

Minutes
State Board of Education Meeting
Tuesday, November 15, 2011

The State Board of Education reconvened its November meeting in the auditorium of the Department of Education building. Dr. Ben Mays, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Present: Dr. Ben Mays, Chair; Jim Cooper, Vice Chair; Joe Black; Sam Ledbetter; Alice Mahony; Toyce Newton; Mireya Reith; Vicki Saviers; Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Commissioner; and Kathy Powers, Teacher of the Year

Absent: Ms. Brenda Gullett

Action Agenda

(Complete records of the hearings are available in the State Board office.)

Hearing of Open Enrollment Charter Application Appeal and ADE Review: Premier High School of Texarkana, Texarkana, Arkansas

Dr. Mary Ann Duncan, Charter School Coordinator, introduced an open enrollment charter school application from Premier High School of Texarkana to be located within the Texarkana School District in Texarkana, Arkansas. Dr. Duncan said the school, proposed by Responsive Education Solutions based in Lewisville, Texas, would serve up to 200 students in grades 9-12

Mr. Charles Cook, Chief Executive Officer of Responsive Education Solutions, said his company's high schools serve a high percentage of students who have been unsuccessful in traditional schools by keeping the student-teacher ratio low.

Board members asked why ResponsiveEd chose to locate in Texarkana.

Mr. Cook said his company was initially approached by a pastor in Texarkana interested in providing educational options to students. He noted Texarkana High School's long history on the state's list of academically troubled schools and the school's higher than average dropout rate.

University of Arkansas professor Gary Ritter said Arkansas High School ranked 239 out of 252 in the state in terms of graduation rates.

Robin Stover, Arkansas High School principal, and other school officials described the school's efforts to improve student behavior and achievement and raise the

graduation rate. They reported 248 of the school's 252 seniors graduated last year. In addition, the district provides an alternative school with flexible scheduling of academic courses taught by state-certified teachers, career training and advisory sessions.

Texarkana Mayor Wayne Smith spoke in opposition to the school because of its downtown location and the possibility of students waiting long periods of time without transportation.

Senator Steve Harrelson objected to the possibility of Texas teachers coming to the charter school without Arkansas certification.

Mr. Cooper moved, seconded by Ms. Saviers, to approve the application. The motion failed four to three in a roll call vote.

Reith-no
Newton-yes
Saviers-yes
Ledbetter-no
Black-no
Cooper-yes
Mahony-no

Ms. Reith said she wasn't convinced the school could succeed without community support.

Mr. Ledbetter said the applicant chose the Texarkana community because of proximity to its Texas headquarters. He also said the Texarkana School District recognizes its needs and is better able to direct students into a recovery program.

Ms. Mahony and Mr. Black indicated their approval of the school district's alternative program and the effort to reach that population of students.

Mr. Cooper left the meeting at this time.

**Hearing of Open Enrollment Charter Application Appeal and ADE Review:
The Diploma School of Jonesboro, Jonesboro, Arkansas**

Dr. Duncan presented an open enrollment charter school application from The Diploma School of Arkansas to be located within the Jonesboro School District in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Ms. Sally Wilson, President of the Board of Directors for Osceola Communication, Business and Arts Inc., the sponsoring organization, said the school would serve up to 300 students in grades 11-12. She said the school was designed to provide

day and night classes giving students flexibility to work, receive job training and meet family responsibilities while attaining a diploma. Students could earn up to three credits in each six-week semester.

Jonesboro School District Superintendent Dr. Kim Wilbanks and other Craighead County superintendents explained how they had worked together to open an alternative school for students from their districts and an adult education programs in their communities.

Board members expressed concern about the organization's ability to be successful.

Ms. Newton moved, seconded by Ms. Reith, to deny the application. The motion carried unanimously.

**Hearing of Open Enrollment Charter Application Appeal and ADE Review:
The Diploma School of West Memphis, West Memphis, Arkansas**

Dr. Duncan introduced the application of The Diploma School of West Memphis, a proposed open-enrollment public charter school to be located within the West Memphis School District in West Memphis, Arkansas. The school would serve up to 300 students in grades 11-12.

Ms. Wilson explained the proposal was designed similarly to The Diploma School of Jonesboro and would give students in the West Memphis area an option for attaining a diploma.

West Memphis High School Principal Jon Collins said West Memphis coordinates with the Marion School District to provide an alternative school that offers services similar to what the charter school would provide.

Ms. Mahony moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to deny the application. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

These minutes were recorded by Phyllis Stewart.

Dr. Tom W. Kimbrell, Commissioner

Dr. Ben Mays, Chair

