LISA West High School would
8 serve grades 8-12 and relocate the LISA West
9 Elementary into their current, where the -- where the
10 LISA West Middle School is currently. In addition to
11 that, they're also asking for a 200 -- 200-student
12 increase in their enrollment cap. This time I'll
13 turn it over to the LISA administration to -- for
14 their presentation.

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you. Before we
16 get started, all those giving testimony today on
17 behalf of LISA Academy, both in person and remote,
18 please stand and raise your right hand. And do we
19 have anybody joining remote?

20 DR. BOGREK: We have one remote.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Let me see if I
22 can see them. You say you do have folks joining
23 remote?

24 DR. BOGREK: Yes.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Very good. I see

1 him standing, sorry.

2 All right. Do you swear that the testimony or
3 statement you are about to give is the truth, the
4 whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

5 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you. You
7 may begin your presentation.

8 DR. BOGREK: Yes.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And as a reminder, you
10 have 20 minutes. And please state your name each
11 time.

12 DR. BOGREK: Dr. Fatih Bogrek, executive
13 superintendent.

14 Good morning, dear respected Panel Members. We
15 would like to thank you for the opportunity to
16 present our amendment request. Ms. Bethany Ratermann
17 is going to show our PowerPoint presentation.

18 MS. RATERMANN: Well, good morning. My name is
19 Bethany Ratermann. I'm the senior director of
20 Communications for LISA Academy. Thank you so much
21 for having us today. I'm very proud to be here.

22 So make sure I've got my buttons correct. If
23 you're not familiar with LISA Academy, you'll
24 remember that we opened in 2004 as a middle school
25 here in Little Rock. We expanded across the Central

1 Arkansas area through K-12, and then we went to
2 Northwest Arkansas, and now we're statewide. So just
3 a quick little timeline to kind of remind you about
4 how we've developed where we're at today.

5 I want to let everyone know, just kind of a
6 refresher, about how we've expanded with
7 intentionality to share our success as we've gone and
8 just increase the copy of the replicated proven model
9 throughout the district. In the latest '24-'25 data,
10 you can see that we had six A school ratings, four B
11 school ratings, two C school ratings. And so there
12 was -- out of all of our schools, 83 percent of them
13 were rated A or B; and we want to note that in
14 Pulaski County, Arkansas, there are only two middle
15 high schools with an A rating, and both of those are
16 from LISA Academy. And so we also want to note that
17 LISA Academy North was the number one highest ELA
18 growth in the State of Arkansas. And LISA Academy
19 hybrid campus moved from a letter grade of a D to a B
20 because of our proven methods and continued work and
21 growth focus.

22 You can also see on those '24-'25 results that
23 we were accredit -- we were awarded many prizes. And
24 some of those were from the Arkansas Education
25 Policy, the OEP results. And then the Department of

1 Education also awarded us performance growth for both
2 achievement and academics and student growth to the
3 tune of \$153,000 for student progress. Something
4 we're extraordinarily proud of.

5 As you know, LISA Academy is a STEM-C-focused
6 charter school, and this STEM-C coordinates with STEM
7 education from kindergarten through 12th grade with
8 STEM classes, enrichment, project-based learning, and
9 all of these PLTW pathways to get students those
10 hands-on learning opportunities that we're so proud
11 of.

12 Maybe. Maybe not. My clicker does not want to
13 participate, I apologize. Maybe. Okay, we'll keep
14 trying. There we go. Oh, there it goes.

15 So, as you know, LISA Academy graduates are the
16 proof in the pudding. It is when we've worked with
17 our students to move them on to their next level of
18 education. In 2025, our senior class received \$7.2
19 million in scholarships. And while our graduating
20 class at West and North of 2025 was accepted to
21 college with a 100% graduation rate, I'm also proud
22 to report that as of Monday, our graduating class of
23 2026 is also 100 percent college acceptance rate,
24 something we're extraordinarily proud of. So that
25 lets us know that what we're doing is working for our

1 students. We're setting them up for success after
2 high school.

3 Another way that you can determine how our path
4 has been successful is to look at when we started our
5 expansion in Northwest Arkansas. The Springdale
6 campus was originally called Ozark Montessori School.
7 They were struggling as a charter school and looking
8 for options to support their programming and get
9 their students a higher level of education. So they
10 reached out to LISA Academy in 2019. In 2019 is when
11 we started working with a coaching model where we
12 brought in our practices, our curriculum. And so you
13 can see on my left-hand chart there in 2019, the
14 score rose from a D to a C just because of that
15 incorporation of our curriculum and our support for
16 that -- for that campus. Excuse me.

17 So then 2020 happens, there's no test scores.
18 But that's when we transitioned from the Ozark
19 Montessori to fully have that campus underneath our
20 LISA umbrella, and you can see that it continues to
21 excel all the way to the letter A grading in 2024.
22 Same campus, same students. We're increasing; we're
23 growing in enrollment; and we're still using our
24 proven methods that worked in Central Arkansas, now
25 applying to another school district in another area.

1 And we can see that success happening, something that
2 we're very proud of.

3 You can see that with that success from the
4 transition from Ozark Montessori to LISA Academy,
5 that we were recognized for that progress and
6 achievement again with our OEP results from '21 to
7 '24, listed there on the slide, as well as the SAU
8 Educational Regional Zone recognition.

9 For today's meeting, we're going to look at a
10 few campuses. And so we put the slide in there just
11 to kind of illustrate which campuses are actually
12 impacted by today's amendments. And so on the left
13 in our Central Arkansas hub, you'll note that we have
14 the North campuses, which are in red. They're not
15 affected at all. The West campuses, I'm going to
16 talk about those individually. And then on the
17 northwest side, we have the Rogers campus, which is
18 not affected at all. We've got some changes in the
19 Springdale/Fayetteville campus. And so this kind of
20 just helps highlight which is going to be impacted
21 the most.

22 So to talk about amendment request No. one, this
23 is where LISA Academy Springdale Middle School
24 students will be transitioning to the LISA Academy
25 Fayetteville High -- Middle/High School campus. And

1 so you can see that this beautiful new campus,
2 there's an illustration on the bottom there. It's a
3 beautiful facility that has a beautiful
4 state-of-the-art gym. It has the labs, learning
5 facilities. Those are things that we're really
6 excited to bring to those middle schoolers, that we
7 want to accelerate those courses and provide those
8 learning opportunities that LISA Academy is known
9 for. This way, they will have that beautiful
10 facility that they can learn in, as well as finish
11 their K-12 pathway.

12 The benefits, again, as I mentioned, they'll be
13 able to finish out their K-12 career with that
14 building. It will expand the K-5 seat capacity at
15 the current Springdale campus. There'll be focused
16 elementary instruction at the Springdale campus.
17 Again, advanced courses, more electives, all the
18 things at the Middle/High School Fayetteville, that's
19 beautiful. They'll have access to the high school
20 gym, full athletics programs, specialized teachers,
21 as well as the modernized labs.

22 The second request is a little bit more unclear,
23 so I want to be really slow here because it kind of
24 confused us. The reason we talked about this was if
25 you look at the very bottom, our Westhaven facility,

1 where our elementary campus is currently out in West
2 Little Rock, the lease is expiring in 2026. And so
3 we started talking about what is our next most
4 sensible, appropriate manner to take the next steps?
5 And so we decided to look at restructuring that West
6 campus to see how we can really maximize our spaces
7 as well as our operational and fiscal benefits.

8 And so what we're doing is we're moving the West
9 Elementary campus from where it's out on Westhaven
10 Drive over to the big middle school campus right
11 there on Corporate Hill. You guys have probably been
12 there, seen that. So that way they've got a bigger
13 space; they've got a gym; they've got a beautiful
14 learning space; they've got the maker space. We're
15 really excited to offer that at the 23 Corporate
16 Hill.

17 At the middle school level, we're really excited
18 to change the grade span to really focus in where
19 that content really speeds up. That acceleration
20 starts in that middle school with that 6th and 7th
21 grade to move them to the 21 Corporate Hill. So it's
22 just 6th and 7th grade, really hyper-focused.
23 They'll share it with the hybrid campus since they
24 have just a few students that come on-site for those
25 support services. So they can hold up the 21

1 Corporate Hill.

2 And then the 8th graders, we're really excited
3 about this, will move into the high school campus,
4 which is there on Markham Street, where they can get
5 that high school experience, whether it be the
6 courses that we offer in our high school, our CTE
7 pathways. We can start offering them the gym, all
8 the things that really are going to push them
9 forward, because again, we're that college-prep focus
10 that we want to see starting in middle school. It
11 will also allow us to offer a seamless transition
12 between the students. Because one of the things that
13 we often see in the Little Rock space is between
14 those transition grades of 5th and 6th and 8th to
15 9th, that that's a time when, traditionally, parents
16 see this as a transition year. And so by having them
17 patterned in this way, we're going to follow our LISA
18 North model, where they're not disjointed in those
19 multiple buildings spread out so far. So this will
20 help more integrate them throughout the K-12 system
21 in the West Little Rock region, and it'll provide
22 those 8th graders a more high school experience, and
23 it will also provide operational academic efficiency
24 because the buildings will be consolidated. So that
25 way, we actually reduce one whole building, and we

1 can really focus on those students on site. So
2 there'll be no change in enrollment. Additionally,
3 this will result in leading to savings of staffing,
4 having an extra building we won't have to staff, and
5 a reduce -- reduction in our budget for that extra
6 building.

7 And the final request is to increase the cap by
8 200 students across the district to accommodate more
9 students. We really think that it's very important
10 to expand our cap because we have a waitlist that's
11 running year over year. And if we have that many
12 students in demand of high-quality STEM education, we
13 want to be able to offer them a seat as soon as
14 possible to focus on their science, technology,
15 engineering and math, as well as computing.

16 Thank you so much. I know I sped through that
17 because I know you've had a long morning, but I'm
18 hopeful we can answer any questions that you have.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you. Before we
21 start with Panel questions, I'm going to invite Ms.
22 Raney up from legal to let us know if there's any
23 concerns that we need to be aware of.

24 MS. RANEY: Hi. Julia Raney, ADE.

25 We have no legal concerns. Thanks.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All right, thank
2 you.

3 Okay. So I'll start with questions from the
4 Panel from Dr. Beshears-Duncan. Do you want to start
5 us off?

6 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yes. Thank you.

7 Thank you for offering a history and a timeline
8 that's helpful, especially as a new -- new member
9 here. Can you all speak to -- a little bit about
10 your family and community's feedback and engagement
11 with the move that will impact 6 through -- 6 through
12 8 students in Springdale?

13 DR. BOGREK: Mr. Sazci is, I think, online. I
14 think we conducted some surveys, also, some, you
15 know, conversation.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Can you please state
17 your name and title, please?

18 DR. BOGREK: Yeah. Fatih Bogrek,
19 superintendent.

20 Mr. Sazci is online. Mr. Sazci, could you
21 please answer this question?

22 MR. SAZCI: Hi, this is Hasan Sazci, assistant
23 superintendent -- superintendent for LISA Academy.

24 And since we opened our Springdale campus, we
25 were serving kindergarten through 8th grade, and that

1 was a request from our parents to have a really
2 strong high school options. Unfortunately, the
3 building size is small. We cannot really expand the
4 high school in the same building or any available
5 building around us. So when we have our Fayetteville
6 facility, we are building in new middle and high
7 school building. And that is very close proximity to
8 our current location, which is around like
9 15-minutes' drive from Springdale to Fayetteville.
10 And this is going to make our parents' wish come true
11 to have an option to start kindergarten, finish --
12 finish all through elementary, middle and high
13 school. And because we have a really strong
14 retention rate for our Springdale campus kindergarten
15 through 8th grade, but we are losing all of them
16 because there's no middle high -- like the high
17 school option for them. Moving with this middle
18 school students to Fayetteville, they have all these
19 benefits, and we -- we can serve our Springdale
20 community better with more seats for K-5 students.
21 And this is the, you know, like, the request since
22 the first day we opened our Springdale campus.

23 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: So if I'm understanding
24 correctly, there's interest from your families, and
25 there's some targeted benefits for them in this move?

1 MR. SAZCI: Yes.

2 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you so much.

3 DR. BOGREK: Also, two buildings, they are
4 convenient. I think the, you know, difference for
5 travel is around like 15 minutes. Then we, you know,
6 found the, you know, location for Fayetteville. We
7 were already planning to have high school in that,
8 you know, facility. So it's kind of border in
9 Fayetteville and Springdale. So also we are planning
10 to have transportation if there is demand between two
11 campuses. So we are going to make sure our retention
12 is important. Our Springdale middle school students,
13 they can, you know, come to, you know, our
14 Fayetteville campus comfortably.

15 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you.

16 No further questions.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Dr. Moore?

18 DR. MOORE: That was my main question as well.
19 I do want to ask about the enrollment cap, and I may
20 be overlooking it. I've tried to look. Do you
21 anticipate, like, how that's going to be broken down
22 across campuses?

23 DR. BOGREK: It's 200.

24 DR. MOORE: But is that across all campuses?
25 Like how --

1 DR. BOGREK: Mostly our West High School and
2 Springdale campus, they will use this 200-cap
3 increase.

4 DR. MOORE: Okay. That's what I was --

5 DR. BOGREK: The additional one.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay.

7 That's all I have. Thank you.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

9 Mr. Baldwin?

10 MR. BALDWIN: No questions.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

12 Ms. Stewart?

13 MS. STEWART: Good morning. My -- well, first
14 off, a comment. Great job on the presentation. I
15 would love to have, like, a tenth of your energy and
16 enthusiasm. So appreciate that. Just a quick
17 question regarding staffing, is there going to be any
18 kind of -- does this impact staffing at -- at all
19 moving campuses or -- or consolidating?

20 DR. BOGREK: Yeah. We will have some savings
21 again since we are going to, you know, eliminate one
22 building. So it's going to save us some, you know,
23 in terms of like, you know, budget saving for
24 building. We are going to use one less building.
25 Also like secretaries, principals. So we will have

1 maybe some savings. But as LISA, you know, since,
2 like, you know, this is my 15th year, I don't
3 remember we have, you know, laid off anyone at LISA.
4 So usually, you know, if a -- a position is closed,
5 that person is moved to another position. So this is
6 why, you know, none -- none of the staff is going to
7 be, you know, impacted negatively. But on the other
8 hand, overall, we will have some, you know, maybe
9 position cuts, and then it will help ours -- our
10 budget as well.

11 MS. STEWART: Okay. Great.

12 That's all I have.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

14 Dr. Bacon?

15 DR. BACON: Yeah, I just have one or two things.
16 First, congratulations on all the phenomenal success,
17 all those letter grades. I know several of us were
18 at your school and LISA North for the Milken Award
19 announcement recently. Just phenomenal things going
20 on at LISA. So I -- I want to start there.

21 I'm familiar with your Little Rock locations.
22 And so closing that elementary school on Chenal,
23 moving those kids to the other location, that's very
24 close. I know there's probably not a lot of worry
25 about losing students because of the -- a change.

1 I'm not as familiar with the Northwest Arkansas. So
2 how far is the Springdale campus to the Fayetteville
3 campus, where you're going to be having students make
4 that transition?

5 DR. BOGREK: Mr. Hasan Sazci?

6 MR. SAZCI: Hi. Hasan Sazci, assistant
7 superintendent.

8 This is, you know, like the -- in the busy
9 traffic, it takes 15-minutes' drive from Springdale
10 location to Fayetteville location. So it is around
11 -- you know, depends on where they're driving, but
12 just for the campuses, it's around like ten miles.

13 DR. BACON: And so at present, do you just have
14 the one high school in Northwest Arkansas? The
15 Fayetteville High School?

16 MR. SAZCI: We -- we have two high schools. One
17 is in Rogers' location.

18 DR. BACON: Oh.

19 MR. SAZCI: Rogers-Bentonville location. We
20 have middle and high school building. And our
21 current Fayetteville building is under construction,
22 and it will start serving this August.

23 DR. BACON: Okay. I -- I -- I was -- I asked a
24 confusing question. I didn't -- students who are in
25 the Springdale campus elementary, and you have

1 Fayetteville Elementary, will all feed together to
2 the middle school in Fayetteville, and then the high
3 school for everyone will be in Fayetteville as well?

4 DR. BOGREK: Yes.

5 DR. BACON: Okay.

6 MR. SAZCI: Okay.

7 DR. BOGREK: And our middle school and high
8 school, they're under one roof.

9 DR. BACON: Okay.

10 DR. BOGREK: So 6-12. So, you know, our
11 Fayetteville campus middle school, yeah, they will
12 be, you know, fed by two elementary schools,
13 Springdale and --

14 DR. BACON: Okay.

15 DR. BOGREK: -- our, you know, Fayetteville, and
16 we will hopefully provide the transportation for
17 Springdale families.

18 DR. BACON: Okay.

19 DR. BOGREK: So by this, they, you know --

20 DR. BACON: Yeah.

21 DR. BOGREK: That'll be good.

22 DR. BACON: Certainly. Okay. Thank you.

23 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Well, thank you again
24 for your presentation, and I echo comments. I did
25 attend the -- the ceremony you guys held there, and

1 everything was wonderful. The band did a wonderful
2 job. I know that they're new. And so I was glad to
3 see students getting the opportunity to express their
4 artistic ability as well. And congratulations again
5 to your Milken Award winner.

6 DR. BOGREK: Thank you for joining. We
7 appreciate your compliments.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: I know he went home with
9 a -- a great day. We went home a little bit richer.

10 So just a couple of questions, and just to make
11 sure that I'm -- I'm hearing it correctly. So the
12 parents are aware that this change is coming, and
13 they are supportive of the transitioning of the
14 school being moving from Springdale to Fayetteville,
15 so there's not any concern there?

16 DR. BOGREK: We sent a, you know, survey to our
17 families. We get their feedback about, like, you
18 know, they -- they have multiple stuff. For example,
19 in West Little Rock right now, if they have siblings
20 in all three schools, they need to go to three
21 different locations, but right now, two locations.
22 So we just ask their feedback about, you know, if
23 there will be any move -- any transition. So -- but
24 we don't really give all the details which grade
25 level is going to be served in which campus. We were

1 waiting for the approval first. So hopefully today,
2 you know, we will let them know. But in West Little
3 Rock, destinations are very close, so it's just a few
4 minutes from other campuses. So it's not going to be
5 a problem for parents to move to another building.
6 And also, the building conditions are getting better,
7 especially for West Elementary. They will have a
8 larger building. They will have more rooms. They
9 will have a gym. So -- and then our 6th and 7th
10 grade, they will go back to their original home
11 campus. You know, our 21 Corporate Hill Drive is
12 very, again, the same campus, so it's not going to be
13 a big change. Only big change is 8th graders.
14 They're going to go to high school building. And
15 then, we also -- also contact our advisory board. We
16 have some parents there. So they're so excited
17 because 8th graders, they're going to be high school
18 student, and also it's going to help us for 8th grade
19 to 9th grade retention. So -- and also they will
20 take more advanced courses. So I think when we, you
21 know, discuss with our, you know, advisory groups or
22 -- throughout the surveys -- so we see all positive,
23 you know, feedback. But hopefully, after the
24 approval, we are planning to make a big announcement
25 to all our families.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. And then
2 kind of referencing back to the enrollment increase,
3 so 200, and then there was an indication during the
4 presentation that this is response to try to reduce
5 the amount of -- number of students on the waiting
6 list. So I guess I'm still not quite clear on the
7 distribution of that 200. Is it going to address
8 that issue, or is it just that was just the capacity
9 of the building that it could hold? I'm just trying
10 to get a better sense.

11 DR. BOGREK: Our cap is based on the capacity of
12 the buildings. You know, our current cap is 6,800,
13 but our enrollment is -- our enrollment is 4,300 now.
14 But still, we have a lot of rooms in our North and
15 South Arkansas campuses. So we -- for example,
16 Rogers campus is serving right now at the near
17 building 6-10. So we are adding grades. So some
18 cap, they're already, you know, assigned to, you
19 know, current, you know, expansion plans. So this
20 additional 200 is going to have -- to go Springdale,
21 then we move middle school to Fayetteville. We will
22 have some room for elementary kids there. So this is
23 like, you know, some of the cap is going to be used
24 for that building. And also our West High School,
25 right now they're serving around 400. And then with

1 the addition, they're going to serve 530. So just
2 these two schools mostly use this 200 cap. But also,
3 our total cap is going to be from 6,800 to 7,000. So
4 we did not really dig into a lot in each grade level,
5 how many, you know, increase. But this 200 will help
6 us, you know, for Fayetteville expansion and also our
7 West High School.

8 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Makes sense.
9 Okay. All right.

10 Any other questions? Any Panel Members?

11 (NO RESPONSE)

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. If there's no
13 further questions, then I'll accept a motion on the
14 open enrollment charter school amendment request of
15 LISA Academy.

16 DR. MOORE: I move that we approve the
17 open-enrollment charter request -- amendment request
18 of LISA Academy to increase their enrollment cap and
19 change the configuration of their grades and
20 locations in Northwest Arkansas as well as in Central
21 Arkansas. There's a lot on this amendment request.
22 I didn't know if I needed to be so specific on all
23 the pieces.

24 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: I second that. Thank you,
25 Dr. Moore. I had the easy part.

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So I have a
2 motion from Dr. Moore, a second by Dr.
3 Beshears-Duncan, that we accept the motion -- no,
4 approve the application -- approve the amendment
5 request to increase the cap by 200, increasing the
6 enrollment from 6,800 to 7,000, change the grade
7 configuration for the Springdale and West Little Rock
8 campuses for LISA Academy.

9 Does that cover it?

10 DR. MOORE: And the location change.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And the location change
12 as well.

13 Is -- are there any questions or discussion on
14 the motion?

15 (NO RESPONSE)

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Okay. All in
17 favor say aye.

18 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Any opposed? Any
20 abstentions?

21 Okay. Motion passes.

22 Thank you.

23 DR. BOGREK: Thank you.

24 **I.3. KIPP AMENDMENT REQUESTS**

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: All right. Next up is

1 open enrollment-charter school of amendment request.

2 Is that for KIPP Delta?

3 DR. SMITH: For KIPP. Yes, ma'am.

4 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: KIPP Delta.

5 DR. SMITH: Darrell Smith, Department of
6 Education.

7 At this time, the KIPP Delta Public Schools, a
8 network that opened public school charters here in
9 Blytheville and West Helena. This organization is
10 seeking approval through a charter amendment that
11 realigns its organizational identity while
12 maintaining its mission to partner with families and
13 communities, create academically excellent schools
14 that prepare students with the skills and confidence
15 to pursue the paths they choose for employment,
16 enrollment, and enlistment. The proposed amendment
17 would change the legal name of the network to Delta
18 Preparatory Schools and formally disaffiliate from
19 the KIPP Foundation as its charter management
20 organization while preserving its existing
21 commitments to students, families, and authorizers.

22 The KIPP administration is present, and we'll
23 turn it over to them for their application -- their
24 amendment hearing.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

1 Before we get started, all those giving
2 testimony today on behalf of KIPP Delta, both in
3 person and/or remote, please stand and raise your
4 right hand.

5 MR. SMITH: We're not all going to talk, but in
6 case we do, I guess, we --

7 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Is this all
8 that's going to speak today?

9 MR. SMITH: Yes.

10 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Do you swear that
11 the testimony or statement you are about to give is
12 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
13 truth?

14 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you. You
16 have 20 minutes for your presentation, and please
17 remember to always restate when you enter the mic.

18 MR. SMITH: Thank you, Madam Chairman, Members
19 of the Panel, staff.

20 My name is Kevin Smith. I'm executive director
21 of KIPP Delta Schools.

22 And George Cotton is the president of our school
23 board, chairman of our school board and is here
24 today, and he's going to let me try to get through
25 this presentation. I know I'm standing between

1 everybody at lunch. I promise to keep this as
2 quickly as possible and get to your questions.

3 We are here to ask for a change in our name,
4 which we'll address in a minute. But we also wanted
5 to take the opportunity to just update you on where
6 we are today, because it's been a year since you
7 intervened, had an intervention with KIPP Delta, and
8 we were not in a good place. And Mr. Cotton and I
9 both stood up here and made a commitment to try and
10 improve it.

11 So where -- where are we now a year later?
12 That's what this is. And then we'll -- we'll talk
13 about the future -- is -- if I can figure out how to
14 work this. And I'm not going to read the slides.
15 But it started with some SPED complaints, special
16 education complaints, and this kind of reviews that
17 timeline, gives you some organizational chart.
18 Changes, we've made a lot of changes in the past
19 year. This kind of gives you how it's organized now.
20 Specifically, on special education, these are some of
21 the things we addressed immediately. Related
22 services were not being met. We immediately began to
23 meet those services, and we still have some
24 compensatory services to make up for those. We also
25 immediately dealt with a family complaint that was an

1 issue. But there are also other issues that are
2 addressed in this slide.

3 This is a table chart that shows you -- or bar
4 chart that shows you what's remaining on our
5 compensatory services, the stuff that we had not done
6 as of a year ago that got us in trouble. So we're
7 having to do these services, related services, in
8 real time so we don't get behind anymore, and we're
9 compliant with the law. But we also have to make
10 good on all those hours that we did not do; right?
11 And those are not Medicaid reimbursable, by the way.
12 Those come out of the pocket. It would've been if
13 we'd been doing them, you know, all along. This is
14 what's left. Most of the physical/occupational is
15 one student who no longer is in our district that
16 we're trying to provide that service for. The 68
17 speech therapy hours are more than one student, and
18 we hope to be through by the end of the year in that.

19 And I'll stop if anybody wants me to. I just
20 don't want to belabor anything either.

21 So we're taking -- these are some of the
22 services. We're doing the training and the PD -- PD.
23 We've got CPR plan -- training certification for all
24 of our staff in the school this year, Handle with
25 Care, seizure response, first aid, all of these

1 things. And our cap ends, our SPED cap ends in
2 February, and we just had a -- the latest onsite
3 visit was -- was Friday. I stepped in there to see
4 how things were going and -- and, you know, they're
5 not going to tell me everything, but -- and there's a
6 letter here that addresses the most recent letter we
7 got from the state. That'll kind of tell you where
8 -- where things are. But basically, things look
9 really, really good. We're on track to get off this
10 cap certainly by February.

11 And feel free to -- to read that letter and
12 questions.

13 Finance is a big issue. We immediately started
14 taking -- making a lot of decisions last year. We've
15 cut over a million dollars in operating costs, top --
16 sort of top-heavy costs in the last year. We've also
17 resolved over two million dollars in outstanding
18 debt. And by June 30th, we should be free of any
19 outstanding, what I call unsecured outstanding debt.
20 This doesn't account like the USDA loan for one of
21 our buildings. It's on time and so forth. And we've
22 also built up a million dollars in our reserve over
23 the last year, which I feel like is impressive.
24 We're -- we're -- we're in a very good place
25 financially.

1 This is our variance, which is what the state
2 sees when you look at eFinance. And you can see a
3 year ago, and yes, that's \$6 million, how far off it
4 was. It was just not being done. It was -- it was
5 basically on the autopilot. It wasn't being managed.
6 It wasn't just bad management. It just wasn't being
7 managed. And you can see, and -- and I want to speak
8 to APSRC here, they have helped us tremendously with
9 this issue of trying to get it to zero, which is
10 where your -- your eFinance balance should always be.
11 We're not quite there, but you can see the kind of
12 heavy lifting we've had this year on it, while at the
13 same time, again, trying to not get worse. We're
14 trying to do the things you got to do going forward
15 while at the same time getting caught up. That's
16 where that is.

17 And here are some more finance issues. We asked
18 Legislative Audit to start doing our audits instead
19 of a private audit. In terms of transparency, also
20 saves us 90,000 a year. PO systems, all the other
21 things you know about. We do weekly meetings and
22 finance meetings, trainings. APSRC, again, has been
23 a tremendous help to us. We couldn't do it without
24 them.

25 We have a CIO. I don't want to read these, but

1 the state I want to -- and I want to say this is a
2 former policymaker myself. I have seen politicians
3 and haven't been a -- and having been a recovering
4 politician, manipulate data, especially around
5 election time, to sort of make it look like things
6 are really, really great; right? I've seen that.
7 I'm not naming any names, but I've seen it, and it's
8 not unusual. I now applaud the State Department of
9 Education for trying to prevent that sort of
10 corruption of data because data tells you where you
11 are, good or bad, and you can't correct something if
12 you don't know about it. You can't solve it if you
13 don't know what the problem is. And we're trying to
14 emulate that at KIPP Delta. And we got our good
15 stuff and our bad stuff too. But we're trying to,
16 you know, shoot it straight down the middle. And we
17 have a CIO who's very qualified, who's behind me,
18 who's doing that with us, and it's a team effort.
19 So this -- this discusses some of those issues. And
20 one, you know, would be our academics and how are --
21 how are we doing in our classrooms with our kids. So
22 an Academic Progress Monitoring program, for example,
23 is also part of our data, a big part of our data
24 collection and how we deliver that. That's -- that's
25 a good example of how that tool can help us get

1 there.

2 So on academics, we as a school district, our
3 grade this year was a C, which is an awful lot better
4 than where we were a year ago, even though we didn't
5 have district grades yet. It would not have been a
6 C. It's not good enough for a charter school, and
7 it's not good enough for our charter school in
8 particular, but -- but where it is progress, it's
9 important progress. And there aren't a lot of Cs.
10 There aren't enough Cs in the Delta. But C is not
11 something we want to settle for, but it's -- excuse
12 me. But that's our district grade. We had two
13 schools that received Bs this year, and we -- we had
14 one school that was an F that's no longer an F. So
15 we're off F status. And Ds aren't anything to be
16 proud of either, but they're better than Fs, and it
17 shows progress. And that's in the course of a year.
18 So financially, academically, and measurable --
19 independent, measurable ways, you can see that we've
20 made a -- a lot of progress. And here are those
21 grade reports by school over the last three years.
22 So you can see -- and the one school that -- that got
23 held out in particular was in Blytheville that went
24 from an F to a B in three years. And then you can
25 see where we had one that remained a B and the -- the

1 F that became a D. We had one school go down. We --
2 we -- we lacked a 5th-grade teacher. And I could
3 tell you, and I'm not -- I'm not a professional
4 educator, but it doesn't take much training to know
5 how important teachers are to these grades and to
6 these outcomes. We didn't have a 5th-grade teacher
7 in our elementary school in Helena. And that's not
8 exclusively but extremely critical to why we did what
9 we did, where the C went to a D.

10 Nonetheless, we were recognized, and -- and yes,
11 we're going to put these up here and be proud of it.
12 We were also recognized that out of all the schools
13 in -- in Arkansas, not school districts, but schools,
14 that Blytheville school was recognized as one of five
15 outstanding schools. It went from F to a B, and
16 we're really proud of that.

17 These show some of those statistics -- and
18 again, I'm trying to respect your time, but encourage
19 you to -- to look these over. That -- that -- our
20 ADE, this is ADE. These are ADE statistics. You
21 kind of make comparisons, and you can get granular
22 about it, and we can go into it. I just don't want
23 to take your time. But most of the scores have
24 improved. We've had some places where we had -- we
25 needed supports with teaching. And again, APSRC has

1 been very helpful, providing support in our
2 classrooms. That's made a big difference. Why --
3 why the big difference? We've got a good leadership
4 team at our school, No. one. DESE has been amazing
5 in supporting us, No. two, and APSRC we couldn't have
6 done it without. It's just that simple. Making good
7 decisions about who the leadership people are in
8 those places, your principals, your leadership team,
9 those are the essential most important issues. And
10 those changes we made have started to bear fruit.

11 College and career. Again, 41 concurrent
12 students. Forty-seven CTE district scholars enrolled
13 for school year '26. We hope that -- we hope to have
14 all of our graduates ultimately, or most of our
15 graduates ultimately have community college degrees
16 too when they graduate high school. And we've got
17 several in that pipeline already. And it does start
18 before they become seniors. And we've started with
19 our sophomores this year. That -- we call it KIPP --
20 KIPP Forward/KIPP Through College. We got to come up
21 with a new name for it, but that's one of the things
22 that originally the KIPP brand was famous for, was
23 its hyper focus on college and getting those kids in
24 college and now career. And so that's one of the
25 things we -- we're going to retain and build on. And

1 we've also brought back this year -- we just got some
2 SAT -- ACT scores in. And somebody had told me a
3 year ago that some of these same kids could never be
4 above 15. And we had some twenties this year because
5 we did the prep, we did the study, and we did all
6 that stuff that you should be doing.

7 And I put this -- I wanted this slide to be in
8 here. And the reason is because -- and I go back to
9 -- I go back a long way, more than I want to admit,
10 and I was the passing vote on the vote -- on the bill
11 that gave -- created the law to take over public
12 schools. So allow the State Department of Education
13 to take over a public school. My school district,
14 and the school district, my own -- where I graduated,
15 was the first one to be taken over, which was
16 Helena-West Helena School District, and it was the
17 first one to be the second one taking over and the
18 first one to be the third one taking over, which I
19 think is where it is now. And it seems like this is
20 a pattern in the Delta, and I've watched it for 30
21 years, where the state takes over and improves, give
22 it back. Something happens again. The state's got
23 to come back again. How do we get off of that Ferris
24 wheel? How do -- how do we get -- stop that -- that
25 process after 30 years? I really think it's a good

1 idea to start looking at -- at what might -- what
2 might be a solution for that.

3 In my opinion, it's this, and that is that it's
4 very difficult to come in from the outside and have
5 sustainable success. You have to have that buy-in
6 locally. These pictures are some of the people who
7 graduated from KIPP Delta, and one of them, Joseph
8 Whitfield, was just appointed mayor by Governor
9 Sanders. Kevin Martin-Arnold, on your far right, was
10 a Phillips County citizen of the year, also a KIPP
11 graduate, has been my chief of staff of the city.
12 Jessica Walker. Martha Madden, Martha's behind me,
13 both outstanding contributors to our school and to
14 our community. And both Kevin and Joseph moved back
15 after getting excellent educations to help KIPP Delta
16 and help their community.

17 And these are four out -- standouts, but I can
18 do others. And in my opinion, what our job is as a
19 school is to produce people who come back and -- and
20 manage your sustainability. That is how you get off
21 that -- that Ferris wheel, that -- that continually
22 state taking over and having to take it over again
23 and again and again. This is how you do it, and you
24 do it with people who are only capable, but who care,
25 who love their community, who love their school, who

1 care and are going to be in day and out. It's not
2 just a career move for them. It means something.
3 And this is the proof of that, these folks.

4 All right. Thank you very much. And we're
5 going to take questions.

6 And by the way, if I could ask -- well, y'all
7 all stood up again. But stand up again if you're on
8 our staff at KIPP Delta so they can see who all's
9 here. And every -- and most of our leadership is
10 here, and I want to -- want to make sure you -- they
11 can -- they're available to answer questions. I know
12 it's almost lunch, but -- if you need them to.

13 I also, again, want to recognize our APSRC
14 partners who have been amazing, and y'all don't have
15 to stand. They probably know you anyway, but just
16 wave at them in case they -- in case they don't.
17 They've been -- a year ago, I couldn't even say
18 APSRC. And so that's progress. But now I feel like
19 we've all -- all been through a battle together over
20 the last year.

21 And so we're really proud of our success. But
22 the question is, where are we headed? We think -- we
23 think we're going to -- we're on the verge of -- of
24 much better things to come. Our goal is to show that
25 Delta kids can learn and that we can build a

1 sustainable school that can do that over and over
2 again. Thank you.

3 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Very good.

4 Okay. Ms. Raney from legal, do you want to come
5 forward? Please make sure we don't have any concerns
6 from legal that we need to address.

7 MS. RANEY: Hi. Julia Raney, ADE.

8 We have no legal concerns.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay, thank you.

10 Okay. So we'll start with questions. Dr.
11 Bacon?

12 DR. BACON: Thank you so much.

13 For full disclosure, I want to acknowledge I
14 have, in the last few months, been engaged in some
15 executive leadership coaching with Mr. Smith. And so
16 I -- I've seen a lot of the results that he talked
17 about here. I think it's phenomenal where you were
18 when I first came on this Panel in January for my
19 first meeting. I think you all were presenting very
20 transparent about where you were to where you are
21 today is night and day. And so your team should be
22 commended for that.

23 Talk to us a little bit about specifically the
24 amendment requests, what this means for you guys. It
25 looks like you're -- you're disaffiliating from KIPP

1 National, KIPP Foundation and changing your name. It
2 sounds simple but tell us what that really means to
3 you guys.

4 MR. SMITH: That's an excellent question. And
5 -- and the long and short of it is that there was a
6 mutual agreement between the KIPP Foundation and our
7 board that we wanted to go our own way. The KIPP
8 Foundation helped start this school 24 years ago, and
9 -- and it was called -- it was called Delta, by the
10 way. It was called Delta Preparatory Public Schools
11 then. But KIPP came along and made everybody -- all
12 the KIPP schools used that -- that logo and that KIPP
13 name. And they've been instrumental. I don't want
14 to -- I don't want to diminish that at all. We're
15 very grateful for -- for everything that KIPP
16 Foundation has done. But it is not what it was 24
17 years ago. It -- it is a national brand, and we're
18 used to saying KIPP. But the biggest difference, it
19 -- it will feel somewhat like a -- a yoke being
20 lifted. And I'll let my -- my board chairman also
21 speak to this if he'd like to -- to not have two
22 masters. We -- we were not serving the state's
23 interest. We were serving KIPP's needs. And it --
24 it is not so much that one is better than the other,
25 but it's very difficult to do both, especially

1 academically, when it comes to curriculum and all of
2 that.

3 Financially, it'll -- it -- it means almost --
4 it hasn't almost no impact at all. And I didn't know
5 that until -- until I started doing this, how little
6 financially it would actually mean. The school that
7 owns its own stuff, it has its own money. It does
8 its own thing. They're very little. They're very
9 tiny. You know, it's just a little bit of
10 difference. And what that is basically is help with
11 some trips, but we have to pay the rest of it. They
12 don't pay for all of it. They give you money, but
13 you have to pay it on the curriculum, spend it on the
14 curriculum that they want you to spend it on which is
15 not the same curriculum the state wants us to use a
16 lot of times.

17 And that's kind of how we got in trouble, is we
18 were hiring people who were more responsive to the
19 foundation's goals and not interested in the state's.
20 And you have a very aggressive agenda in the State of
21 Arkansas now. And I think Secretary Oliva said he
22 wants to be -- be called the Arkansas Miracle. And I
23 was speaking with him recently, and I think -- I
24 think it could be. And certainly, DESE's support of
25 us shows the seriousness of it, and -- but that's a -

1 - a long way to say that we -- we feel like it's
2 actually going to give us some freedom to do a better
3 job. And it means almost nothing financially, but in
4 terms of energy, time, commitment, focus, we can --
5 we can better focus.

6 And plus, KIPP Foundation itself, the reason
7 they're for this is because they're reorienting their
8 schools. We're not the only ones to do more of what
9 I call an urban-based model which is where they
10 really came from, Houston and New York. They've
11 never really gotten rural, even 23 or 24 years ago.
12 So they're trying to go back, and their national
13 statistics are no better than anybody else's. You
14 know, everybody has problems in public education
15 across the country. They haven't cracked that code
16 yet. And -- and certainly not like it was in the
17 beginning when you saw that 60 Minutes piece 20 or 30
18 years ago. It's a totally different institution, and
19 they want to get back to what their roots were, which
20 was inner-city urban. So it's a mutually beneficial
21 thing.

22 DR. BACON: Thank you.

23 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

24 Ms. Stewart? Sorry.

25 MS. STEWART: Yes. Sorry.

1 First off, I got to say thank you. Really
2 informative. I appreciate all the information, and I
3 think that what you're doing is near and dear to a
4 lot of our hearts. So thank you so much. Thank you
5 for, you know, the -- the staff that's here. The
6 support of a board president that's here says a lot.
7 So -- and you know, and the numbers are -- numbers
8 speak to that. I -- I did have a couple of questions
9 that -- I appreciate Dr. Bacon's questions too, as it
10 relates to what -- what we're talking about. But I
11 love the fact that you gave an update and wondered --
12 more of a wondering -- or a question. Is that
13 something that we could continue to ask for?

14 Because -- I don't know if this would go to Dr.
15 Smith or the Department, if we could include a report
16 out periodically, because this has been really,
17 really helpful.

18 DR. SMITH: Darrell Smith, Department of
19 Education.

20 `Yes. You all, as part of the -- as -- as part of
21 the amendment, affirmation of the amendment can also
22 put some conditions on that of, like, maybe like a --
23 a three month, a quarterly report out on just the
24 numbers and where they're at and progressing and
25 making sure that we're continuing to make the

1 progress that they've seen over this last year. So
2 certainly want to recognize what they've already done
3 but also continuing to just monitor that progress
4 forward. So yes, you can put that as part of your
5 amendment request or as far as your -- the -- the
6 motion.

7 MS. STEWART: Okay.

8 DR. SMITH: Yep.

9 MS. STEWART: Yep. Yep. Yeah, I mean, all my
10 questions would've been around the presentation, but
11 I mean, is that okay to do even the -- okay.

12 So I -- I wanted to highlight just a couple of
13 things. First off, with the -- I appreciate the fact
14 that you mentioned, you know, it's the quality of the
15 teacher in the classroom that actually is --

16 MR. SMITH: So what happens --

17 MS. STEWART: -- the game changer; right? That
18 -- that's exactly right. That's what affects student
19 outcomes. So recruitment of teachers, I know in the
20 past has been -- it's difficult. It's difficult
21 everywhere, but it has been particularly difficult
22 for that area. If you could just speak to that from
23 a staffing perspective and how y'all have -- have
24 done that or are doing that?

25 MR. SMITH: Well, first of all, we made our --

1 our salary schedule more equitable, but it's still
2 the most competitive of anywhere in commuting
3 districts; okay? And that's attractive, but we have
4 to tell people about it. We've taken the list that
5 DESE just sent out, and I don't know if I really want
6 to say this, but we're calling them individually.
7 Maybe I shouldn't have said that. We're calling
8 them, and now they'll all get all these calls, but
9 we've already called them, so -- and getting them to
10 come to our school, and most of them have said, this
11 is the first person -- you're the first ones who've
12 ever called, you know, that's called us. And they
13 really are grateful. These are -- these are
14 soon-to-be graduates in December who are looking for
15 jobs. And so DESE sent us that list, and we started
16 -- started calling them. But the -- but it is a
17 problem. It's -- it's a even bigger problem in -- in
18 Mississippi County, and we -- I don't know if I have
19 the answer to why it's like that. We just convinced
20 Arkansas State that Blytheville was within 50 miles.
21 And so yes, their student teachers can teach in
22 Blytheville because they've been saying they couldn't
23 because I was beyond 50 miles, but I think they just
24 wanted it to be beyond 50 miles. So we've -- you
25 know, we're doing those kinds of things. We're going

1 to go to the teacher fairs this year. We didn't --
2 we haven't been doing that.

3 MS. STEWART: Okay. Great. Great -- all of
4 those are great strategies, and I just -- again, I
5 just -- I commend you for that because, you know,
6 again, in the past it has been very difficult, but
7 those things were not in place. One last thing about
8 special education. So with that, what -- just an
9 estimate -- percentage of students are -- fall under
10 that umbrella?

11 MR. SMITH: We have about 120 SPED districtwide.
12 So we have two campuses, one in Blytheville, one in
13 Helena, K-12, a pre -- pre-K in Helena. And as of a
14 week ago, 1,078 students, the majority of those in --
15 in Helena, majority of the special ed's in Helena.
16 We've also, since last year, tried to do a better job
17 of screening those kids so they're not all thrown
18 into special ed. So we have more 504s. We're --
19 we're trying to be very intentional about
20 implementing the state's dyslexia programs, and with
21 the resources there, some of it. But we -- I think
22 we're guilty, along with probably other schools, of
23 throwing kids into SPED that didn't really need to be
24 there. That wasn't fair to them because it didn't
25 give them the best services to what they needed. But

1 anyway, that's -- that's where we are.

2 MS. STEWART: I appreciate that. I -- as a
3 former special education teacher, I've -- I
4 appreciate that you have already headed off two of my
5 other questions. So thank you for that. Staffing
6 for that -- SPED is even harder than a classroom
7 teacher. So I'm -- I'm guessing you're doing the
8 same types of things for the --

9 MR. SMITH: In -- in Helena, we've been
10 successful. We used J-1 Visa program. In
11 Blytheville, we're -- we're -- we're having a harder
12 time.

13 MS. STEWART: Okay.

14 MR. SMITH: So we're having to support
15 Blytheville by driving back and forth up there. Ms.
16 Rattler, who's here, does that.

17 MS. STEWART: ASU helping out with that?
18 A-State?

19 MR. SMITH: Not. No, not yet.

20 MS. STEWART: Okay.

21 MR. SMITH: But --

22 MS. STEWART: That maybe that will have some
23 potential.

24 MR. SMITH: No. that -- that is our -- we don't
25 have as many SPED students there, but still, we had

1 -- the J-1 visa had an issue. It wasn't anything
2 terrible, but it kept him from getting here on time.
3 And then we had another special ed teacher whose
4 husband, nothing related to the school, had some
5 legal issues going on, and she had to move. So just
6 things that happened. But you're right, that -- that
7 is the biggest challenge. We're pretty good in
8 Helena, but Blytheville, we're -- we're having to
9 support Blytheville from Helena.

10 MS. STEWART: Well, you're making strides in the
11 right direction, and I appreciate it, and I
12 appreciate everything that you've done, and I love
13 your alumni engagement idea, you know, and
14 highlighting that at the end as well. So hats off on
15 the work that you've done, and that continued work
16 with the Department and others to support, I think,
17 is probably critical. But appreciate all you've
18 done. That's it from me.

19 MR. SMITH: Thank you.

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Mr. Baldwin?

21 MR. BALDWIN: So I was -- I was there when KIPP
22 started, and Ernest and Kathy Cunningham, Scott
23 Shirey, leaders in Helena-West Helena at the train
24 station with the 5th grade class. I financed your --
25 your school building across the street on Cherry

1 Street.

2 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

3 MR. BALDWIN: You guys have a -- you have my
4 heart. You've also got a piece of my soul. And you
5 know, you've lost your way, but it looks like you're
6 coming back, and you've -- you've got to succeed.
7 You've got to figure it out and do whatever it takes
8 to educate children because they -- they can do well.
9 I saw it. They can do very well.

10 So after having said that, I guess a couple
11 questions. So in the -- in the breakup with KIPP,
12 how does it work financially? Do you have to -- is
13 there a penalty? I mean, are y'all just walking away
14 free and clear, or is there some ongoing financial --

15 MR. SMITH: It's free and clear. I -- you know,
16 this is the first year we haven't borrowed money,
17 operating money. We -- in the last couple years
18 before I got there, they did from KIPP Foundation.
19 This year, we didn't need to borrow the money, and it
20 just was a cash flow management issue more than
21 anything. And they waived the loan that we had
22 outstanding with them, which is part of that 2.2
23 million resolution I mentioned. So actually, we're
24 -- we're -- we're good. We're -- we're -- we're not
25 going to owe them anything, and -- and they're not

1 going to owe us anything.

2 MR. BALDWIN: And they're -- they're not going
3 to pay anymore, so --

4 MR. SMITH: They're not requesting any ownership
5 in anything. And I don't -- you know, and I -- I
6 think that would be --

7 MR. BALDWIN: As you look -- as you look at your
8 ability to fund the school without KIPP's help going
9 forward, how does that look?

10 MR. SMITH: Well, again, financially, except for
11 those years when they needed a loan, which was the
12 last two or three before this last summer, it was --
13 it was good because they -- apparently, those
14 directors, they felt like they needed loans to make
15 it through the summer. But it was mostly -- and you
16 should probably understand this more than anybody
17 from seeing it all the time. Mostly a cash flow and
18 a cash management, lack of management ability is all
19 that really was. From a asset point of view and --
20 and a cash flow point of view, if it's managed
21 correctly, which we did this year, you -- there's no
22 need for that operating loan in the summer, and we
23 didn't need it. Going forward, I mean, I -- I -- I
24 just be -- we're looking at 170-something thousand
25 dollars in materials that they require us -- they

1 give us, and then we turn around and buy from their
2 vendors. And we're not going to -- financially,
3 we're not going to miss a beat.

4 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Are you going to keep the
5 Blytheville school?

6 MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

7 MR. BALDWIN: Okay. Who is -- who is on the
8 board now? Is it -- is it all Helena-West Helena
9 people, local people?

10 MR. SMITH: We -- we have Mr. Cotton, who is
11 from -- he's the vice chancellor of UAPB, but he's a
12 native of West Helena. He lives in Pine Bluff. And
13 we have our circuit court judge who was probably
14 there the day you were.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Brian Miller?

16 MR. SMITH: I'm sorry?

17 MR. BALDWIN: Brian Miller?

18 MR. SMITH: No. He's -- he's a federal --
19 federal judge now. Chalk Mitchell, who's a district
20 court judge.

21 MR. BALDWIN: Oh, yes.

22 MR. SMITH: He's still on the board. He's from
23 Helena. We've got another board member from West
24 Helena and a board member from Forrest City, and we
25 are trying to get -- recruit from Mississippi County

1 to replace some board members up there that we did a
2 year ago when we did some of the leadership changes.
3 So we're -- you know, we went from -- just for your
4 own information, one of the questions I would ask if
5 I were you is, how often does your board meet and are
6 they all virtual meetings? Our board, for a long
7 time, met virtually every three months. It's very
8 difficult to manage anything that way. The KIPP
9 Foundation came in and sort of ran it really, and
10 that -- and this is -- this is what happens. And --
11 and I -- I really think with any charter management
12 organization, they -- they can't really run the
13 school and make it successful in the long run.
14 And so now, Mr. Cotton, our Chairman Cotton has -- we
15 have monthly meetings. Every third meeting is in
16 person, and we've been implementing those things.
17 And we've had community meetings in both Blytheville
18 and Helena a couple of times. And we are -- they've
19 been doing the board development. We've had
20 strategic planning, we've had budget workshops, all
21 that stuff you want to see a real board do. And our
22 board meetings include real -- real stuff, real
23 oversight, and to the extent that now I'm kind of
24 wishing they would lay off a little bit now.

25 MR. BALDWIN: Well, I -- I appreciate Chairman

1 Cotton being here, sir. Thank you for coming.

2 And what -- my final question is: as you all
3 look out at the future, what are your three biggest
4 challenges that you think you have to overcome?

5 MR. SMITH: To me, the biggest -- the big
6 challenge faces our school, as you all know, is -- is
7 enrollment. And that's something that -- that pretty
8 much every school, even not in the Delta, deal with.
9 I believe the answer for our school is that to -- to
10 be that school that you remember, which is the best
11 possible school, the best option, and -- and we
12 believe all parents, including parents in the Delta,
13 including children in the Delta have -- should have
14 -- as much money as we spend on public education --
15 should have an alternative or an option of a good
16 school. If they're not interested in an education
17 for their kid, then we can't make them do that. But
18 I don't believe that's true. I think they all do.
19 But they have to have an option. And -- and if you
20 don't have the resources or you can't move for some
21 reason, and sometimes it's difficult in poor areas
22 especially, you still deserve, and the best way to
23 get -- not out of that region but out of the -- your
24 poor circumstances is education. But you have to
25 provide it, make that option available.

1 KIPP -- KIPP Delta has done that for a long time
2 in the last five, six years. As you said, we've lost
3 our way, but we're back. And we think the best way
4 to go forward is to -- is to get back to the -- being
5 the best possible option and have excellent education
6 available for all kids in the Delta. And we've
7 already proven Delta kids can learn. We proved it
8 before, but we just proved it this year with those
9 two B schools, one in Mississippi County and one in
10 Phillips County. We can do that everywhere, but it
11 takes strong leadership. And -- and you know, you
12 can have all the great systems in the world, you can
13 have a great system, and if you have the wrong people
14 in those systems, it will not work. You can have the
15 worst system in the world, but if you have the right
16 people, you can make it work and everything in
17 between. So focusing on the right people and how to
18 sustain that going forward is not easy, but that's --
19 that's what we're trying to do.

20 MR. BALDWIN: Thank you.

21 MR. SMITH: Thank you.

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Dr. Moore?

23 DR. MOORE: Thank you for your presentation and
24 for your transparency and -- and identifying areas
25 for improvement. So my information is more a comment

1 than question, but in the future, when you share
2 data, I would appreciate on like the academic data
3 for ELA, math, and science, if it could be
4 disaggregated by campus instead of just as a whole
5 because that doesn't really tell me a lot when it's
6 all put together without that breakdown. And then
7 also compare it to the state because when I saw the
8 grade levels that did drop from '24 to '25, it made
9 me question, well, did the state drop? You know, was
10 that something to do with the tests? And I pulled up
11 the state-level data and -- and looked at that and
12 compared, and the state didn't drop. So then I'm
13 curious, you know, why in certain grade levels did
14 from '24 to '25 drop as you're making these changes?
15 So just in the future, more details when you are
16 sharing that would be helpful. A little more labels
17 on those charts as well would be helpful. So that's
18 one thing.

19 And then as we look at the letter grades, I
20 think about the changes in the letter grade
21 calculations and the business rules for the state.
22 And you know, right now we're going through the
23 transition as we move towards merit distinction being
24 part of the letter grade full blast for high schools.
25 But I'm really concerned and wondering about the

1 opportunities that your high school students have to
2 earn merit distinction because I know we're looking
3 at really the foundational math, science, literacy
4 components right now, and having qualified teachers
5 in every classroom, you know, those are really
6 foundational things to be successful. But as we look
7 at opportunities for students, do they have
8 accelerated learning opportunities that will be
9 required for them to earn merit or distinction, such
10 as concurrent-credit opportunities or the H2 pathways
11 or CTE with industry-recognized credentials? So
12 curious if that's been part of your planning as you
13 move forward as well, because that will have a -- a
14 huge impact, being one-ninth of your letter grade, as
15 well as we just want students to have those
16 opportunities.

17 MR. SMITH: Absolutely. And -- and the answer
18 is yes, we are doing those things, and we've entered
19 into agreements even before the state or even without
20 the state emphasis, we were doing that anyway. And
21 one of the things that the KIPP Foundation did give
22 us is -- is the KIPP Through College/KIPP Forward
23 model, which is a whole office dedicated to what
24 you're talking about, of staff. It's not just the
25 counselor traditional role, but other staff whose

1 main job it is to follow those students. Really
2 starting, at least in the 10th grade, moving up to
3 graduation. And yes, we are providing those
4 opportunities, and they weren't getting them before.
5 Even though we had the program, they -- it had been
6 changed to fit other things. They weren't following
7 that. They didn't have the expectations, to be
8 honest. They were saying things like, the best they
9 can do is a 15, so we'd better get them enlisted.
10 And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with being
11 enlisted. There's not. But it's not the only path,
12 and you don't give up on them that quickly. And so
13 we've had to change the culture.

14 But we have an entire program. And what we want
15 to see going forward is a more robust program when it
16 comes to that, and not just for the letter grade. We
17 ought to -- but because the state decided -- to saw
18 those -- emphasize those things, our school ought to
19 shine better than anybody's because we were already
20 doing that. We got -- we used to get money from the
21 foundations to teach other schools how to do that
22 long before it was cool, I guess you'd say. And then
23 we lost our own way and weren't doing it. And now
24 we're back to doing it. The short answer is to your
25 -- and -- and I can get our -- our chief academic

1 officer up here if you need some specifics on which
2 classes or pathways, but yes, we are but on steroids
3 in both campuses.

4 DR. MOORE: Well, that's really great to hear.

5 MR. SMITH: With both community colleges.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay. And yesterday I had the
7 privilege of being in Mississippi County on the Steel
8 to Cotton Tour and visiting industry partners, and
9 one in particular that we -- we visited, Hybar, is
10 eager and hungry to partner with local K-12 campuses
11 because they know that pipeline starts early on. And
12 the opportunities for not just a livable wage, but a
13 life-changing wage, higher than most college
14 graduates in the area would have, is just right there
15 at your back door. So whatever we can do for
16 students to realize those opportunities and to have
17 work-based learning experiences and exposure to
18 what's right there in Mississippi County just could
19 really change the trajectory of a lot of lives that
20 have been part of generational poverty. So thank you
21 for all you're doing.

22 MR. SMITH: Thank you, Dr. Moore.

23 DR. MOORE: Really appreciate that.

24 MR. SMITH: Thank you.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

1 Dr. Beshears-Duncan?

2 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yeah.

3 So I don't have any questions at this time. And
4 I agree with what has been surfaced here by the
5 Panel. It would be incredible to hear about what I
6 anticipate will be your continued growth in these
7 schools as you make these changes. And so I'm -- I
8 guess I do have a question. What might -- what might
9 make sense -- given your continuous improvement cycle
10 right now, what might make sense to come back here
11 and -- and be able to report out to us some of that
12 continued improvement?

13 MR. SMITH: In terms of how would we like to do
14 it, you mean?

15 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yes.

16 MR. SMITH: I -- I mean, we always want
17 opportunity to brag on ourselves, you know. If we're
18 doing great, and we are doing great. We got a long
19 way to go in a lot of things. Special education,
20 recruitment, and we want to see enrollment. It's
21 difficult to -- in -- in -- in the best
22 circumstances, enrollment's tough, and y'all already
23 know that. We want to be that exceptional school to
24 get there, but we're not there. So we still have a
25 lot to do. As far as methodology or timing or

1 anything, it really -- six months a year, quarterly.
2 Whatever y'all want -- want us to do, we'll be here.
3 You tell us what you want, and we'll -- we'll do it.
4 Maybe, you know, six months since it's the first time
5 not being KIPP in 20-something years. And then
6 annual, and then -- or quarterly, whatever y'all say.
7 We'll be here every month if you want us to.

8 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: So thank you for that. So
9 six months sounds reasonable to me. And I'm just
10 curious from others?

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Everybody's looking at
12 me.

13 Did you have -- did you have more questions or
14 comments?

15 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: I have no further
16 questions or comments. Thank you.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I also echo that I
18 feel like that there is a need for us to have regular
19 updates on the progress of your school. I probably
20 would do, in my one opinion, a little sooner than six
21 months, just because -- just from some of your
22 comments, you spoke to that in February, you have,
23 like, a milestone of what you need to meet as it
24 relates to special education. I'd like to kind of
25 have an update at that point on where are we with

1 that piece because that's pretty important to make
2 sure that we have kind of resolved those issues. The
3 longer that those push out, that's more students
4 going through the pipeline that are not adequately
5 supported, and that just continues to perpetuate
6 other issues that you may have in your --

7 MR. SMITH: We'd be back in February. No
8 problem.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. So that's
10 something I guess we'll have to further discuss as a
11 Panel, but I think that that would be helpful just
12 for us to be able to -- to see that. And definitely
13 appreciate your role and Mr. Cotton's role in coming
14 and being a part of this conversation.

15 MR. SMITH: He's being bashful. I'm not exactly
16 sure why. He's not usually.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But if we do a little
18 bit of, like, future forecasting and looking at
19 what's in store for your system and reflecting back
20 to a comment that you made that is very on -- you
21 know, on point. We see a lot of times that we
22 provide a lot of supports to districts, and we work
23 really hard to get them back on track. Then they get
24 back on track and take off the training wheels, and
25 then they're back off again. So when you are

1 thinking about your current situation and where you
2 need to go, what do you see as a plan outside of
3 making sure you're recruiting good teachers but good
4 leadership in your -- in your area? What's your
5 leadership capacity to be able to carry this forward
6 so that three, four years from now, we're not back
7 here having a similar conversation about there's some
8 challenges that need to be addressed?

9 MR. SMITH: Dr. Wright, I think that's -- that's
10 the million-dollar, billion-dollar question, isn't
11 it? I think any school that -- that goes through
12 that, I believe if we're doing our job now, we're
13 going to have that pipeline, you know, in five, six
14 years. But the bigger question, or answer to that
15 question, I believe, might be, I would like -- I
16 don't want to give a short pat answer. I think
17 that's a deeper answer that requires more than just
18 my opinion. I would really be able to contribute a
19 lot to that opinion, I think, and our experience too.
20 I would love to see our school lead an effort to
21 answer that question a little more deeper and more
22 broadly with maybe our partners, APSRC, some of the
23 other funders out there to discuss that very thing
24 because there -- there is a way to do it. There are
25 some things you have to have for it to happen. And I

1 think it's -- a lot of it could be applied. And I'm
2 nothing against charter management organizations, but
3 we've had a 24-year marriage with that, and there are
4 limitations. It's things they just can't do. They
5 can do a lot of things. There's some things they
6 just can't do. And what they can't do is provide
7 that ownership and that passion at the local level
8 for that institution to provide those services for
9 their local kids year in, year out over time. So I
10 would love to be a -- a leading part of deeper
11 discussion about that answer.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah, because I mean, I
13 -- I fully understand what you're saying there as
14 well, is that when you are working with the CMO, that
15 they have like this structured box that you work
16 within, but sometimes that structured box helps to
17 provide the model that is necessary to be successful.
18 So I'm just also wanting to kind of get a sense once
19 -- once you guys have an opportunity to work outside
20 of that box, what is going to ensure that there's
21 this model that's going to be in place that's going
22 to be successful, I guess, is the question I'm also
23 trying to get to.

24 MR. SMITH: Well, the biggest model, as far as
25 I'm concerned, is -- is -- is that last slideshow.

1 If we are producing kids, and that maybe they go off
2 to -- I think one of -- one of those went to -- our
3 mayor went to Colby. His assistant went to Hendrix.
4 They came back and -- and our -- our mayor was living
5 in New York City, married to a New York City girl,
6 who'd never been out in New York City hardly. And
7 that was not easy getting her to come to Helena,
8 Arkansas. But she's now the community librarian and
9 taking that over which was -- I'm not going to say it
10 was dying, but it was not exactly -- and now it's --
11 it's becoming an amazing thing because she's there,
12 and she's there because she's married to him. And
13 they met at college, and, you know?

14 So that's how you do it. That's not a really
15 simple formula, except that our kids in our school
16 now could be those kids in the future. And I think
17 we are attracting. We started alumni very vigorous
18 -- trying to be very vigorous alumni program, whereas
19 before my predecessors prohibited an alumni program.
20 Why they did that? I still don't know. But we -- we
21 want that. It's sort of like you see in alumni at
22 your university and how they try to keep you in that
23 pipeline, making sure they know that they're needed,
24 wanted.

25 They came back because they cared. That's why.

1 Not because they couldn't be anywhere they wanted to
2 be, but because they cared. And -- and that is a
3 hard thing to find in a formula or a process on
4 paper. It's difficult. Some places are hard to
5 love. Helena is hard to love. I'm -- I'm born and
6 raised native. It is hard to love my hometown, and I
7 love it. I love it, and that's why I'm there. I
8 have a lot of friends that graduated from college who
9 would think I'm nuts for -- for being moving back
10 there. So how do you make that happen? That's not
11 something that's easy to write on the formula, but I
12 think you know that you can do it.

13 DR. SMITH: May I interrupt you?

14 MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

15 DR. SMITH: Darrell Smith, Department of
16 Education.

17 I -- I think to answer your question and also to
18 just continue on with what -- what -- what the --
19 what -- what -- what the chairman's going to say or
20 mention here in just a second is that the goal of the
21 Department, not only in the charter world but also as
22 the state is if -- if there's support going to be
23 added, which obviously right now there is a lot of
24 support happening with KIPP. There's a lot of
25 support from APSRC. There's a lot of support from

1 the Department to make sure that we're -- you know,
2 we're creating that foundational structure. The goal
3 for all of this is to eventually say, "You've got to
4 walk on your own." And so -- and -- and so part of
5 our goal over the next couple of years is to ensure
6 that they have the infrastructure and the capacity to
7 walk on their own, which I think is -- was addressing
8 your question. It was like, so what are you going to
9 do? So well, that's part of our help too. That's
10 part of that support structure to say, you got to do
11 it. Yeah. We're going to -- we're going to give you
12 the model. We're going to make sure you have all the
13 right pieces. We're going to train those pieces to
14 -- to do the things that have been successful so that
15 you've -- where we've seen success, fix the things
16 that haven't been successful, and then take our hands
17 off. We'll kind of be right behind you a little bit.
18 We're going to take our hands off. We're going to
19 let you ride the bike. And -- and we're going to
20 make sure -- and then make sure that you're riding
21 the bike and making sure that you've got -- you feel
22 confident and that you can continue to sustain this
23 for years and years to come without all of this heavy
24 support on the bottom. And so I think, you know,
25 obviously, they're willing to do that. They've

1 already shown a willingness to accept feedback and to
2 accept that support. Our goal is basically to give
3 them what they need, but also then to start weaning
4 them off of that support and training them and giving
5 them the capacity so that they can, you know, run on
6 their own, so --

7 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you.

8 MR. COTTON: George Cotton, board chair.

9 In answer to your question and -- and Kevin's
10 right, I was -- I had decided I wasn't going to say
11 anything until the last comment you made. I guess
12 the thing that I want to -- to emphasize is what Mr.
13 Baldwin said earlier, we do take very seriously the
14 fact that we had lost our way. And when I was here
15 last year, one of the things I committed was that
16 when we came back, we would not be in the same place
17 that we were last year, and we're not. But I also
18 wanted to point out that there's several things that
19 we have done and will continue to do that really get
20 to your point. One, Kevin and I have begun extensive
21 conversations with additional foundations to make
22 sure that we bring additional resources to the table.
23 As a matter of fact, we had a very extensive and, I
24 think, a very positive conversation with folks at the
25 Walton Foundation about three weeks ago. We will be

1 expanding those conversations with additional
2 foundations and corporations.

3 But the other thing that we can't get away from
4 is, you know, the demographics of the Delta has
5 changed. You know, when I was a student there, it
6 was one of the most vibrant places, really, in
7 Eastern Arkansas. But when you look at the
8 enrollment cliff and how many fewer students are
9 going off to college, we are impacted by that. But
10 we're sensitive to that. But at the same time, we
11 also are aware that we've got to put in place the
12 resources, the staff, and we're convinced that we've
13 got the staff who know what they're doing. But we
14 also -- the board is also committed to making sure
15 we're doing our part.

16 The other part of that is making sure that they
17 have the discretionary dollars to make sure that we
18 recruit and bring talent to the table. We're making,
19 putting incentive dollars on the table to help
20 recruit additional talent. So we're very sensitive
21 to that, and we're putting in place those things that
22 we think are necessary to bring people to the Delta
23 because it is difficult. Housing is -- shortage is
24 real. The quality of life. You know, I still am
25 back and forth at home at least once a month. So

1 we're sensitive to that. We're putting the
2 additional dollars in that are necessary to bring
3 people into the area, and we're constantly also
4 reassessing and asking ourselves what staffing
5 changes need to be made to make sure that, again, we
6 have a model that's right.

7 We also believe that, and we told the folk at
8 KIPP this, that we think they've made their move too
9 soon. We think they're going to resent the fact or
10 that they left KIPP at the time when not only test
11 scores are going up, but additional resources are
12 coming in, and people are paying attention to it. So
13 we take very seriously the commitment that people
14 like you believed in us, and we intend to get that
15 confidence back, so -- and thank you for the
16 opportunity.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you. Okay. I
18 don't have any other questions. I just -- if we --
19 reiterate, I feel like we do need to have a revisit.
20 And just for me, special education is one that I'm
21 going to want an update on. And then also, I know
22 you had mentioned the elementary school, you feel
23 like you had a dip because of the 5th-grade teacher
24 was missing. But I just want -- want a little bit
25 more detail of what the plan looks like for that

1 because again, when you're talking about those
2 foundational levels building upon, we want to make
3 sure we really tackle those. So that would be what I
4 want to see in any follow up conversations.
5 All right. Any other questions from Panel Members or
6 any other discussion on the presentation and the
7 discussion on the amendment?

8 (NO RESPONSE)

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. If not, I will
10 then accept a motion on the open enrollment charter
11 school amendment request of KIPP Delta.

12 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: So I motion to approve the
13 amendment request for the name change and the
14 disaffiliation with KIPP.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. I do have a
17 discussion that I would like to have a stipulation
18 that there is a time for them to come back, at least
19 by February, with a follow-up report. That's my
20 comment.

21 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: So I motion to approve the
22 amendment request with the name change and the
23 disaffiliation and to report back by February of 2026
24 with the level of specificity here requested by the
25 Panel.

1 MR. BALDWIN: Second.

2 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. I have a motion
3 by Dr. Beshears-Duncan and a second by Mr. Baldwin
4 that we accept the amendment request for the open
5 enrollment charter school KIPP Delta to have a name
6 change, to disaffiliate with KIPP, and for them to
7 come back in February 2026 with an update on
8 requested items from the Panel which we will share
9 with the charter office to make sure they're
10 communicated to the charter. Okay.

11 Does that include everything?

12 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Uh-huh.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All those in
14 favor, say aye.

15 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Any opposed, nay? None?
17 Okay, great. Any abstentions?

18 Motion carries.

19 MR. SMITH: Thank you very much.

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thank you.

21 MS. STEWART: Thank you all.

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I think we'll take a
23 lunch now. And is lunch here? Okay. So 30 minutes,
24 is that okay? So we're going to recess for 30
25 minutes to take a lunch break, and we'll be back

1 1:05.

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

4 **I.4. TITAN LEARNING ACADEMY - DISTRICT CONVERSION CHARTER**
5 **APPLICATION**

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Very good. So we
7 are on to our next agenda item, district conversion,
8 charter school application, Jacksonville North
9 Pulaski School District - Titan Learning Academy.
10 Dr. Darrell Smith is going to get us started.

11 DR. SMITH: Welcome back, Panel, from lunch. As
12 we start the second half of our day, the Jacksonville
13 North Pulaski School District is coming before this
14 board to present an application to form a district
15 conversion charter. The Titan Learning Academy is
16 proposed to open in August of 2026. School will
17 serve students who have not been well served in
18 traditional settings, those who have been expelled,
19 behind on graduation credits, otherwise high risk of
20 disengaging. The instructional model combines
21 in-person, virtual, and hybrid learning with
22 standards-aligned digital curriculum at its core,
23 certified teachers with provide one-on-one support,
24 continuous progress monitoring, and targeted
25 interventions with a multi-tiered system of support.

1 The design emphasizes restorative discipline,
2 individualized support plans, and an active
3 engagement from parents and guardians to stabilize
4 and -- students and accelerate their learning. The
5 intended result is a clear re-engagement pathway that
6 enables credit recovery supports, on-time graduation,
7 prepare students for post-secondary education and
8 career opportunities.

9 And at this time, I will turn it over to the
10 district administration.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

12 All right. So before we get started, all those
13 giving testimony today on behalf of Titan Learning
14 Academy, both in person, and do you have anybody
15 online?

16 MR. OWOH: No.

17 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: No? Okay. Please stand
18 and raise your right hand. Okay. Do you swear that
19 the testimony or statement you are about to give is
20 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
21 truth?

22 MR. OWOH: Yes.

23 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Thank you. You
24 may begin. You have 20 minutes to -- for your
25 presentation.

1 MR. OWOH: I was about to say good morning, but
2 good afternoon, everyone.

3 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Good afternoon.

4 MR. OWOH: Jeremy Owoh, superintendent for
5 Jacksonville North Pulaski School District. Just a
6 quick background, this is our 10th year. We're
7 approaching our 10th year of operation, but when we
8 started the district almost ten years ago, it was
9 created and actually fought for by the community and
10 created by legislators, you all, the -- well, the
11 state department and then our school board members to
12 ensure that we provide instructional options for all
13 of our students, not just a certain population of a
14 certain group, but for all of our students. And as
15 we continue to grow the district, our objective has
16 been to look at our instructional options to ensure
17 that we're meeting the needs -- meeting the needs and
18 learning styles of all of our young people.
19 And so before you is our application for the Titan
20 Learning Academy that's already established, and we
21 have 1240 waivers in place. But as those sunset, we
22 want to make sure we continue to provide physical,
23 flexible, non -- non-traditional learning option,
24 instructional option for our young people. And so
25 that's what you have before you.

1 And before I continue, I would like to say that
2 officially, we would like to rescind the first two
3 waiver requests that are centered on attendance. So
4 we are not going to move forward with those. We will
5 have a way of assessing and obtaining attendance as
6 our young people move through that learning option.
7 But again, we like to present this to you so that we
8 can continue to provide these flexible,
9 non-traditional learning options all under one roof,
10 6th grade through 12th grade, for our scholars in the
11 Jacksonville community.

12 I have with me our principal, April Turner of
13 the Titan Learning Academy, our director of
14 Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Amanda Picard, and
15 then our assistant superintendent for Curriculum and
16 Instruction, Dr. Janice Walker. I'm going to now
17 bring up Ms. Turner so she can go in more detail
18 about the instructional setup.

19 MS. TURNER: Hello. Good afternoon. How are
20 you guys doing?

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Good.

22 MS. TURNER: Well, my name is April Turner, and
23 I am the principal of Titan Learning Academy.

24 I wanted to just kind of briefly show you guys
25 what our current model is. Our current model is that

1 we are -- we have all of these great programs in
2 different areas of our district. Currently, like K-
3 5, traditional ALE is at Bobby G. Elementary School.
4 Titan Learning Academy currently holds 6-12 Titan --
5 I'm sorry, 6-12 traditional ALE, 9-12 ALE hybrid
6 program. And then we also provide credit recovery.
7 Our Professional Development Center, it has our K-12
8 expelled scholars, and of course, they have the
9 opportunity to have credit recovery as well. And
10 then, they also hold our 6-12 virtual students as
11 well. And -- and of course, our virtual model has,
12 as Dr. Owoh said, our six -- the waivers that's
13 currently going to be this school year, 2026. And we
14 have a World Language Lab that our Professional
15 Development Center holds. And our central office
16 actually has -- holds the -- the programs K-12 Titan
17 Home School and which is an MOU with Arkansas Public
18 School Resource Center. And our GED, our Adult
19 Learning, we also have that MOU with Pulaski County
20 Adult Education.

21 What we are trying to do, we are actually trying
22 to put all of these programs under the one umbrella
23 at Titan Learning Academy. And as you see now, this
24 is our proposed conversion charter. And what this
25 will allow, not only will having our own LEA allow us

1 funding for one thing, it will -- it will allow us
2 funding, but it will also ensure that our students
3 have -- have the -- ensure that we can track our
4 students' data because right now we -- alternative
5 learning, we receive students from Jacksonville
6 Middle School and Jacksonville High School. It is
7 hard to track that data when it is in two different
8 places. Having one LEA will ensure that we can track
9 their academics along with their attendance as well
10 to ensure that they have the best possible education.
11 We also have -- we also -- we will also -- we also
12 allow flexible non-traditional learning options under
13 this one umbrella. We limit the barriers of our
14 students to move between the options. So for
15 instance, we have virtual students that are virtual,
16 but they still want to be under a pathway at our high
17 school. So we still allow them to be able to take
18 those courses at the high school but still be virtual
19 students.

20 We also provide acceleration options. Just like
21 our students at the high school, our -- well,
22 actually, our virtual program will be the only
23 program in Jacksonville that will allow our students
24 to accelerate. And so we -- we will increase our
25 graduation rates. In fact, currently, we are 100%

1 percent -- well, 98 percent graduation. All of our
2 students have graduated. And 98 -- 98 percent of our
3 seniors graduated last year.

4 And so this is the Titan Learning Academy
5 organizational chart that we are functioning under
6 currently, and nothing will change with that. And of
7 course, this is our district's multi-tiered support
8 system. Does anyone have any questions?

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Trying to turn
10 the timer off.

11 Okay. Before we start with questions, I'll ask
12 Ms. Raney from legal to come forward and let us know
13 if there's any concerns that we need to be aware of.
14 And then also, I think we just may need to make sure,
15 for the record, that it's recorded with legal that
16 you guys are resending those two waivers.

17 MS. RANEY: Yes. Hi. Julia Raney, ADE.

18 We agree that -- or we -- with the withdrawal
19 request, we have no more legal concerns as long as
20 they withdraw their request for the first and second
21 waivers regarding attendance.

22 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And do you just want to
23 confirm that again?

24 MR. OWOH: Yes.

25 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yes.

1 MR. OWOH: Thank you. Jeremy Owoh,
2 superintendent.

3 We are resending, withdrawing those two waiver
4 requests, request number one and request number two,
5 that center on attendance.

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

7 So we're in agreement. Perfect. Thank you.
8 Okay.

9 Questions, I'll start with Mr. Baldwin. Mr.
10 Baldwin?

11 MR. BALDWIN: I don't have any questions.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: No questions? Okay.

13 Dr. Moore?

14 DR. MOORE: One question. I think it may just
15 be the use of the word, but when you said virtual is
16 the only program that allows students to accelerate,
17 what do you mean by that? What do you mean by when
18 you say that acceleration?

19 MS. TURNER: In our --in our school district, so
20 our scholars can -- our virtual learning, they can
21 work at their own pace, and so they can accelerate
22 from one class to another.

23 DR. MOORE: Okay.

24 MS. TURNER: Does that answer --

25 DR. MOORE: Not -- not like the new definition

1 of accelerated learning --

2 MS. TURNER: No. No, ma'am.

3 DR. MOORE: -- all that? Okay.

4 MS. TURNER: No.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay. Just wanted to clarify that.

6 And then, so -- and this is a nuance that you
7 probably just said, and I didn't catch. Just to be
8 clear, will all these be now in the same building?
9 Are you physically moving everyone to the same
10 location as well?

11 MS. TURNER: We are currently already in one
12 building outside of the -- outside of the virtually
13 expelled, of course. You know, the virtual will be
14 virtual, but we will also have Titan Learning, the
15 homeschool program. They can visit our site.
16 Currently, it is at our central office site.

17 DR. MOORE: Well, the one slide that you showed
18 with the current programs that had Bobby G. Lester
19 Elementary Titan Learning Academy, Professional
20 Development Center, Central Office.

21 MS. TURNER: Uh-huh. That was our current
22 model, and that is our current model at this time.
23 So we -- our K-12 traditional ALE -- I mean, our K-5,
24 it still will be at Bobby G. Lester.

25 DR. MOORE: Okay.

1 MS. TURNER: Ours is just, we are just asking
2 for 6-12.

3 DR. MOORE: Okay. So --

4 MS. TURNER: Does that make sense?

5 DR. MOORE: I guess that -- that was my
6 confusion then. So K-5, nothing's going to change
7 with K-5?

8 MS. TURNER: No, ma'am.

9 DR. MOORE: Because the proposed conversion
10 charter doesn't have -- does not have grades on it.

11 MS. TURNER: It doesn't have a number on it, but
12 it is only going to be our secondary, which is 6-12.

13 DR. MOORE: Okay. That's helpful. Thank you.

14 MR. OWOH: Dr. Moore, Jeremy Owoh,
15 superintendent. On the front page of the contract,
16 it does say the anticipated -- anticipated grade
17 levels are 6th grade to 12th grade. So those are
18 grades that we're asking for --

19 DR. MOORE: Okay.

20 MR. OWOH: -- for this conversion.

21 DR. MOORE: So K-5 just won't be changing at
22 all?

23 MR. OWOH: Yes, ma'am.

24 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you. And then I didn't
25 see this on there, and once again, I apologize if I'm

1 overlooking it between the presentations and the
2 waivers and the application, sometimes I might
3 overlook something. On your virtual students, can
4 you speak to the current headcount, anticipated
5 headcount? Because we know that throughout our
6 state, virtual is not the best option, typically.

7 MS. TURNER: Right.

8 DR. MOORE: So can you speak to how many
9 students are -- are that?

10 MS. TURNER: Current -- our headcount for
11 virtual, our cap is 75. We currently have around 70
12 students that's in our virtual program right now.

13 DR. MOORE: Okay. Thank you.

14 That's all the questions I have now. Thanks.

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Dr. Beshears-Duncan?

16 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yeah, thank you.

17 So thank you for what you're doing for
18 non-traditional students. I'm a former non-
19 traditional high school and college student, and so
20 it's always just really great to hear about those
21 kiddos being served.

22 MS. TURNER: Thank you.

23 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Yes. On your proposed
24 conversion charter slide, you mentioned limiting
25 barriers for scholars to move between options. Might

1 you speak to that a bit more?

2 MS. TURNER: Yes. And so as you know -- well,
3 our alternative learning environment, our students
4 are not geared to stay in that position or in that --
5 in -- in that environment forever. It's just, we --
6 we always call it a vacation, so to speak. They're
7 just there to ensure that we give them the social and
8 behave -- the social behavior or academic skills that
9 they're lacking. Once they've met their goals, we do
10 transition them to our traditional schools.

11 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you. Thank you. So
12 what are some of the behavioral supports within your
13 MTSS?

14 MS. TURNER: Okay. Well, first off, we have a
15 behavior interventionist that's there on-site that
16 will assist our students when they are having moments
17 of -- you know, they need moments of support in their
18 behavior. But we also train our -- our -- all of our
19 staff, they're trained to -- to assist students when
20 they're having those moments. When we meet with our
21 students and develop their placement -- when we have
22 their placement meetings in their goals, they set up
23 what their goals are. But we do look at
24 interventions that will work for them. And so when
25 we look at those interventions, one thing that most

1 of our scholars say is that they need a cool-down
2 when they're upset, they need a place where they can
3 go to kind of decompress, like all of us; right? And
4 so we provide them that opportunity. They have a
5 safe place in our school where they go to cool down.
6 Once they've done -- done that, that's their path to
7 see either the counselor, myself, my dean, or our
8 behavior interventionist, and we allow them to go
9 back to class at that point.

10 DR. BESHEARS-DUNCAN: Thank you so much.

11 I don't have any further questions.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Dr. Bacon?

13 DR. BACON: Thank you so much.

14 I think I just have a couple of questions. Help
15 me understand the rationale for pursuing conversion
16 charter at this time. I think I heard you say you
17 have 1240 waivers that are going away, but just sort
18 of what's the background and rationale for pursuing
19 this as a conversion charter?

20 MS. TURNER: So our 1240 waivers, they are going
21 away as you -- as you spoke about. However, we want
22 to ensure that our scholars have the best
23 opportunity, and sometimes that opportunity -- their
24 -- their opportunity doesn't look traditional in a
25 regular traditional school. We have -- we are trying

1 to provide students that have high social behavioral
2 needs the ability to complete graduation and -- and
3 as well as virtually, we have a lot of students that
4 are working. If you look at our -- if you look at
5 our -- our -- I'm sorry, give just a moment. If you
6 look at our students' backgrounds, a lot of our
7 students are working.

8 DR. BACON: Right.

9 MS. TURNER: They're -- you know, they -- it's
10 not by wants. They have to. And we want to provide
11 them the opportunity to finish strong and give them a
12 solid foundation. In our building, we also have
13 trained our students for work-based training. And so
14 they actually come in, and they provide our students
15 virtually, our hybrid students and our ALE students,
16 with the training that they're going to need to go to
17 work and be successful in the workforce right after
18 graduation.

19 DR. BACON: So what are the real advantages to
20 this being a conversion charter?

21 MS. TURNER: So --

22 DR. BACON: I'm just trying to get to figuring
23 out --

24 MS. TURNER: So it's to increase our graduation.

25 DR. BACON: -- if this is the only way to --

1 yeah. Is this the only way to accomplish what you're
2 hoping to accomplish, is as a conversion charter or
3 -- yeah. I'm just trying to get -- wrap my brain
4 around the background for the thought.

5 MS. PICARD: Yes. Amanda Picard, director of
6 curriculum and instruction.

7 And I'll help -- I'll help answer this one
8 because I was there when we started this a few years
9 ago. And the advice that we received from the person
10 working with us from the charter unit was that we
11 could do virtual and do virtually expelled, give all
12 the virtual services to our students under the
13 waivers that we held. But when the waivers expired,
14 we had to have new waivers to replace those waivers,
15 and that the only way to now do that, since those
16 were sunsetting, was to apply for a conversion
17 charter so that way we could get those waivers for
18 the virtual programs to continue.

19 DR. BACON: Okay. I mean, that -- that --

20 MS. PICARD: So that is where that came from.

21 DR. BACON: I appreciate that. That makes
22 sense. Okay. Thank you.

23 MS. PICARD: So we are trying to continue on.

24 DR. BACON: Absolutely. Okay. The only other
25 question I have is really not directly related to

1 this request, but just for my benefit. I know a few
2 months back there was an article in the paper, on the
3 newspaper, about you all engaging with Jacksonville
4 Lighthouse Charter. What's the status of that? Is
5 that over? Is that an ongoing conversation?

6 MR. OWOH: Yes. We have officially not --
7 chosen not to pursue that at this time.

8 DR. BACON: Okay.

9 MR. OWOH: Yes, sir.

10 DR. BACON: Okay. Thank you.

11 MR. OWOH: Yes, sir.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Oh, again, thank
13 you for your presentation and providing additional
14 details on the why behind why you're wanting to move
15 in this direction. Just a couple of questions.

16 When students are in the ALE environment, can
17 you speak a little bit on what CTE is going to look
18 like for them? And then also too, I -- I know that
19 we have a partnership with your district where your
20 Jobs for Arkansas Graduates program is available for
21 students that are in the traditional high school. It
22 has been in the past available through an ALE, but
23 I'm not quite sure if that's still in place. Does
24 that program have a role in this conversation?
25 Because it looks like a lot of what you are wanting

1 to accomplish can be accomplished through a
2 partnership with that program. I'm just trying to
3 see what the plan is there.

4 MS. TURNER: Okay. So I can speak to your first
5 question.

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

7 MS. TURNER: We do provide CTE opportunities at
8 our school. We -- the students that want to be in
9 that pathway, they can also go -- that's why we have
10 that blend -- that hybrid virtual model. They can
11 also participate at the high school level. Our ALE
12 students, what they -- what they receive is that work
13 placement based training. And so we come -- they
14 come in, and we do a survey to see the -- what their
15 interests are. We have those -- those industries to
16 come in and speak to our students, let them know what
17 they're going to need. And at that point -- at that
18 point, our work-placement teacher works with them and
19 develop a partnership between the employer and the
20 student.

21 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So while they're in the
22 ALE environment, they still have access to a pathway?

23 MS. TURNER: Absolutely.

24 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: And -- but the pathway
25 is offered at the traditional high school at -- I'm

1 trying to -- trying to understand that.

2 MS. TURNER: It is. And so when our students go
3 back to the traditional high school, they haven't
4 missed anything. They can just step right back in
5 into that model. And so it's not like they've missed
6 anything.

7 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: But while they're in the
8 ALE environment, how is that being provided? I guess
9 that's my question.

10 MS. TURNER: Our work-placement teacher --

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So the work-based
12 learning experience, that is the way that they're
13 connected to the pathway?

14 MS. TURNER: Yes, ma'am. Uh-huh.

15 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So for your students
16 that are not at the grade level to where they would
17 be in a work-based learning experience, say, like
18 your 9th, 10th graders, what does the CTE look like
19 for them being engaged in a pathway?

20 MS. TURNER: Well, they do work with the
21 work-based placement teacher. She just provides them
22 with a career, with all those soft skills that
23 they're going to need to be successful.

24 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

25 MS. TURNER: And so in our high school, in 9th

1 grade, our students aren't in a pathway yet. They
2 don't really declare a pathway until their 10th-grade
3 year.

4 MR. OWOH: So one of -- Jeremy Owoh,
5 superintendent.

6 One of --

7 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

8 MR. OWOH: As Ms. Turner was just mentioning
9 about 9th grade, that's when they start the freshman
10 seminar.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

12 MR. OWOH: So they get --

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So you are using the
14 academy model?

15 MR. OWOH: We -- we are an academy.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

17 MR. OWOH: So we have college and career
18 academy.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

20 MR. OWOH: So all our freshman scholars are in
21 that freshman seminar. So they get snippets of all
22 of the pathways. So they learn -- so they can
23 actually choose the pathway of choice after their
24 9th-grade year. They also participate because of our
25 partnership with the Academies of Central Arkansas,

1 with the freshman exposure events that they have
2 during that time as well. And then, of course, the
3 speakers from the industry leaders -- or industry
4 sector come during that freshman seminar. So then
5 there -- so that they can make a well-informed
6 decision after that 9th-grade year. So that's what
7 Ms. Turner at the Titan Learning Academy also
8 emulates with that teacher at the 9th-grade level.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So I hate to keep asking
10 this question.

11 MR. OWOH: You're good.

12 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. But -- so the
13 foundational course in a CTE pathway, they can take
14 that at a 9th or 10th grade level? Any student can?

15 MS. TURNER: Absolutely.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: So the students that are
17 at the Titan Academy --

18 MS. TURNER: Yes, ma'am.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- do they have access
20 to those foundational courses, or do they only have
21 access to it if they're at the traditional school?

22 MS. TURNER: No, they have access to those
23 courses, and they also have access to all the field
24 trips and all the -- everything that they're
25 receiving at the high school, they're receiving at

1 Titan Learning Academy, so --

2 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All right. That
3 helps me. And then my second part of my question is
4 about your JAG program. So I know that we recently
5 had some of your students come to our leadership
6 academy at the end of last month. Hopefully, they
7 enjoyed it. But I don't know if we have that level
8 of engagement with the ALE. And so I'm wondering, is
9 that going to be a part of this model, or is it
10 something that you guys are looking at or
11 considering? Because again, it's similar to if
12 students are engaged in a JAG program at their
13 traditional high school for whatever reason, they
14 have to take a step back and go to an ALE. When they
15 come back, are they going to lose that connective
16 piece if it's not available at their ALE also?

17 MS. TURNER: Yes, ma'am. Instead of us using
18 JAG in -- at our ALE campus this year, we -- we chose
19 to use a work-based learning --

20 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

21 MS. TURNER: -- which provides the same skills
22 as JAG.

23 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Somewhat. So they do
24 look at their work experience, but with JAG, because
25 of the intentional population that they're focusing

1 in on which is really that ALE population in many
2 cases, not all, it provides that additional layer of
3 support as well. So I would encourage you to look at
4 that again --

5 MS. TURNER: Yes, ma'am.

6 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: -- because I know that
7 we have some of our districts that think it has to be
8 an either or. It doesn't have to be -- it can be
9 both and --

10 MS. TURNER: Okay.

11 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Yeah.

12 MS. TURNER: Thank you.

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. Any other
14 questions from the Panel Members?

15 DR. MOORE: I have just two quick questions.

16 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay.

17 DR. MOORE: And you may not be able to answer
18 one of them. It might be something that our charter
19 group has to answer. Have our ALE folks at DESE
20 reviewed this? Okay. And so their concerns have
21 been addressed. All right. And then my second
22 question, and I'm not highly knowledgeable of the
23 nuances of ALE and how students may flow in and out
24 of that. Since you -- the accountability for this
25 will be a separate LEA, and the students are moving

1 in and out --

2 MS. TURNER: Yes.

3 DR. MOORE: -- can you speak to how that's going
4 to work for the accountability for those students?
5 Like, at what point are they tied to their -- their
6 home -- campus as opposed to tied to the ALE/LEA?

7 MS. TURNER: Okay. So that is --

8 DR. MOORE: As well as the ALE/LEA?

9 MS. TURNER: -- a question that I had as well.
10 And you know, when -- when at the end of the year
11 they're going to take the ATLAS exam; right? Those
12 who -- whoever -- whichever students are at our
13 campus, that -- their test scores will be tied to us.
14 The thing about our district is that our -- all of my
15 teachers are certified to teach. And we also have
16 CTMs throughout our district that will ensure that
17 our -- our teachers are teaching the exact same
18 curriculum that they're teaching in -- at the middle
19 school building as well as the high school building.
20 And so none -- so they will not miss anything as far
21 as curriculum goes.

22 MR. OWOH: Dr. Moore, to add to that, our
23 students, and Ms. Turner can share this, they -- we
24 don't allow them to go back and forth at unreasonable
25 or just random times of the school year. And so,

1 like, semester breaks. And so that when they have
2 finished a course, that -- that grade can transfer
3 with them back to the middle school or to the high
4 school. So it's a seamless transition because it's
5 at an obvious break of the school year.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay.

7 MR. OWOH: So they can go back and forth.

8 DR. MOORE: That's all. Thank you.

9 MR. OWOH: Okay. Thank you.

10 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Any other questions or
11 comments from the Panel?

12 (NO RESPONSE)

13 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All right. If
14 there are no further questions, at this time, I'll
15 entertain a motion.

16 DR. BACON: Move that we approve the conversion
17 charter request for the Jacksonville Titan Academy.

18 DR. MOORE: I second.

19 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. There is a motion
20 by Dr. Bacon, a second by Dr. Moore, that we approve
21 the request from Jacksonville Titan Academy to become
22 a district conversion charter; is that correct? Yes.
23 Okay. Is there any discussion or any more questions
24 on the motion?

25 (NO RESPONSE)

1 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Okay. All in favor,
2 aye?

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Any opposed, nay?
5 Any abstentions?

6 Okay. Very good. Motion passes. Thank you.

7 MR. OWOH: Thank you.

8 MS. TURNER: Thank you so much.

9 CHAIR WRIGHT-McMURRAY: Thanks.

10 (The action agenda concluded at 1:34 p.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 7th day of January, 2026



MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #852

