

BEFORE THE ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

On July 14, 2022, during a regular meeting of the Arkansas State Board of Education, the State Board considered the Petition of the Harmony Grove School District to close Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus, which is an “isolated school” as defined by Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-601, beginning the 2022-2023 school year, and to move those grades to its Harmony Grove High School. The State Board conducted a hearing pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602 and the Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing the Closure of Isolated Schools.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On April 26, 2022, by majority vote (5-2), the Harmony Grove School District voted to close Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus and serve the impacted students at its Harmony Grove High School, starting with the 2022-23 school year.

2. On June 10, 2022, the District filed with the Arkansas State Board of Education a Petition for Closure of Grades 7-12 to Onsite Learning at its Sparkman Campus.

3. Grades 7-12 at the Sparkman campus had 40 students enrolled during the 2021-22 school year. The District’s Petition did not seek closure of Grades K-6 at its Sparkman campus.

4. The District reasoned that Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus must be closed for fiscal reasons, as well as to ensure that the District provides an adequate and appropriate education for its students in Grades 7-12.

5. The District stated that transporting impacted students to its Harmony Grove High School will be done in a way to minimize inconvenience and in a manner that will allow impacted students to fully participate in all academic and extracurricular programs at Harmony Grove High School.

6. An Opposition to the District's petition was filed by a group of Sparkman patrons, supporters, community members, etc. The Opposition was represented by legal counsel, Jess Askew.

7. Both the District and Opposition presented evidence and argument during the hearing.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND ORDER

8. The Sparkman K-12 Campus is an "isolated school" as defined by Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-601.

9. Because the Board of Directors of the Harmony Grove School District did not vote unanimously to close Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman Campus (although a majority of members voted for closure), Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b) requires State Board approval for closure of the Sparkman campus.

10. According to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b)(2)(C), the State Board shall only approve the closure of an isolated school, or any part thereof, if it determines that the closure is in the best interest of the students in the school district as a whole, and that the closure would have no negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate a valid court order.

11. The District acknowledged that the closure of Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus would not have a negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate a valid court order, and no evidence to the contrary was introduced.

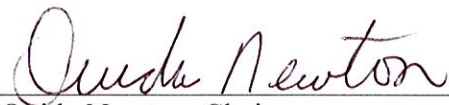
12. Based on the Petition and Opposition to Petition, as well as evidence and argument presented at the hearing, the State Board finds that closure of Grades 7-12 at Harmony Grove's Sparkman campus and serving the impacted students at Harmony Grove High School is in the best interest of the students in the school district as a whole.

13. Consequently, the State Board grants the District's Petition to close Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus and move the impacted students to its Harmony Grove High School starting with the 2022-2023 school year.

14. This Order is effective July 14, 2022.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

On this 15th day of July, 2022

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ouida Newton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ouida Newton, Chair
Arkansas State Board of Education