

BEFORE THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

APRIL 20205

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RECORD OF MEETING

BE IT REMEMBERED, That 12:40 P.M. on the 9th day of April, 2026, came on for meeting the captioned cause before the Arkansas Department of Education, Lee County School District, 161 Walnut Street, Marianna, Arkansas, the following proceedings transcribed with said meeting being reported by Shatonda McClain, Arkansas Supreme Court Certified Court Reporter

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## A P P E A R A N C E S

## PANEL MEMBERS:

ADRIENNE WOODS, CHAIR  
JACOB OLIVA, SECRETARY  
DR. GARY ARNOLD  
RANDY HENDERSON  
JEFF WOOD  
KEN BRAGG  
LEIGH S. KENNER

## ALSO PRESENT:

STACY SMITH, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
MICHAEL STONE, MARIANNA SCHOOL DISTRICT

I N D E X

STYLE AND NUMBER ..... 1

APPEARANCES ..... 2

PROCEEDINGS..... 5

PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED.....35

COURT REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE.....36

EXHIBITS

(NO EXHIBITS WERE IDENTIFIED OR ATTACHED TO THIS TRANSCRIPT)



1 Michael Stone, who you heard from a few months ago in  
2 Little Rock at the state board meeting. Indicators  
3 from the exit criteria that were set with the  
4 district had to do with these five areas.

5 One is about a safe learning environment.  
6 You're going to notice in a minute when we go through  
7 the actual scoring, you're not going to see a score  
8 for school safety, right? Because legislation was  
9 passed about not giving out information that could in  
10 any way jeopardize the school safety or pointing out  
11 something publicly they may need work on. All right.  
12 What I can tell you, though, and Jerry Keefer and  
13 Jason are both here from our school safety unit.  
14 They have provided walkthroughs on this campus. They  
15 have worked with the district, and we are confident  
16 that they've met all the criteria that's been  
17 established. If not, they've exceeded it. Okay.  
18 And continue to strive for this to be a safe place.

19 Indicator 2 has to do with the district and  
20 instructional monitoring and the district decisions;  
21 3 is when you get down to what the school system's  
22 putting in goals for instructional expectations; 4  
23 has to do with about educator growth and support,  
24 which many of you saw that today on the tour; and 5  
25 then is specific about curriculum and materials used

1 in classrooms.

2 So the current status of this district, the  
3 district letter grade is a D. The high school is  
4 currently at an F. We're confident that that is  
5 continuing to improve and is strong right now is  
6 currently at a C. I pulled these slides right here  
7 because when we talk about what's really happening in  
8 this district, it's on the growth side. All right.  
9 We want to see this school district moving kids and  
10 that kids are meeting or exceeding their growth  
11 expectation. Anna Strong's growth scores overall  
12 were positive. They were -- more kids were achieving  
13 growth than not. When you get to the growth of the  
14 lowest -- lowest quartile, that's where we take the  
15 kids who score the lowest in achievement, group those  
16 kids together and we look at their growth scores.

17 So it's very important for a school district to  
18 have a very purposeful, specific target on how we're  
19 going to catch the kids up. All right. And so  
20 again, taking that population, looking at where they  
21 are continuing to make growth -- Lee High School on  
22 growth. Today, as you were doing your visit, you got  
23 to see that Trojan time and being specific about  
24 trying to move kids. We've got to get more kids  
25 moving in their growth target there. They do have

1 structures in place. They're currently going to take  
2 the Atlas assessment here in the next few weeks, and  
3 we believe that you're going to see growth scores on  
4 those assessments. And our indications and interim  
5 assessments indicate that. Right here, though, I  
6 think this one's neat for the high school growth of  
7 the lowest quartile.

8 So those of you who just did the tour, and you  
9 went to Trojan time, and were being very specific  
10 about points and what you've got to do to get to the  
11 next level. When you see them having their teen  
12 times with teachers sitting around looking at student  
13 data and getting really specific about what lessons  
14 have to deliver, they're making growth with the kids.

15 Okay, so they're starting to move up on that  
16 list. The advisory board -- this has been presented  
17 before back in November, an advisory board, community  
18 members from around the community applied to be a  
19 part of this board. They were interviewed. Mr.  
20 Henderson participated in those interviews and  
21 recommendations. And we currently have an active  
22 advisory board. They have been -- had trainings by  
23 the School Boards Association. They have reviewed  
24 every board packet that's come to Secretary Oliva to  
25 sign off on. The past couple of months they have

1           been doing trainings and working together as a board  
2           with Dr. Stone.

3           The rubric for the exit criteria. So we used a  
4           five-point scale when rating the different criteria  
5           in the different elements. They were a zero on every  
6           one of these elements when we started. We picked  
7           elements that we felt like they had to grow on. All  
8           right. So one was not attempting, two was beginning,  
9           three developing, four and five sustaining. A year  
10          ago, last February, under Ms. Whitlow's leadership,  
11          the OCSS team did a full walkthrough, scoring them on  
12          the rubric that was -- was used again this February.  
13          Okay.

14          From that, they gave very specific goals on what  
15          we needed to improve, what -- where we were shooting  
16          for to continue that improvement process. And I'm  
17          happy to say that they grew in all five areas again.  
18          That's what this whole process and partnership with  
19          the state has been. It's about continuous growth.  
20          In no way do we believe that this district is an A at  
21          this moment. But we believe that they're well on  
22          their way to making great strides to be able to  
23          function as a district, and that they have systems  
24          and structures in place to continue moving kids.

25          So looking at overall school safety, those were

1 the specific five objectives that the school safety  
2 team, and the OCSS team scored the district on and  
3 they met those. In the report that -- you guys had a  
4 written report, you saw their last year's score  
5 compared to this year's score, except for in safety.  
6 Exit criteria two again, about monitoring student  
7 progress. But it was more about the district --  
8 district level -- level leadership being in team  
9 meetings, knowing where students were heading, how  
10 the district was supporting the schools, how they  
11 were coordinating and working with stakeholders, and  
12 engaging effective two-way communication. So again,  
13 a 3.77 score. Some of these objectives arranged as  
14 high as fours and fives, overall score average, so  
15 3.7.

16 Exit criteria for Number 3, again, this goes  
17 back to what's happening at the school, so developing  
18 models of instructional practice. I want to  
19 highlight again this morning when we were at the  
20 elementary school and you saw a literacy coach  
21 sitting with four other teachers and being very  
22 specific about the lessons that they were going to be  
23 teaching the next day. Right? That's part of this,  
24 right? This district recognizes that they have a lot  
25 of novice or unlicensed teachers. And so being able

1 to scaffold and put in the supports that they need to  
2 be able to deliver a lesson -- a lesson well. All  
3 right. So again, you saw those in action today and  
4 again on the score on this, they continue to improve.  
5 This gets into your program services, special -- your  
6 students with IEPs or 504, talks about GT. This  
7 looks at those special programs, too, making sure  
8 that we're meeting -- meeting kids' needs.

9 Objective 3.4, Ms. Keener, I want to pull that  
10 one out for you. Pre-K. They have a -- you didn't -  
11 - we didn't visit it today for time. They have a  
12 robust pre-K program. They have done outreach to  
13 mom-and-pop pre-Ks throughout the county and brought  
14 them in and done training with them. It's a -- it's  
15 -- it's fabulous. I mean, I wish we had time to go  
16 by there today, but it is a robust program. Lots of  
17 kids involved and again, getting kids early. The  
18 curriculum adopted in pre-K we think is having a  
19 direct impact on us as kids are moving into  
20 kindergarten and first grade.

21 Exit criteria for Indicator 4 talks about  
22 educator growth and support, educators being on  
23 professional growth plans, which they are. How we're  
24 doing ongoing teacher observations. That's how we're  
25 assigning teachers to areas. This is an area, if I

1 had to say they're providing support for teachers or  
2 finding ways to attract teachers here, this is still  
3 an area that they're continuing to have to improve  
4 on, right? When you have as much staff as they do,  
5 that really does need that intensive support. They  
6 have structures in place, right? But how do we get  
7 to that individualized support piece through the  
8 year? So this is an area they're still working on.  
9 But they do meet the criteria for this and do have  
10 systems in place for that. I would say more than  
11 anything, it's about feedback to teachers on their  
12 instruction. What do you -- do you need to do next  
13 to make that lesson that much better? Right? And so  
14 developing our administrators on that feedback --  
15 feedback part on how to make teachers better in the  
16 classroom.

17 And Exit Criteria 5 had to do with their high  
18 quality instructional materials. This morning they  
19 were pointing out the CKLA, which was their literacy  
20 curriculum. They pointed out that for dyslexia that  
21 they were using Take Flight. Those are top notch  
22 curriculum materials. But they're tough curriculum  
23 materials and there's lots of support happening with  
24 those teachers to be able to deliver them. They have  
25 high quality instructional materials in math, and

1 they have high quality instructional materials here  
2 at the high school as well. So as far as pulling all  
3 their extra criteria together, they're considered  
4 still overall in that developing phase, but when you  
5 look at individual objectives, they were hitting many  
6 of the applying scores as well, but we averaged them  
7 together for overall score. Believing that the  
8 district -- that this shows that they did meet the  
9 extra criteria that was set forth for them as a  
10 district.

11 Again, we know they still have work to do and  
12 the work is not done, but as far as being completely  
13 under state authority and not being able to operate  
14 with their own board, we feel like it's time for that  
15 release, but to still walk alongside them in some  
16 form or fashion and I'll talk about that in a little  
17 bit more.

18 So what we're going to be asking for today, in  
19 a little bit, is for the state board to approve that  
20 they've met the exit criteria that was established  
21 for them at level five, move to putting the district  
22 in a level four, which is considered to be directed  
23 support. So we're still very much hands-on with  
24 them, walking with them because they're being  
25 released that they're still required to come to the

1 board with quarterly reports for at least a year and  
2 at the end of the year, you could require them to  
3 continue to come, right? The -- the rules outline  
4 that it's a requirement for quarterly reports for at  
5 least a year. Okay. Our OCSS team will still have  
6 assignments here, still be doing walkthroughs here,  
7 still being -- having direct support, working with  
8 Dr. Stone as well. I hope they know that we're a  
9 phone call away. Right?

10 So at this point I would like to ask Dr. Stone  
11 to come up and make a few comments, be prepared to  
12 answer any questions that you might have still as a  
13 board, and then we'll make the final recommendation.  
14 But I will say this before Dr. Stone comes up. This  
15 district has come a long, long way. I'm very proud  
16 of the work they've done and very, very, very proud  
17 of this man right here, Dr. Stone. So he came home,  
18 came home with a purpose and I think he has  
19 delivered. So, Dr. Michael Stone.

20 **DR. STONE:** Thank you. To the board, Secretary  
21 Oliva, our Deputy Commissioner Stacey Smith. Thank  
22 you for your continued support. Let me also say  
23 thank you to many others that may be in the room.  
24 Senator Mourdock, the OCSS team, Julie, John,  
25 Michael, Chris, Yolanda, Renee and others. The

1 fiscal services, Willie Murdock and the Great Rivers  
2 Cooperative, students, staff, community members,  
3 advisory board who is with us today, and to a special  
4 thanks to one of my mentors, Sheila Whitlow.

5 My extraordinary staff members and students that  
6 are here today. Today marks a meaningful and hopeful  
7 moment for Lee County School District as we are being  
8 recommended to return to local control. This step is  
9 a testament to the resilience, commitment, strong  
10 belief in this community has shown our schools and  
11 most importantly, in our students. I want to extend  
12 my deepest gratitude to our teachers, staff,  
13 students, parents and the community members. Your  
14 hard work, sacrifice and dedication have made this  
15 moment possible. You stayed focused, you stayed  
16 committed, and you never lost sight of what matters  
17 most, providing the very best for our students.

18 While today is a milestone worth celebrating,  
19 it's a reminder that the work must continue. This is  
20 not the finish line, just the beginning. It's the  
21 next step forward. We must continue united, continue  
22 striving for excellence, and keep pushing to ensure  
23 every student in Lee County has the opportunity to  
24 succeed. I'm incredibly proud to stand here with  
25 you, stand and serve alongside you, and say without

1           hesitation, I'm proud to be a Lee County Trojan. The  
2           work -- together, we'll keep moving forward. I'm  
3           here for any questions that you may have.

4           **MS. SMITH:** Starting on that side. Mr. Wood?

5           **MR. WOOD:** I do have some questions for the  
6           conversation. It's not really for Dr. Stone, though.  
7           It's more for the department and the process of the  
8           return to local control. I was just looking at the  
9           scores -- the scores and the criteria and whatnot  
10          and, you know, it seems to me that the criteria that  
11          were listed here, they seem to measure processes and  
12          effort as opposed to achievement. Is that fair?

13          **MS. SMITH:** Yes, the processes will lead to  
14          achievement.

15          **MR. WOOD:** Sure. Sure. So how -- how hard is  
16          it for a school system to get a five on these  
17          criteria?

18          **MS. SMITH:** So these criteria were specifically  
19          set for Lee County with the district and the OCSS  
20          team, and when these were set, you know, the  
21          conversation was based on doing walkthroughs on  
22          materials that were being used. It was a mix-match  
23          of materials. Nothing was consistent. Nothing was  
24          necessarily considered high quality. When you look  
25          at what district staff was -- so I don't want to

1 belabor that, but it -- those -- they were set  
2 together.

3 **MR. WOOD:** But -- but I mean, but -- but I  
4 mean --

5 **MS. SMITH:** It would be difficult.

6 **MR. WOOD:** Okay.

7 **MS. SMITH:** It would be difficult for -- for us  
8 to walk away. If we went into any school district  
9 right now to say that we could use the same criteria  
10 and walk away with a five, I think you would see  
11 mixed matches of -- you'd probably get a high four in  
12 some very high functioning school districts. I think  
13 a solid three for Lee County right now is good, but  
14 we want to strive for them to get to the four. We  
15 want to strive for them to get to a five where it's  
16 sustaining, but having a five would be difficult.

17 **MR. WOOD:** Okay. So what keeps them -- because,  
18 you know, it looks like in almost all the indicators,  
19 their -- their score is a three point something so  
20 between a three and a four. What's keeping them  
21 between the developing and applying stage? What --  
22 why haven't they gotten to applying or sustaining in  
23 in some of these indicators?

24 **MS. SMITH:** I'm going to take a stab at it  
25 because you're asking me, but then I would love for

1           you to jump in. I would say that some of it has to  
2           do with novice staff, just the direct support on  
3           keeping teachers. Even at the high school, in a time  
4           period that this school has been under state  
5           authority, I believe we've had three, possibly four  
6           principals. So being able to not only have staff,  
7           keep staff, invest in getting people trained. You  
8           know, today you got to see the housing. That's a  
9           huge win for this district of being able to recruit  
10          nine people who don't live here, living in housing  
11          here, that are that are willing to stay. Right? So  
12          I think it's being innovative like that, but I think  
13          -- I think that's the difference.

14                 You know, we're investing in people, training  
15          new people, hoping that they'll -- they'll stay here  
16          in return. You want to add anything to that?

17                 **MR. WOOD:** How did you get to a point? What's  
18          your vision and plan for getting the district to a  
19          place where you're consistent -- your staff is  
20          consistently applying the processes and procedures  
21          that will lead to the achievement that you want?

22                 **DR. STONE:** It's like deputy commissioner said,  
23          it's a training. It's the training of the staff. We  
24          have to keep pouring into them and then as -- as they  
25          are consistent and we're as a leadership team

1 consistent, we'll continue to grow. So it's the  
2 training of the staff, and -- and -- and we are --  
3 we're having a stable staff now. We have very few  
4 turnover in the last couple of years, and so as we  
5 are able to continue to grow that staff, training  
6 wise, I think we'll get closer to that four and our  
7 ultimate goal, five.

8 **MS. WOODS:** Ms. Kenner?

9 **MS. KENNER:** I wanted to know -- I have a couple  
10 of questions. On the growth target, we were able to  
11 see how many students at each school is meeting their  
12 targets. Tell me more about those targets. Are they  
13 across the board? Everybody should grow at grade  
14 level and 10 percent or tell me how those are set and  
15 what they're based on? What's the criteria for that?

16 **DR. STONE:** So we look at students, individual,  
17 you know, student by student. And so we'll take an  
18 assessment and at our -- at our elementary grade  
19 levels or actually all of our grade levels, we -- we  
20 talk to our kids about where they are or where  
21 they're scoring on our interim assessments. And so  
22 we build a growth target based on what they do on  
23 that last assessment. So for instance, if they're a  
24 1060 -- you're here -- you're here, the people  
25 saying, We've got to get to 1060. We've got to get

1 to 1060. So if you're at 1020, you know, that goal  
2 setting will be somewhere between if the goal is  
3 1060, but your next level may be 1030, 1040, you  
4 know, just giving them something to reach for, but  
5 not too out of the park, but -- but just a little bit  
6 at a time, incremental growth at a time.

7 **MS. KENNER:** Thank you.

8 **DR. STONE:** Yeah. Another question?

9 **MS. KENNER:** And Ms. Smith mentioned the  
10 curriculum in pre-K. Do you know which -- the name  
11 of the curriculum, they selected?

12 **DR. STONE:** Rise -- Lunch. I call it RISE, but  
13 it's Lunch.

14 **MS. KENNER:** Lunch?

15 **DR. STONE:** Lunch -- Lunch Pass.

16 **MS. KENNER:** Oh, yeah. Okay.

17 **DR. STONE:** I call it the riots, pre-K riots.

18 **MS. KENNER:** Okay, perfect. Thank you. And  
19 then, you mentioned Take Flight for dyslexic  
20 students. I know often when we're as a department  
21 creating lists for Hyper HQIM for whether it's for  
22 pre-K or K-12, one of the things we did was kind of  
23 slow that down so that we can ensure that students  
24 are all have access to that high quality. With Take  
25 Flight, is that the sole curriculum available for

1 dyslexia or are there multiple choices? I've --  
2 that's what I've heard of recently. So I was just  
3 curious about that or that may be for Ms. Smith.

4 **DR. STONE:** Well, that's what we're using.  
5 We're using Take Flight. We've had teachers to go  
6 through that program -- that training for that  
7 specific program. We don't -- we used to have Barton  
8 years ago, but, you know, there's those gaps in each  
9 curriculum. So we've -- we've taken a stance on Take  
10 Flight is where we're headed and it works good for  
11 our children. So that's what we're training for and  
12 pouring our training into that, and that's where we  
13 are at now. We do have a program at the first --  
14 Kindergarten First. You know, you've got me on the  
15 spot, I can't call the name of it -- BILLS. Thank  
16 you. BILLS.

17 So we -- we are using that as well because Take  
18 Flight doesn't go that low. So we're trying to get  
19 to our students earlier than -- than when -- when  
20 Take Flight can be a program for them.

21 **MS. KENNER:** Thank you so much. Thank you.

22 **DR. STONE:** You're welcome.

23 **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Henderson.

24 **MR. HENDERSON:** Yes. I'll take a little bit of  
25 a different spin on it. Over the last several

1 months, working real close with Ms. Whitlow and Dr.  
2 Moore, I've learned a lot about Lee County and some  
3 of the things that have been going on, some of the  
4 advances that you guys have had. I was very  
5 privileged to be part of the advisory board selection  
6 process, a very clear process. I feel pretty  
7 confident that the district and the community made  
8 the best choices. You mentioned a word, stability.  
9 Can you talk a little bit about sustainability and  
10 the involvement of the advisory board, and what does  
11 that outlook look like?

12 **DR. STONE:** Let me see if I understand your  
13 question. Ask that again so I can make sure I'm  
14 answering it correctly.

15 **MR. HENDERSON:** Going forward with the  
16 infrastructure that is now in place with the advisory  
17 board and obviously the potential opportunity to come  
18 up to level five. When you think about the  
19 infrastructure that's in place now with the advisory  
20 board, what does that infrastructure look like? Give  
21 me a forecast on that. How do you see that a year  
22 from now, two years from now, three years from now?

23 **DR. STONE:** Well, and I'll answer that this way.  
24 I have worked in the trainings with this board --  
25 this advisory board and we've gone through a couple

1 of meeting -- board meetings. I have every  
2 confidence in -- in them supporting what the district  
3 needs are. They are community members. They have --  
4 one, two, three of them have children in the -- in  
5 the buildings. And so sustainability -- I think this  
6 board that's -- that's here now is forecasting two or  
7 three years. I think -- I think we're in great  
8 shape. I think we're in great shape. They are very  
9 supportive and -- and they -- they told me that, Hey,  
10 we're one 100 percent behind you.

11 Now, I don't -- I don't expect them to agree,  
12 and I told them I'm -- I'm pleased. Pull me off the  
13 ledge if you need to, but I trust what they're going  
14 to be able to do as a board for Lee County School  
15 District.

16 **MR. HENDERSON:** Okay. Yeah. Again, I was very  
17 impressed with the job of the department, and I think  
18 very highly of the selection process and the  
19 candidates that were selected. All right. Thank  
20 you and thank you for serving on that. And you guys  
21 did a wonderful job choosing or selecting  
22 individuals.

23 **DR. STONE:** Thank you.

24 **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Bragg?

25 **MR. BRAGG:** Are all of your teachers certified

1 or do you have some working through the process?

2 **DR. STONE:** We still have some working through  
3 that process. We have -- we have several teachers  
4 that are on teacher licensure plans. We started --  
5 when I started back in '22, we had about 40 percent  
6 of our teacher staff that were non-licensed, and now  
7 we're down to about 16 percent. So we're headed in  
8 the right direction.

9 **MS. KAREN:** Dr. Arnold?

10 **DR. ARNOLD:** Yes. Dr. Stone, you mentioned how  
11 important staff retention has been in this process.  
12 I would love for you to share what factors you feel  
13 your leadership and your team has -- have implemented  
14 to cause that stability, and then what could we be  
15 doing to even help you more?

16 **DR. STONE:** Okay. One Of the things, you know,  
17 I'll start -- I'll say this, we're at 28.3, which is  
18 our millage rate in Lee County. When -- when the  
19 decision was decided, a great decision to take the  
20 salaries up to \$50,000, we were at \$36,000, and so  
21 that was a great decision that helped us out a lot  
22 tremendously. But at 28.3 mills, we -- you know, we  
23 can't compete with salaries. So one of the factors  
24 that's -- that's contributing to our stability is the  
25 training that we offer.

1           We bring in academic coaches and instructional  
2 support specialists, and we train our administrators  
3 as well, and we pour in support to those teachers,  
4 that are -- that are here. And we've -- we've had  
5 quotes from teachers that said, You know, I could go  
6 and make money somewhere else, more money, but the --  
7 but the support that I'm getting makes a difference.

8           And so I would say that that contributes mostly  
9 to why we're able to sustain staff, is the support  
10 that we offer them.

11           **DR. ARNOLD:** Thank you.

12           **DR. STONE:** You're welcome.

13           **DR. ARNOLD:** Is there anything that we can be  
14 doing to add to that?

15           **DR. STONE:** That's a loaded question. I -- let  
16 me say continue -- just to continue support.  
17 Continue support and that -- that's what we're --  
18 we'll -- I'll land there.

19           **DR. HENDERSON:** Thank you.

20           **DR. STONE:** All right.

21           **MS. WOODS:** Any other comments? Anything else?

22           **MS. SMITH:** So I'm going to -- I want you to  
23 stand up here with me because this is your moment  
24 too, right.

25           So I would respectfully ask that the state

1 board find that Lee County has met the exit criteria  
2 for Level 5 intensive support and reclassify the  
3 district as Level 4 directed support so that we're  
4 still here providing support for them, but they would  
5 no longer be considered Level 5.

6 And then with that, I would then also ask that  
7 this board make a motion to return Lee County School  
8 District to local control with the current advisory  
9 board members, and I believe we have their names. I  
10 have their names for them to be directly serving as  
11 the new board.

12 **MR. WOODS:** So I think Ms. Smith did a good job  
13 sharing the recommendation from our team.

14 I just want to just talk to our board a little  
15 bit about what that means when -- when we come to you  
16 saying that we feel the confidence that the district  
17 has the right systems in place to maintain momentum  
18 to get to that Level 5. Mr. Woods, like your three  
19 is not the landing spot, right? We have not arrived.  
20 We know that there's still a lot of work to do. But  
21 when you look back at the kind of status of the  
22 state, when this board took action to put them under  
23 state authority, it was a broken school district.  
24 Right? And you've heard me say that, you know, bad  
25 systems beat good people every time, there's good

1 people here in Lee County that were working really  
2 hard in a broken system, and I -- and I know we have  
3 some potential new board members here, but a lot of  
4 times when -- when we see districts kind of lose  
5 their way, it starts with leadership and governance,  
6 and we had to take some serious actions to put that  
7 in place. And I've been working with Dr. Stone for  
8 -- for about the past three years and gotten to know  
9 him pretty well.

10 And what I appreciate about his leadership and  
11 governance style is that he doesn't make excuses.  
12 And when I would sit down with him and say, I think  
13 we can get more students during high school and  
14 middle school, we can do that. I think you can get  
15 students here in Lee County to graduate with their AA  
16 degree while they're still in high school. I  
17 remember the first time I asked you, I think the  
18 following year you had four students, right? We had  
19 less than 120 students in the state meet that  
20 expectation. But Lee County, had four -- four of  
21 those students.

22 So this year -- this year -- this year we're --  
23 we have five graduating with an Associate of Arts  
24 degree, 10 will graduate with at least 30 hours. 18  
25 will graduate with a certificate, and one will

1 graduate with a CDL and become more partisan.

2 So what I can tell you is that we know we  
3 haven't arrived, but when we make this  
4 recommendation, we have evidence, right? We have  
5 evidence that when we set high expectations, I see a  
6 lot of young scholars here, and I saw a lot of you in  
7 your classrooms today. These students are hungry to  
8 learn and they can't. And it's up to us as adults to  
9 create those conditions where they can be successful.  
10 So when we're establishing a new board, we're putting  
11 a lot of faith in kind of relinquishing control and  
12 to a new set of governance and leadership.

13 And that's why I always like to remind folks  
14 that when we make this transition, I always like to  
15 use different sports analogies, and I think we're in  
16 track and field season or what's coming up pretty  
17 close, but one of my favorite sports that I like to  
18 watch is the 4x4 100 relay. I don't know if anybody  
19 else is a fan, but that is probably the greatest race  
20 that you can run, but when you're passing that baton,  
21 which is what we're asking here to do.

22 There's a beautiful moment in that race where  
23 both runners are holding that baton. And if they  
24 don't do that in synchronous connected, that baton  
25 falls and their race is over. And that's what we're

1 setting up today is to say we're ready to pass that  
2 baton. Now, we're going to run with them in this  
3 race. We're not just going to throw the baton at  
4 them and leave. And when you look at our OCSS team  
5 -- and I do need to give them a lot of credit because  
6 they spent a lot of time out here, right? So if  
7 you're part of that team, can you just stand up?

8 And I'm -- I'm saying this maybe as a  
9 confidence member to our board, but also as a warning  
10 to the new board, they're not going away. Right?  
11 Like they're going to be in this school. They're  
12 going to be working with Dr. Stone and they're going  
13 to tell me what's going on, and we want to be able to  
14 come back with those quarterly updates to share this  
15 progress, because achievement is not where it needs  
16 to be. We know that, right? We know that we can  
17 push those needles, we can push those metrics. We're  
18 going to continue to look at the resources we invest  
19 in and grow that. And that's what we're asking today  
20 is say, Hey, I think it's time for us to run with  
21 both runners holding that baton, I mean, if that's  
22 the will of this board, but we're still going to be  
23 in that race. And -- and I can tell you, I know from  
24 our team's perspective, when -- when they get vested  
25 in a school, it's hard for them to let go, too. And

1 that's one of the challenges that we're going to have  
2 is to say, It's time for them to be able to make  
3 those decisions. But when you're in these schools  
4 for so many years, like we have, this becomes part of  
5 your family, right?

6 Our folks at our agency know every student by  
7 name. They know all these teachers. In fact, they  
8 -- they don't stop staying involved. And I just want  
9 to just recognize one person who, without her  
10 commitment and passion, we wouldn't be here today,  
11 who probably wins the gold medal for traveling the  
12 most miles to be at state board event, but she is  
13 here and without her and her leadership, communities  
14 like this wouldn't thrive the way they are. And so I  
15 think this is a day of celebration when we look at  
16 this recommendation for the hard work that our folks  
17 have put in, and a congratulations to you, Dr. Stone,  
18 and your team for accepting and exceeding that  
19 challenge. And -- and you're still going to get  
20 calls from me, buddy. So just be warned.

21 **DR. STONE:** I'm ready to run with you.

22 **MR. HENDERSON:** Thank you.

23 **MS. WOODS:** Can we introduce their advisory  
24 board?

25 **MS. SMITH:** Yes. That would be great.

1           **DR. STONE:** Yes. If you guys will stand.  
2 I got -- I've got four of the five here. Dr.  
3 Yolanda Lemon could not be with us today, but to my  
4 left -- far left would be Mr. Kelly Reddick, Pastor  
5 Carl Bledsoe, he has multiple -- multiple students  
6 here. I mean, he's a Pastor of one of the churches  
7 with a lot of youth there. Ms. Christy Wilson, she  
8 goes to one of the neighboring school -- school  
9 districts she brought today with her, Mr. -- Dr.  
10 Halbert. I'm claiming it for him. My friend Dr.  
11 Halbert around Palestine-Wheatley School District and  
12 then Dr. Kelly Farris. She also had a child in the  
13 school district as well.

14           Thank you guys for being here and -- and looking  
15 forward to working with you.

16           **MS. WOODS:** If there are no other questions or  
17 comments, then it's just discussion time for us. And  
18 there's really three motions that we need to make  
19 today. I'll kind of go over these. The first would  
20 be that you would find that Lee County School  
21 District has met the criteria to exit Level 5  
22 intensive support. So that's the first motion. The  
23 second motion would be to classify Lee County School  
24 District as in need of Level 4 directed support, and  
25 then return them to local control.

1           And then the third motion would be to appoint  
2           the current members of the Lee County School District  
3           Advisory Board to serve as at large for the Board of  
4           Directors of Lee County School District. So with  
5           that, I have four open. Anybody would like to make a  
6           motion?

7           **MR. BRAGG:** I move -- we -- we move from Level  
8           5.

9           **MS. WOODS:** Okay. I have a motion by Mr. Bragg  
10          to find that Lee County School District has met the  
11          criteria to exit Level 5 intensive support. Do I  
12          have a second?

13          **MR. WOOD:** Second.

14          **MS. WOODS:** Second by Mr. Wood. We'll go ahead  
15          and do a roll call. Dr. Arnold?

16          **DR. ARNOLD:** Yes.

17          **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Bragg?

18          **MR. BRAGG:** Yes.

19          **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Henderson?

20          **MR. HENDERSON:** Yes.

21          **MR. KAREN:** Ms. Kenner?

22          **MS. KEENER:** Yes.

23          **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Wood?

24          **MR. WOOD:** Yes.

25          **MS. WOODS:** The five years, any opposed? All

1 right. Then motion passes. Lee County School  
2 District has been -- has met the criteria to exit  
3 Level 5 support. All right. So our second motion  
4 would be to classify Lee County School District as in  
5 need of Level 4 directed support and return them to  
6 full local control. Can I have a motion?

7 **MS. KENNER:** Sorry. There's two separate?

8 **MS. WOODS:** So there's two -- two motions. We  
9 need to classify them as Level 4 in need of directed  
10 support, and then -- and then part of that is also  
11 returning them to local control. And then our third  
12 motion would be to appoint the current advisory board  
13 members. So the second one is classify them as Level  
14 4 and return them to local control. Do I have a  
15 motion?

16 **DR. ARNOLD:** I would move that we classify Lee  
17 County School District as Level 4 --

18 **MS. WOODS:** I have --

19 **DR. ARNOLD:** -- and return the school district  
20 to local control.

21 **MS. WOODS:** All right. I have a motion by Dr.  
22 Arnold to put Lee County School District in Level 4  
23 directed support and return them to local control.  
24 Do I have a second?

25 **MR. BRAGG:** I'll second.

1                   **MS. WOODS:** Seconded by Mr. Bragg. We'll do a  
2 roll call. Mr. Wood?

3                   **MR. WOOD:** Yes.

4                   **MS. WOODS:** Ms. Keener?

5                   **MS. KEENER:** Yes.

6                   **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Henderson?

7                   **MR. HENDERSON:** Yes.

8                   **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Bragg?

9                   **MR. BRAGG:** Yes.

10                  **MS. WOODS:** Dr. Arnold?

11                  **DR. ARNOLD:** Yes.

12                  **MS. WOODS:** With five yeas, we have classified  
13 Lee County School in need of Level 4 directed support  
14 and also voted to return them to local control. Our  
15 final motion is to appoint the current members of the  
16 Lee County School District Advisory Board to serve as  
17 at-large members of the Board of Directors for the  
18 Lee County School District. Just as a reminder,  
19 those members are Dr. Kelly Farris, Reverend Carl  
20 Bledsoe, Ms. Yolanda Lemon, Ms. Kelly Reddick, and  
21 Ms. Christy Wilson. Do I have a motion?

22                  **MR. HENDERSON:** I'd like to make a motion to the  
23 current members of the new Lee County School District  
24 Advisory Board to serve as at-large members of the  
25 Board of directors for the Lee County District. The

1 members are Dr. Kelly Ferris, Reverend Carl Bledsoe,  
2 Yolanda Lemon, Kelly Reddick, Christine Wilson. Can  
3 you I have a motion by Mr. Henderson?

4 Do I have a second?

5 **MS. KENNER:** Second.

6 **MS. WOODS:** Second by Ms. Keener. We'll do a  
7 final roll call, Dr. Arnold?

8 **DR. ARNOLD:** Yes.

9 **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Bragg?

10 **MR. BRAGG:** Yes.

11 **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Henderson?

12 **MR. HENDERSON:** Yes.

13 **MR. KAREN:** Ms. Keener?

14 **MS. KEENER:** Yes.

15 **MS. WOODS:** Mr. Wood?

16 **MR. WOOD:** Yes.

17 **MS. WOODS:** That's a big deal. Everyone,  
18 congratulations.

19 (WHEREUPON, the proceedings were concluded in  
20 the matter at 1:30 p.m. on April 9, 2026.)  
21  
22  
23  
24

C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS )

) ss

COUNTY OF LONOKE )

I, SHATONDA MCCLAIN, Certified Court Reporter #939 and Notary Public, 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 to the action.

## C E R T I F I C A T E

(Continued)

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not knowingly identified on a preferred provider list, whether written or oral, for any litigant, insurance company, or third-party administrator involved in this matter. This transcript is prepared at request of Arkansas Department of Education and all fees are billed directly to Arkansas Department of Education in compliance with Arkansas Board of Court Reporter Examiners Regulations Section 19.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this day 10th of May, 2026.



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Shatonda McClain

Certified Court Reporter #939

My Commission Expires: 11.06.2035

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SIGNATURE PAGE

I, (\*\*) do hereby certify that I have read the foregoing \_\_\_\_\_ pages of typewritten transcript of my testimony, after necessary translation, given under oath on the th day of , 2025, and that the said transcript and corrections, if any, that appear on the attached errata sheet(s), are true and correct to the best of my memory and belief. Further, that I have signed my name to this signature page and authorize that the same be attached to the original transcript.

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS

\*\*\*\*\*

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_)

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me, a Notary Public in and for the aforesaid county and state, on this the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

\_\_\_\_\_

NOTARY PUBLIC

MY COMMISSION EXPIRES:

\_\_\_\_\_