

ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

9:00 a.m.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. OUIDA NEWTON, Chairman
DR. SARAH MOORE, Vice Chairman
DR. FITZGERALD HILL
MS. KATHY McFETRIDGE
MS. ADRIENNE WOODS
MR. STEVE SUTTON
MR. RANDY HENDERSON
MS. LISA HUNTER
MR. JEFF WOOD

NON-VOTING PARTICIPANTS:

MR. JACOB OLIVA, Secretary of Education
MS. JESSICA SAUM, Arkansas Teacher of the Year

DESE LEGAL COUNSEL:

MS. LORI FRENO, General Counsel
MS. WHITNEY JAMES, Attorney

LOCATION:

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

I N D E X

	Page
1. Petition by Ozark Mountain School District	3
2. Annual Statistical Report	81
3. Rules Governing Home Schools	85
4. PULLED FROM AGENDA	
5. Educational Service Cooperative Evaluations . . .	86
Court Reporter's Certificate	100

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 1: PETITION OF OZARK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT TO CLOSE GRADES
3 7-12 AT ITS ST. JOE AND BRUNO-PYATT CAMPUSES

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We're going to move on to our
5 action agenda. And the first item on our action
6 agenda is the Petition of the Ozark Mountain School
7 District to close grades 7 through 12 at the St. Joe
8 and Bruno-Pyatt campuses. Ms. Freno.

9 MS. FREN0: Thank you, Ms. Newton.

10 The Ozark Mountain School District seeks to
11 close grades 7 through 12 at two of its campuses, St.
12 Joe and Bruno-Pyatt, and move those 7 to 12 grades to
13 its Western Grove campus. All three of those schools
14 -- those school campuses are isolated schools. And
15 the board, the local board, they voted, not
16 unanimously, but the majority of the board voted to
17 go ahead and move those. Because these are isolated
18 schools the -- if it's not a unanimous decision, the
19 school district has to come before the State Board
20 and ask the State Board to allow it to partially
21 close the school district -- or partially close these
22 school campuses. And a petition was filed, in
23 accordance with the law, by the school district; it
24 contained the data required under Section 6-20-
25 602(b). And the State Board has the authority to

1 approve or deny the petition. But y'all approve the
2 petition only if it finds the closure to be in the
3 best interest of the students in the school district
4 as a whole.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

6 MS. FRENO: If I may, I would like to read the
7 procedure --

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Please, do.

9 MS. FRENO: -- for the hearing today.

10 All persons wishing to testify before the Board
11 shall be placed under oath by the Chair -- anyone who
12 is not a lawyer. The spokespersons for the
13 petitioning school district shall have a total of 15
14 minutes to present the school district's remarks, and
15 of course this board can allow more time, if needed.
16 The spokespersons for any individual group of
17 citizens that opposes the petition then has 15
18 minutes to make remarks -- and, likewise, the Board
19 can allow more time, if needed. And then the
20 spokespersons for the school district may have a 5-
21 minute rebuttal, with more time, if necessary.

22 The State Board then deliberates, of course, in
23 public, and either grants or denies the petition of
24 the school district. If it deems necessary, the
25 Board can take it -- this matter under advisement and

1 decide at a later date. But, of course, anything
2 would have to be done in a public meeting.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

4 MS. FRENO: And if there are no questions, at
5 this point I would turn the floor over to the school
6 district superintendent, Jeff Lewis.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

8 MS. FRENO: And ask that Dan please pull up the
9 PowerPoint.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Okay. So would
11 anyone that is planning on giving testimony or
12 speaking to this item on the agenda, would you please
13 stand and raise your right hand please? Do you swear
14 or affirm that the testimony you're about to give
15 shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
16 the truth?

17 (ALL SPEAKERS ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY)

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

19 All right. Mr. Lewis. Good morning.

20 SUPT. LEWIS: Good morning. Thank you for
21 having us this morning. And thank you for allowing
22 me time to explain why this move is so important for
23 our Ozark Mountain students. We're here today to
24 discuss the two reasons why combining our 7-12
25 students is so important.

1 My students -- our students deserve more than
2 they are getting. And even though we are not in
3 fiscal distress yet, my job as superintendent is to
4 make sure that we don't get there at all.

5 MR. DAN DAVIS: Turn it on on the side there.

6 SUPT. LEWIS: The number one reason, though, is
7 my students. They deserve everything that other
8 students in this state are getting. And I cannot
9 work toward that if we cannot pool our resources, put
10 past rivalries behind us, and do what is best for our
11 kids.

12 Academic integrity -- many of our elective
13 classes and AP classes are offered virtually through
14 Virtual Arkansas, and we all know how important
15 Computer Science is to the future of our students,
16 and other than the basic course, we have to offer all
17 the others virtually. We can agree that during the
18 pandemic not all students can learn this way and this
19 is not the best way to educate the majority of our
20 students.

21 We can also adjust our schedule to offer these
22 classes and still have enough time to transport
23 students back to their shuttle buses at Bruno-Pyatt
24 and St. Joe.

25 One concern raised was that the high school

1 campus would be too big. If all of our students end
2 up on one campus, currently, that would total around
3 220 students. I was a high school principal for 10
4 years at a campus of 220 and I can assure you that
5 the small school environment and the great staff and
6 student relationships will not be lost.

7 As I mentioned before, if we can pool our
8 resources we will plan to add the following classes
9 and activities listed on this slide. I wanted to
10 apply for a start-up grant this year for Family and
11 Consumer Science. I was unable to do that because I
12 would not only need the equipment for three campuses,
13 but I would also need three teachers. This is not
14 feasible for us, not now and not any time in the
15 future, unless we can get our students together.

16 Our student athletes have proven how successful
17 they can be when they're all on one team. I believe
18 that our CTE teams and programs, like FFA and FBLA,
19 can also have that same success. It's extremely
20 difficult to compete when you only have a limited
21 number of students on a campus like we currently
22 have. Our CTE teachers do an amazing job, but their
23 hands are tied due to low numbers. I want our
24 students to sit here one day, like these other
25 awesome students we had earlier.

1 A growing problem in our schools right now is
2 mental health. Combining our students will allow
3 them to have more friends, have better resources,
4 have more clubs and activities, which leads to more
5 fun and in turn a better whole child.

6 We know there will be challenges now, during,
7 and after if this is approved. I know a major
8 concern is how will students from the other campuses
9 be treated. Culture is our top focus. The combining
10 of our athletic teams has helped with this. But our
11 plans are to develop a guiding coalition of students
12 from each campus. This will help in the process of
13 being an all-inclusive campus where everyone feels
14 welcome.

15 We feel like we can make more academic progress,
16 not only with clubs and activities that I mentioned
17 before, but -- excuse me -- but by having all of our
18 high school teachers on one campus we feel like our
19 PLC process will become much stronger.

20 Transportation is a concern, and I will touch on
21 more -- more on that in just a moment.

22 I know stakeholders will be watching, and I can
23 promise you this is not going to fail. We will make
24 this an easy transition for our students.

25 I have already checked with Mr. Eichelberger

1 from the Division of Career and Tech and we can keep
2 the FFA charter name of the Bruno-Pyatt school. The
3 Bruno-Lincoln FFA chapter is the oldest and was the
4 first school in Arkansas to have an AG-ed. program
5 and the first VO-ed. program west of the Mississippi
6 River. I know that is important and we plan to keep
7 that name.

8 We also plan to have a lot of our district
9 professional development on the St. Joe campus. I
10 know there is a concern that there's going to be an
11 economic impact from this. Even though I consider
12 that to be a non-factor in this decision, we will try
13 to alleviate some of that concern by having district
14 level PD in St. Joe and purchase the food for the
15 staff locally.

16 The farthest student to the Bruno-Pyatt --
17 excuse me -- Bruno-Pyatt campus lives 24 miles away,
18 which is about 42 minutes, close to Dodge City. The
19 farthest student from the St. Joe campus lives about
20 13 miles, which is 30 minutes away. These do not
21 take into the account the seven students we pick up
22 near Silver Hill that live in Marshall, depending on
23 weather and traffic, is approximately 15 to 20
24 minutes from each of these campuses to the Western
25 Grove campus. This should not be a concern for most

1 because if a new campus were ever to be built it
2 would still be a 15 to 20 minute -- 15 to 20 minute
3 commute from each campus.

4 MR. DAN DAVIS: (inaudible)

5 SUPT. LEWIS: That's okay.

6 MR. DAN DAVIS: Go ahead.

7 SUPT. LEWIS: Okay. Thank you.

8 Currently, our numbers have changed a little bit
9 since this slide. The Bruno-Pyatt campus has 75, St.
10 Joe, 48, and Western Grove, 100. So at the time I
11 submitted this -- I checked this morning and these
12 are the updated numbers, 75 at Bruno-Pyatt, 48 at St.
13 Joe, and 100 at Western Grove.

14 I hear the question all the time why the rush.
15 As you can see, our current enrollment is very low at
16 each campus in grades 7 through 12. It is very
17 difficult to meet standards, offer more for our
18 students with numbers this low. Mr. Hill will
19 address this more in just a moment.

20 As I mentioned earlier, I need to pool our
21 resources to give our students more, as you can see
22 in the slide what it costs to educate a student at
23 each campus. This is based off of teacher salary and
24 operating costs. If I can combine grades 7 through
25 12, I can give our students more opportunities and

1 make better use of taxpayer money in our district.
2 In other words, I can make my district more efficient
3 based off of the funding matrix for a 500-student
4 building.

5 We all know school districts' number one source
6 of funding is student enrollment. As you see in the
7 slide, just in the last four years alone we have lost
8 approximately 73 students. From the time of
9 consolidation until now our district has lost around
10 250 students. This day, this discussion has been
11 coming for a long time. A 73-student decline is over
12 a half-a-million dollars and we have to -- and we
13 have had to make that up. How have you done that,
14 you may ask. We have made cuts over the years, but
15 you can only cut so much and still meet standards.
16 As I mentioned before, I want our students to have
17 more, not the minimum.

18 Throughout our district we are overstaffed
19 approximately by 13 certified positions and 9
20 classified positions, but currently I have to have
21 those people to stay compliant.

22 I'd now like to turn this over to Mr. Norman
23 Hill who will talk more about our financials and
24 long-term sustainability.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Welcome, Mr. Hill.

1 MR. HILL: Good morning.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good morning.

3 MR. HILL: Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

4 As he said, I'm Norman Hill. I'm a financial
5 consultant. Right now, I've been -- this is my 57th
6 year in public education, State of Arkansas. The
7 last 17, I've done financial consulting for districts
8 all over the state that are having financial issues;
9 primarily, those financial issues has to do with loss
10 of students. I spent 30 years as superintendent in
11 Arkansas, and two years as a co-op director. So I
12 think I'm fairly familiar with schools, and I enjoy
13 working with schools, trying to help them stay
14 financially afloat.

15 Last fall, Mr. Lewis called me. I have worked
16 for the Ozark Mountain School District off and on for
17 the past seven or eight years. He called me and
18 wanted to know if I had time to come in and look at
19 the current situation in Ozark Mountain School
20 District, and when I looked at it -- to help him make
21 a report to the board and to the patrons. I went in
22 and looked at it. Then after pulling the information
23 together I met with the Ozark Mountain School
24 District, the Bruno-Pyatt campus and patrons that
25 attended that meeting, and went over what I found.

1 Then, later on, I met with the patrons at the St. Joe
2 school and I went over the findings. And what we're
3 looking at -- and you saw the figures that Mr. Lewis
4 presented; he presented the figures just for the on-
5 campus students. I'm going to present the figures
6 for the entire district, including virtual students,
7 because that's the only way you can look at the
8 actual financial situation and see the impact.

9 In Fiscal Year '21, total student population was
10 722 in all three schools, and last year the total
11 population was 592. That's a loss of 130 students in
12 one year. As of October 1, this year, that had
13 dropped to 571, which is a loss of 21 students. So
14 in the last two years, Ozark Mountain School District
15 has lost 21% of their student body across the
16 district and we know that this affects the funding.
17 To see just how drastic the effect, I went back this
18 week to get ready for this meeting and I ran the
19 first seven months of the financials of the fiscal
20 distress funds for the Ozark Mountain School District
21 versus last year. That's the newest model. Ozark
22 Mountain started this year with \$275,000 less money
23 in their funds to cover the costs. The first seven
24 months of this school district [sic], the revenue is
25 down \$1,318,000.00. The first seven months the

1 expenditures is down \$6,780.00. They are losing so
2 much revenue and they're not increasing expenditures.
3 They have to meet the standards regardless of the
4 income. They must meet the academic standards, and
5 to do that they could not reduce that.

6 So the ending balance at the end of January
7 versus last year is down \$1,581,000, and anybody that
8 knows figures knows that they cannot continue to do
9 that. Now this year they will be able to operate, I
10 think, in the black simply because two years ago the
11 Legislature passed a new law which gave -- or, excuse
12 me -- which gave isolated school districts declining
13 enrollment money. Based on the 130 students, that
14 produced almost half-a-million dollars this year,
15 this one-time money that will go away. And also
16 Ozark Mountain gets the isolated funding on all three
17 school districts and that could be used for
18 academics.

19 Then, we also -- the last two years, plus next
20 year we'll have a lot of ESSER money, which is
21 federal money, that we can use.

22 So they're using those three pools of money. I
23 think they could maintain a balanced budget this
24 year. The declining enrollment will go away; the
25 ESSER money is going to go away; the isolated will go

1 down, but it will stay there because of loss of
2 students. So starting next year, or at least year-
3 after-next, they're going to run a negative budget.
4 And there's no way, in my opinion as a financial
5 person working with schools, that, if they do not
6 make drastic changes, that they're going to be able
7 to survive financially in doing that.

8 One of the problems we have for all small
9 schools, whether it's Ozark Mountain or what, is we
10 have a funding matrix that's funded based upon the
11 500 student body that's a perfect ratio, and that's
12 for funding in the state of Arkansas. We have a
13 standard that doesn't take in consideration funding
14 their academia, and you must meet the academic
15 standards whether you've got 10 students or you've
16 got 10,000 students in doing that. So the small
17 school districts, the matrix funding doesn't match
18 the academic funding, and that's because we're
19 virtually talking about funding for 500. Where, if
20 you look at the number -- St. Joe campus, 48 students
21 -- in my figures that produces funding for 1.92
22 students -- I mean teachers; less than two teachers
23 for that campus. Bruno-Pyatt has 74; that's 2.96
24 teachers. Western Grove has 101 as of this week;
25 this week that's 4.4 teachers. So in the three

1 campuses we're funded 8-point -- just let's say nine
2 teachers, but it takes 22 teachers to meet the
3 standards; so we've got 13 teachers that they have to
4 pay that's not funded through the matrix. They'd
5 have to have other sources. And like I said, I think
6 this year they've used declining enrollment, isolated
7 money, and ESSER money to do that. But when that
8 money is gone there's no other -- schools primarily
9 have local taxes and state money, and local taxes
10 doesn't go up without a tax increase. And even if
11 they raised it, they couldn't raise enough millage to
12 offset what they're losing in that.

13 I watched the Governor's conference yesterday
14 and I was very pleased with her recommendation of
15 going to \$50,000 for a teacher and fifteen minimum
16 for classified. We've needed that for a long time,
17 and I commend the Governor, and our Legislature, if
18 they pass and fund that. But if they do pass and
19 fund that, we need to realize for the Ozark Mountain
20 School District they're going to fund on these three
21 campuses only nine teachers, but they need 22. So
22 Ozark Mountain School District is going to have to
23 come up with the raises for those 13 teachers
24 somewhere else, other than state funding and local
25 taxes. And they're also going to have to come up

1 with the raises for the nine classified. And the
2 only way you could lower those people is to really
3 make the school district more in line between the
4 funding and the standards, and to do that you must
5 combine your students.

6 About five years ago, they were having financial
7 problems and I went in and worked with them. And
8 then, they had six schools; they had a K-6 and 7-12
9 on each campus. We combined those into a K-12. They
10 went from six schools down to three schools. And
11 now, they're down as far as they could go on the
12 number of schools, unless they bring them into one
13 location.

14 And one more thing, they do have \$3,000,000 in
15 the building fund and that's been set aside to
16 hopefully in the future build a central location that
17 will contain K-12 students for all of them. And that
18 would give them a little over, as of today, 571, and
19 that would bring the standards and the matrix closer
20 together where they could survive.

21 So to me, from a financial standpoint they've
22 got to do something drastically to survive as an
23 independent school district.

24 Thank y'all very much.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Mr. Hill.

1 All right. Is there anyone else from the
2 district?

3 SUPT. LEWIS: No.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. For the
5 opposition we have Mr. Treat from the Searcy Chamber.
6 Welcome, Mr. Treat.

7 MR. TREAT: Well, thank you very much. I want
8 to thank Secretary Oliva and yourself, Ms. Newton,
9 and the entire Board for this opportunity to stand
10 before you. I'm Darryl Treat; I'm the Executive
11 Director of the Greater Searcy County Chamber of
12 Commerce.

13 We cover the entire county, we do economic
14 development for the entire county, we're the Tourism
15 Bureau for the entire county, and I'm in my 11th year
16 in this capacity. And our Chamber of Commerce
17 strongly asks this state board to keep the isolated
18 K-12 St. Joe school intact as it is.

19 The St. Joe K-12 school is the best public
20 school in Searcy County and in the Ozark Mountain
21 School District, as released in the annual report
22 card by the Arkansas Department of Education. This
23 is not a failing school.

24 The Chamber of Commerce, in January, just
25 sponsored our 8th Annual Searcy County Spelling Bee

1 in Marshall, and a St. Joe student took first place
2 and third place in our spelling bee.

3 The St. Joe school does need a plan for the
4 future, but I believe it is way too early to talk
5 about the consolidation of grades 7 to 12 to Western
6 Grove. Our Chamber of Commerce was never approached
7 by the Ozark Mountain School District to help the St.
8 Joe school with its enrollment or to collaborate as a
9 community member to come up with ideas to help the
10 school, and I believe that is a step that must be
11 taken now. It's too early to talk consolidation
12 without enlisting the help of the community,
13 including the Chamber of Commerce.

14 Now we've taken our own initiative, once we
15 heard about the threat to our St. Joe school, and so
16 we've gotten involved and we ask for a chance to help
17 the school before any further talk of consolidation
18 or closure actions. And in fact, a Chamber member of
19 ours in Marshall, Simmons Bank, has offered \$100,000
20 to the St. Joe school to buy time so the stakeholders
21 can find a solution to declining enrollment. And the
22 Chamber of Commerce -- that's my job -- is to bring
23 new employment to the county. And I'm currently
24 working to bring two fairly large employers to Searcy
25 County, that if we succeeded it would be about 200

1 additional jobs, which should realize additional
2 students to the St. Joe school.

3 Now Searcy County, if you know where that is --
4 Buffalo National River country -- is a highly desired
5 destination for people to move to. And since 2015,
6 up to November '22, we've had a 12.3% increase in
7 9-1-1 addresses and that involves residential,
8 vacation homes, businesses, and agriculture. And
9 right now, in the southern part of the county we're
10 deploying broadband, and as the broadband becomes
11 more widespread more and more people will be moving
12 up to the Buffalo River country to live. They can
13 work from home with high-speed internet.

14 Consolidation and longer bus rides are just bad
15 for students' health due to less exercise and
16 playtime after school. Searcy County has poor health
17 outcomes already, and the current plan will act
18 against the health interests of the students.

19 Consolidation of grades 7 to 12 also stands to
20 cause a loss of jobs in St. Joe that is detrimental
21 to our businesses and takes badly needed economic
22 stimulus out of our economy. The fact is Searcy
23 County, last I saw, is a persistent poverty county,
24 and the proposed action is just going to add more
25 pain, the way we see it, to us. And I think it's

1 unfair to tax a poor county and then transport the
2 jobs out of the county; it's just not fair. The vast
3 majority of the St. Joe electorate want to keep their
4 school in tact. And, increasingly, expensive
5 transportation costs price poor people out of
6 transportation. And so I believe that schools should
7 be located closer to a community, not further away
8 from the communities that fund them, because poor
9 rural Arkansas, just quite frankly, doesn't have much
10 in the way of public transportation to allow parents
11 to be involved in their children's education and to
12 commute to school activities. In my view,
13 consolidation is a 20th century tool for 21st century
14 realities.

15 Now I read from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette,
16 from 12 January. In it, Governor Sanders said,
17 "Parents cannot be an afterthought in education, and
18 parents are the foundation of a child's success. So
19 let's give parents a greater role in education,
20 including the right to choose the school that's best
21 for their child, whether it's public, private or
22 parochial. When we give parents a choice we give
23 children a chance." Well, I'm here to say that the
24 St. Joe parents unequivocally choose the St. Joe K-
25 12, the best school in Searcy County, as what is best

1 for their child's education. And in fact, Secretary
2 Oliva said, "Families have a right to have a seat at
3 the table and find a learning environment that works
4 best for their children and for the needs of those
5 families." And so, I'm just here to say that the
6 parents of St. Joe respectfully assert their right to
7 proclaim that the St. Joe K-12 school is the learning
8 environment that works best for their children and
9 for the needs of their families.

10 And now I'll turn it over to Andy.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Good morning.

12 MR. McCUTCHEON: My name is Andy McCutcheon; I'm
13 a resident of St. Joe, and I'm speaking today on
14 behalf of the patrons of Bruno-Pyatt and St. Joe
15 communities that oppose these petitions.

16 While these petitions strongly resemble the one
17 Harmony Grove submitted last year requesting the
18 closure of Sparkman High School, Bruno-Pyatt and St.
19 Joe are not Sparkman. Why, if instruction is not
20 limited? While there are some classes taken
21 virtually on each campus, the majority of classes are
22 taught in-person onsite. The only students that
23 routinely travel from the -- to the Western Grove
24 campus are the basketball players, cheerleaders, and
25 members of the currently formed band that go there

1 for practice. It's not very common for our students
2 to transfer to Western Grove; the few that did this
3 year transferred back the following semester. There
4 have been some teacher turnover in the high schools,
5 but for the most part our staff has been with us for
6 three or more years. In areas where there have been
7 shortfalls the district has done an effective job of
8 bridging those gaps. Bruno-Pyatt and St. Joe are not
9 failing schools. As a matter of fact, St. Joe
10 routinely has the highest academic achievement scores
11 in the district. This past November, they were
12 recognized as a Reward School by the Arkansas
13 Department of Education. St. Joe finished in the
14 category of top 6 to 10 percent growth in graduation.
15 They were also recognized by the Office for Education
16 Policy for academic excellence, high ELA growth
17 statewide, and high ELA growth Northwest Region.
18 Bruno-Pyatt beat the state average in 5th and 6th
19 grade math, 6th and 7th grade STEM, and 10th grade
20 ELA.

21 And as you've heard, Ozark Mountain is comprised
22 of three isolated schools in three different
23 counties. The majority of the roads our buses travel
24 are unpaved county roads. Each campus currently has
25 one or more bus routes that take over an hour to

1 complete. Google Maps shows it takes approximately
2 16 minutes by passenger car to travel from Bruno-
3 Pyatt and St. Joe to the Western Grove campus. The
4 exhibits I submitted are marked One (1) and Two (2).
5 That's a very optimistic time and would have to be
6 under ideal driving conditions, with little or no
7 traffic. By bus, travel time between campuses would
8 more likely be around 20 to 25 minutes. Combine this
9 with approximately 5 minutes or more for all the
10 route buses to arrive, drop off elementary students,
11 transfer high school students to another bus, and as
12 much as an additional hour of travel time may be
13 added per day for some of our students. This would
14 put some of them riding a bus three hours a day, 12
15 hours a week. Many parents are concerned this will
16 have a negative effect on their children's readiness
17 to learn and their overall wellbeing.

18 From conversations with parents in meetings
19 between the Bruno-Pyatt and St. Joe communities, it's
20 estimated that Ozark Mountain will lose between 80
21 and 100 K-12 students next year if this proposal is
22 approved. As you can see, we submitted 656
23 signatures on petitions opposing consolidating the
24 high schools. Parents are considering options,
25 including home-schooling, digital learning platforms

1 not associated with Ozark Mountain, or sending their
2 children to neighboring school districts which are
3 shown in Exhibits Three (3), Four (4) and Five (5).
4 Those districts have many, if not all, of the
5 extracurricular activities and advanced courses Ozark
6 Mountain hopes to implement with a perceived savings
7 from this proposal.

8 The loss of enrollment and associated funding
9 will likely lead to the future closure of the
10 elementary schools at Bruno-Pyatt and St. Joe as
11 well. This will create a situation similar to what
12 the State Board pointed out in its denial of the Lead
13 Hill annexation petition in March of 2012, which is
14 shown in Exhibit Six (6). I'll summarize the
15 similarities: they believed the annexation would have
16 a future negative impact on the ability of Ozark
17 Mountain to keep the Lead Hill campus open; that Lead
18 Hill patrons would transfer their students to the
19 Bergman School District; and that Lead Hill patrons'
20 millage would be sent to Ozark Mountain while their
21 students attended Bergman schools. They also
22 expressed a desire to review Lead Hill's enrollment
23 during the next school year and to have additional
24 time to consider whether the proposed annexation was
25 a viable option for Ozark Mountain and Lead Hill

1 School Districts or whether the State Board should
2 review other appropriate actions. At the December
3 15th meeting there were two other options available
4 to the Ozark Mountain board. Option 2 was to delay
5 the consolidation of the high schools until the 2024-
6 25 school year and look for property for a new
7 facility suitable for the current population make-up
8 of the district. Option 3 was to continue with the
9 current configuration of the district, apply for
10 funding with the State for a new K-12 facility in
11 2024, and look for a property for a new facility
12 suitable for the current population make-up of the
13 district. When asked about the location of the new
14 facility Mr. Lewis made a comment to the effect
15 "commonsense would dictate that it be built closer to
16 the campus with the most students," meaning Western
17 Grove, "since there's another school," meaning Valley
18 Springs, "just five miles up the road. If students
19 were required to travel much farther than that, we'd
20 lose students to the closer school." The promise of
21 a new combined school has been talked about since
22 Ozark Mountain School District was formed in 2004.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: You have about one minute
24 left.

25 MR. McCUTCHEON: Okay. There's an attachment I

1 presented to you; it shows the location of what we
2 would recommend. It's probably the only location the
3 district has a chance of getting millage passed for.
4 The current debt millage is expiring in 2027. Searcy
5 County and Marion County, where Bruno-Pyatt and St.
6 Joe are located, make up 73% of the voter base for
7 Ozark Mountain School District and generated about
8 80% of the annual millage. If those two communities
9 are disenfranchised, the future for Ozark Mountain
10 School District is not very good. If they lose this
11 amount of students because of this and don't have the
12 taxpayers behind them to pass another millage, then
13 we may be back before you in a year or so for other
14 closures.

15 I would ask that you deny these petitions and
16 allow us to work with our school district to find
17 alternative means of keeping our campuses open and
18 moving forward with a new centrally located campus.
19 That is what's in the best interest of this district
20 and our students as a whole. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

22 All right. The school district, you have 5
23 minutes.

24 SUPT. LEWIS: In September, October and
25 November, I had community meetings on each campus

1 with a slideshow on why this is being considered. We
2 had FAQ handouts, displayed an email for people to
3 send emails to me with questions about this issue,
4 posted the email address to social media, and fielded
5 questions at all three meetings. I even had Mr. Hill
6 speak at the St. Joe meeting and to our local board.
7 I only received emails and questions from seven
8 different people. I received no more than 10 phone
9 calls. But now we have petitions with all these
10 signatures, the majority who have not been to a
11 meeting and presented with the information of why
12 from the District. Many of these are signed by the
13 same person, do not have kids living in our district,
14 do not live in our district, send their kids to a
15 different district, or have used rental property
16 addresses. Where were they when we had our meetings?

17 During those three community meetings I felt the
18 emotional aspect of this. I empathize with each
19 community, and all three communities have had to give
20 up something. Trust me when I say this has been
21 extremely difficult and not what I set out to do, but
22 providing a better education for our students and
23 making sure our district does not go into fiscal
24 distress is what I was hired to do as Superintendent.
25 What was good enough back in the day is not good

1 enough now. I want our students to have more. I
2 want them to know what the world has to offer and the
3 many different opportunities that await them. I've
4 heard "send them to Bruno-Pyatt, anywhere but Western
5 Grove;" I've heard, "I'd rather the district close
6 completely than the kids go to Western Grove." But
7 it's time to put past rivalries behind us and the
8 dislike for one another to rest. We all have to
9 swallow some pride and do what is best for our
10 students.

11 We have just finished our third year of combined
12 athletic teams and have changed our mascot to the
13 Ozark Mountain Bears. The Patriots, Wildcats, and
14 Warriors no longer exist; we are Bears now. And I
15 wish you could see how these student athletes
16 interact. It's amazing the resiliency of kids and
17 how they have come together. Why can we not do that
18 as adults?

19 Thank you for your attention today. And I
20 respectfully ask that you approve our petition to
21 move our students to one high school campus for the
22 betterment of our students.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

24 Does the school district have anything else?
25 You have about two minutes left.

1 SUPT. LEWIS: (Shaking head from side to side.)

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. We do have
3 some public comment, but the Board would need to vote
4 to allow public comment. What's the pleasure of the
5 Board?

6 MR. WOOD: Move to allow public comment.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Do we have -- I have a
8 motion by Mr. Wood to allow public comment.

9 MS. HUNTER: Second.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a second.

11 All in favor?

12 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

14 Okay. Motion passes.

15 Okay. Our first public comment is from Ms. Doty
16 [ps], Patricia Doty. And for public comment you will
17 have three minutes.

18 MS. DOTY: Thank you.

19 Hello. My name is Patricia Doty and I'm a
20 resident of St. Joe. I have attended all of the
21 public meetings, I've attended the school board
22 meetings, and I've spoken to many of the people in
23 the community.

24 What I want to address is unanswered questions
25 at our public meetings. We heard Mr. Lewis say that

1 people weren't emailing or calling. Well, we weren't
2 getting answers face-to-face. So one of the
3 questions that we asked originally -- you've heard a
4 lot about numbers; so we asked what number would we
5 have to be at in attendance to not close our school.
6 So you would think that if you're closing a school
7 based on enrollment numbers you would know what the
8 requirement was. That's all we wanted to know. We
9 have not gotten that number. So we approached it
10 from a different direction. We decided to see, well,
11 how many would we lose; is this going to be more
12 detrimental if this happens. So we asked -- well,
13 actually Mr. Lewis asked us if we would like a survey
14 done, because we were trying to get that information.
15 So at the third public meeting Mr. Lewis asked us
16 would we like a survey done of the parents, and we
17 said yes. As far as I know, no survey has been done.
18 So those numbers aren't known either. So to make the
19 decision based on numbers when you don't have the
20 information in front of you, it just seems like there
21 were so many unanswered questions, face-to-face in a
22 meeting. We didn't need to email. We didn't need to
23 call. We spoke face-to-face.

24 Another thing is if we're in financial hardship
25 there is enhanced transportation funding left on the

1 table. There is the \$100,000 from Simmons Bank left
2 on the table. So how -- if I was running my
3 household or business and I was in financial trouble,
4 those things wouldn't be left on the table.

5 So these are just questions that we have. And
6 all we really wanted was an extension of time to get
7 the answers we needed, to come up with some solutions
8 to these problems -- because we agree, there is a
9 problem that needs to be solved. So we ask for you
10 to deny this petition, give us more time and let us
11 come up with a more suitable solution that will
12 appeal to the taxpayers and the voters, because we
13 are going to have to pass that millage if we want a
14 new school. And if you have this many people
15 opposed, whether it's vacation rental owners or
16 whether it's parents of students or whether it's
17 business owners, you're not going to pass that
18 millage.

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you, Ms. Doty.

20 MS. DOTY: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. I have a public
22 comment from Megan Hill.

23 MS. HILL: My name is Megan Hill and I'm a
24 parent of students at the St. Joe campus. From the
25 beginning of this process all that we have asked is

1 that we are able to explore other options. We've not
2 been given that opportunity. I as a parent have the
3 choice of where my child goes to school, and I know
4 the education that they are currently receiving is a
5 good education. I know where my priorities are. If
6 my priorities were all these extra programs and
7 things, I have the choice to drive my children to
8 another school. If I wanted to move my child to the
9 campus at Western Grove, I could drive three or four
10 miles farther in any direction and already have those
11 programs in place. I know the education that they
12 are receiving is a good education. I am confident in
13 the community that supports that education. My
14 priority has been the school itself. I chose that
15 school because of the community and the support.

16 And I wish that I could stand before you right
17 now and tell you what our plan is and how we're going
18 to solve it. I don't know the answers to those
19 questions today. But I do know that the community
20 and the parents are involved and they want to help
21 solve this problem. They want to be a part of the
22 solution to the problem. And, yes, those signatures,
23 636 signatures, maybe they don't have children in the
24 district right now, but they still pay taxes in that
25 county and they are involved in the education of our

1 children. So whether they have kids there or not,
2 they have a say. We all have a say. And we're
3 parents; we have the choice of the education that
4 they receive. My choice has been for my children to
5 go to the St. Joe campus because of the confidence I
6 have in not only the education they receive but the
7 community that backs that education.

8 So I hope that we get the time to explore those
9 options. And we're not opposed to working together.
10 I'm not -- there's no bias, there's no hard feelings.
11 I want to work together. But I want to be able to be
12 a part of that solution, not forced into a solution
13 that I don't agree with and that I don't see the
14 benefits of.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Thank you.

16 All right. With that, we'll see if we have any
17 questions from any board members either to the
18 District or the opposition or to the Department.

19 Ms. Woods?

20 MS. WOODS: I guess I have two questions, one
21 that I just -- I wrote at the beginning, and I guess
22 it's to those that oppose this. At what point does
23 it make sense to close? I don't know who wants to
24 try and answer that.

25 MR. McCUTCHEON: Like I said, those options that

1 were presented to the Board that they could have
2 voted on, most of those gave more time; one was a
3 year, the other was to leave things and go straight
4 for the new school. We're not opposed to a new
5 school that's centrally located and equal to all
6 three communities. That's been the dream for the
7 last 19 years. But if we lose 100 or more students
8 from the St. Joe and Bruno-Pyatt communities, our
9 numbers there -- I don't believe the State will
10 support funding a new school. We want that. We do
11 want to be the Bears. When we lost our sports teams
12 we supported them, because they were our kids. And
13 the first two years the basketball games were split
14 between the three campuses. We all felt included, we
15 were equal, we were all cheering our teams. This
16 year, those basketball games are held on one campus,
17 and it's not at Bruno-Pyatt or St. Joe. That hurt.
18 Okay. That took part of our community's heart. We
19 still support those teams, but when this came along
20 -- and, once again, it was from St. Joe and Bruno-
21 Pyatt that had to give something up -- that made
22 people mad, mad enough to leave the district. Some
23 already have. We can come together as adults and sit
24 down and figure out what's the best interest of our
25 students, not just right now but for years to come.

1 We don't know what the new legislation is going to
2 look like. So making a decision now where we release
3 or we go back home and tell 13, 15 teachers -- good,
4 dedicated teachers -- "we don't need you next year,"
5 that could come back to bite us if something changes
6 in this legislation that would have allowed us to
7 keep them, because they will find jobs. They're good
8 teachers. Somebody is going to snatch them up.

9 That's what we're asking: let us see what this
10 gentleman right here and our new Governor can do for
11 public schools in Arkansas, before we do something
12 that could hurt us worse in the very near future.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

14 MR. McCUTCHEON: That's all we ask.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Thank you.

16 MS. WOODS: And then I have another question for
17 Mr. Hill. The lady that was speaking where she asked
18 about the number and she said that was never -- I
19 think -- yes, you -- she asked about what number
20 would you need to get to. I would just like for you
21 to speak to that, as to either why that wasn't
22 addressed or if that was addressed and what that
23 number might be, just so that nobody leaves here
24 today thinking we still don't have answers to
25 questions.

1 SUPT. LEWIS: It's hard to predict a number when
2 you've had -- like Mr. Hill mentioned before --

3 MS. WOODS: I'm sorry. You're Mr. Lewis. My
4 apologies.

5 SUPT. LEWIS: I'm sorry. Do you need me?

6 MS. WOODS: No, I need you. Sorry

7 SUPT. LEWIS: Okay. That's okay. You know,
8 we've had ESSER money that's really helped with lots
9 of different things. We have some of the oldest
10 buildings in the state. We've been able to use that
11 money for HVAC replacement. We've been able to use
12 that money for purchasing of buses, and, of course,
13 you know, the 20% mandated, and we've actually spent
14 a lot more than that on loss of learning. Okay.
15 When that money goes away we won't be able to do
16 those things, but some of those costs are still going
17 to be there. Now if we had 100 more kids, obviously
18 we'd still be able to function. Mr. Hill mentioned
19 we get that loss of student funding, and it totaled
20 around \$416,000 this year approximately. APSRC is
21 our district treasurer; we contract that out, and we
22 work together. And it looks like that's about how
23 much surplus we'll have at the end of the year. All
24 right. Well, obviously that won't be there next
25 year.

1 MS. WOODS: Right.

2 SUPT. LEWIS: So you're talking about even
3 spending or below -- and we know that everything is
4 going up in cost, so that's probably going to be
5 deficit spending.

6 So to answer your question about why I couldn't
7 supply an exact number of students, that's hard to
8 say when we're losing all that money -- not losing,
9 but we won't have that as an advantage anymore.

10 MS. WOODS: Right. It's not recurring income.

11 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah, it's not recurring. And
12 that's kind of the thing with the \$100,000 from
13 Simmons Bank. Awesome gesture, awesome gesture. But
14 that's one-time funding.

15 MS. WOODS: I understand that.

16 SUPT. LEWIS: That's not every year. And
17 \$100,000 in a -- you know, to any of us is a nice
18 chunk of money. \$100,000 in a school system --
19 that's a wonderful gesture; but in order to say we're
20 going to put it in operating to help with salaries
21 and that sort of thing, that's really not much. But
22 it's a great gesture and I'm, you know, honored that
23 they would do that. But, you know, we have a policy
24 that says, you know, as far as accepting donations
25 goes we can't do it when it's not in the best

1 interest of the school or it offsets outlaying
2 expenditures and that sort of thing. So we have to
3 be careful on taking donations to say, "Well, we're
4 going to let you use that to keep your doors open."

5 MS. WOODS: And I'm sure you have run the
6 numbers. But if we were to say you take out the
7 ESSER funds, you take out the one-time donation, has
8 there been an analysis of how many students you would
9 need to merit keeping it open?

10 SUPT. LEWIS: Well --

11 MS. WOODS: As you look at your taxes and you
12 look at, you know, the recurring forms of income,
13 what is needed for this school?

14 SUPT. LEWIS: Right. So like Mr. Hill
15 mentioned, we have 22, you know, high school staff,
16 but the funding matrix allows for nine. So you'd
17 have to have enough students to make up that 13 --
18 those 13 extra teachers.

19 MS. WOODS: Yeah.

20 SUPT. LEWIS: So, you know, you multiply that by
21 7400, 7500, and, you know, not to mention benefits
22 and that sort of thing. You know, the average cost
23 of a teacher is between \$50,000 and \$60,000 with
24 benefits. But we know -- and I think it's awesome
25 and great, listening to the Governor yesterday, that

1 we want that to go up. And we all want that -- you
2 know, even small districts, we want that, even though
3 it's going to be extremely hard. But, you know, you
4 throw in another 23% of benefits on top of that and
5 that really skyrockets.

6 MS. WOODS: Yeah. Okay. I don't have any other
7 questions right now.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Henderson?

9 MR. HENDERSON: Yes. Just for my clarification,
10 I know you mentioned that emails were sent out and
11 there were not any correspondence or replies. And
12 also it was mentioned that there was a meeting and
13 there was no one in opposition present there. What
14 type of threshold or timeline was given, are we
15 talking about as far as replies and correspondence?

16 SUPT. LEWIS: So the email address, I shared one
17 at each community meeting that was called
18 HSQuestions@OMSD.K12.AR.US. And I told the folks at
19 our community meetings, "If you don't want to ask a
20 question here, send it to this email address and I'll
21 answer it, okay, or call." I made that very clear --
22 call, email, even come by -- to the folks. So all of
23 those were -- those seven or eight people that
24 emailed, those were all answered within two days.

25 What was the second part? I'm sorry.

1 MR. HENDERSON: Presence in the actual meeting.

2 SUPT. LEWIS: Oh. So there were people in
3 opposition at all three meetings. We had one -- we
4 started going alphabetically; started at Bruno-Pyatt,
5 then went to St. Joe, and had the last one at Western
6 Grove. We rotate our local board meetings in the
7 same way, in alphabetical order like that, each
8 month.

9 MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.

10 MS. WOODS: I have a follow-up.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

12 MS. WOODS: What's the make-up of your board?
13 How many people is there from each --

14 SUPT. LEWIS: Three from Bruno-Pyatt --

15 MS. WOODS: Okay.

16 SUPT. LEWIS: -- two from Western Grove, two
17 from St. Joe. When the consolidation happened Bruno-
18 Pyatt had the most kids, I believe, at 325 -- and I'm
19 probably off on this just a little bit. But 325 at
20 Bruno-Pyatt, around 250 at Western Grove, and about
21 240 at St. Joe. So --

22 MS. WOODS: So three at Bruno, three at Western,
23 two from St. Joe?

24 SUPT. LEWIS: Three Bruno, and then two at the
25 other two campuses.

1 MS. WOODS: All right. Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Sutton?

3 MR. SUTTON: When did the consolidation occur?

4 SUPT. LEWIS: 2005 or 2006. I can't remember
5 the exact year on that. That was when the majority
6 of the consolidated districts took place.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Anything else?

8 MR. SUTTON: Not yet.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I'll look at Ms.
10 McFetridge. She is online. Ms. McFetridge, do you
11 have any questions?

12 MS. McFETRIDGE: I don't. Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Dr. Moore?

14 DR. MOORE: Yes. I won't ask too many, but I
15 have a few.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right.

17 DR. MOORE: I'm actually -- this is hard. I
18 know it's very hard for all involved, and I know
19 beautiful country and a lot going on. But, you know,
20 just one mile is not the same as a mile in the Delta,
21 where I live, because there's so much. And I know
22 because of that it's just hard, and so I appreciate
23 your response and how you're looking to work with
24 this.

25 But as I look at the numbers I'm actually very

1 surprised that the District has sustained three high
2 schools for so long. And when we think about the
3 opportunities that are afforded to students at high
4 schools, I'm just surprised. So I want to get a
5 little bit a better feel of each of the high schools
6 and what opportunities are there.

7 How many teachers do you have at each high
8 school? And it sounds like the students are doing
9 virtual education; is that correct? And what do
10 those numbers look like?

11 SUPT. LEWIS: As far as the virtual goes?

12 DR. MOORE: Yes.

13 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, we have -- I mean we share
14 some teachers and -- of course, we share a science
15 teacher, we share an art teacher between two
16 campuses. So, you know, we do sharing as much as we
17 can and what's best for kids. We shared a math
18 teacher last year; that wasn't good, so we went ahead
19 and hired a math teacher for each campus. So, you
20 know, we're looking at six high school teachers on
21 each campus and six to seven, depending on how -- you
22 know, if you're sharing them.

23 The virtual classes -- you know, we offer the
24 electives; you know, we offer vo-ag and then we have
25 business, and then our third CTE is a criminal

1 justice program. And then we actually bus kids to
2 the North Arkansas Community College in Harrison to
3 work on either college classes or some more technical
4 classes. So we're doing as much as we can in that
5 area. You know, my hope is that when we -- or my
6 plan is, if we can do this, I can add FCCLA, like we
7 talked about, and just add more programs for kids.

8 If you notice, our elementary numbers are bigger
9 at all three campuses than they are at the high
10 school. I'm not going to deny that. What I hear
11 from parents -- I mean, I even hear this from parents
12 that work there and have kids in this district --
13 that "if you don't start having a few more offerings
14 I feel like I need to take my child somewhere else."
15 I'm all about parent choice too. I mean, I have four
16 kids of my own. And I can't blame folks for saying,
17 you know, "You don't have this there. I want to take
18 my child somewhere else." I understand that. So
19 that's a concern.

20 So, some of the stuff that we offer virtually is
21 the extra electives that kids want to take -- AP
22 classes, for instance. Like I mentioned before, and
23 I think we would all agree, during the pandemic there
24 was some learning going on and then there was the --
25 sometimes there was not, and we had to adjust. And I

1 think the right decision was made about holding folks
2 accountable, especially in the elementary level, for
3 Science of Reading 30 minutes a day and that sort of
4 thing. So, you know, virtual options are there, but
5 is that what's best for kids? Not all.

6 DR. MOORE: Do you all use Virtual Arkansas at
7 the high school level or --

8 SUPT. LEWIS: Virtual Arkansas.

9 DR. MOORE: -- another provider?

10 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah.

11 DR. MOORE: And then do you allow students to do
12 fulltime virtual?

13 SUPT. LEWIS: We do. Yes.

14 DR. MOORE: Do you have many that do that at the
15 high school level?

16 SUPT. LEWIS: We have more in the high school
17 level than we do elementary. Right now, we're
18 looking at -- I think our numbers are 34, last count,
19 total. But the majority of those, I think around 25
20 to 28, were actually high school students. So our
21 virtual numbers are dropping, because we only have a
22 small number in elementary. You know, the one thing
23 the pandemic did is more school districts gave that
24 option of having a virtual program. So the few of us
25 -- the few that were doing it, like ourselves, that

1 were able to pull some kids in from other places,
2 that's not easy to do now because a lot of districts
3 offer this option.

4 DR. MOORE: Yeah. When I looked at your
5 enrollment over time it looked like you had a pretty
6 big increase in 2020. Is that because of the
7 virtual, you got --

8 SUPT. LEWIS: That was virtual. We had about --

9 DR. MOORE: Was that primarily home-school
10 students or from other districts?

11 SUPT. LEWIS: A mixture of both. Yes, we had a
12 large contingent of home-school students from
13 northwest Arkansas. That was prior to me. I came
14 in, you know, last year. And then when the rules
15 changed about how virtual learning could work a lot
16 of those parents chose not to do that option.

17 DR. MOORE: I can see that. That takes your
18 budget on the rise, in that case though.

19 SUPT. LEWIS: Right.

20 DR. MOORE: When you're looking at teachers,
21 currently if you were to consolidate the three high
22 schools would those staff be able to stay? Have you
23 worked through that plan?

24 SUPT. LEWIS: We would have a reduction-in-force
25 policy put in place that would -- for classified and

1 certified. And that would go by what our ASBA policy
2 is -- basically, years in service and then points for
3 additional certifications, masters degree, that sort
4 of thing. We would follow our ASBA policy. So, yes,
5 we would have to have a reduction-in-force in both
6 areas.

7 DR. MOORE: Okay.

8 SUPT. LEWIS: Financially, that is why you would
9 want to do this. You know, there's two pieces: the
10 academic piece and then the financial piece. And
11 obviously the financial piece, we would have to, you
12 know, cut back on salaries, especially if the
13 Legislature does pass the minimum teacher salary
14 increase.

15 DR. MOORE: Do you feel that if the high schools
16 were consolidated the students at that newly
17 consolidated high school would get a better education
18 because of the strength in numbers? Talk to me a
19 little bit more about the academics.

20 SUPT. LEWIS: I believe they would get a better
21 education. You're talking about -- you know, your
22 class size would increase. I mean, I think we would
23 all agree that smaller class sizes typically do
24 better. But I feel like when you put all the high
25 school kids together and you start offering more,

1 morale increases. I mean let's not forget about that
2 part of it; you know, they're kids, they want to have
3 fun. You know, when kids go to their class reunions
4 and stuff -- or when we go to our class reunions,
5 what do we talk about? A lot of times we talk about
6 the extracurricular things that we did, and sometimes
7 maybe a little mischief that we might've got in in
8 3rd grade or something like that. But, so I feel
9 like if we can offer more programs, activities,
10 clubs, more electives, I mean that makes them want to
11 be there. If they want to be there, they're going to
12 perform better. I mean we're that way in our jobs --
13 if we like our job, we do pretty good at it; if we
14 don't, we just kind of clock-in/clock-out.

15 DR. MOORE: Thinking about class size, I can't
16 even imagine we have three high schools with smaller
17 than 20 students in a grade. So I can't imagine the
18 class sizes are going to get that big. In any case,
19 it's hard. It's hard, and this is not the first time
20 our board has seen this issue, and probably,
21 unfortunately, won't be the last.

22 I'll stop there and let y'all ask some
23 questions.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Mr. Wood?

25 MR. WOOD: Yeah, I have a few questions.

1 How many students are currently going to the
2 Western Grove campus from Bruno-Pyatt and St. Joe
3 every day as it currently is happening?

4 SUPT. LEWIS: We send -- well, some go for
5 different sports, and then band. But, you know,
6 Bruno-Pyatt sent -- this is 7th through 12th grade --
7 sends 17 basketball kids, St. Joe sends 5. This
8 year, Bruno-Pyatt sends 3, St. Joe 5. Baseball,
9 which -- you know, we haven't started baseball yet,
10 but last year Bruno-Pyatt, 8; St. Joe, 0. Softball,
11 each campus sent 5; and then track, each campus sent
12 4. So our band kids right now we're sending, I would
13 guess, around 15 total -- no, probably closer to 10.
14 We just started band this year, so we're trying to
15 get them together so they can practice more, and
16 they've played at a few ballgames.

17 MR. WOOD: Okay. I've heard from those who, you
18 know, respectfully oppose this petition that the
19 District could lose upwards of 100 students if this
20 consolidation occurs; they'll -- you know, they'll be
21 motivated to choose other options. What are the
22 other options -- competition, so-to-speak -- if the
23 consolidation occurs, where students from Bruno-Pyatt
24 or St. Joe would choose a competitor?

25 SUPT. LEWIS: Why would they choose somewhere

1 else?

2 MR. WOOD: Well, what are they? Are there
3 proximate competitors near either community so that
4 students would choose a different --

5 SUPT. LEWIS: Western Grove -- Valley Springs
6 School District is five miles up the road. St. Joe
7 -- the Searcy County School District would be their
8 next closest school; that would be I think around 18
9 miles. And then the Bruno-Pyatt campus, their next
10 closest school district I believe would be -- some
11 kids Yellville-Summit, some kids Bergman, some kids
12 Valley, depending on where they're at. And from --
13 you know, we share sometimes some kids between
14 Yellville-Summit and Bruno-Pyatt, and it's about 25
15 minutes. I can't give you an exact mileage; I just
16 --

17 MR. WOOD: Sure.

18 SUPT. LEWIS: -- know how long it takes me to
19 get there.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay. And that reminds me of a slide
21 that was included in your presentation about bus
22 times, I think, and I want to understand what was on
23 there. There was something that said 55 minutes.
24 Was that -- can you explain for me briefly so that I
25 can better understand what that was saying?

1 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes. So the --

2 MR. WOOD: Maybe could we even pull that slide
3 up in your PowerPoint presentation, the slide that --
4 it was multicolored and -- I don't know.

5 SUPT. LEWIS: It was not on that one; it was
6 actually a separate document. But if you go to the
7 transportation slide you might be able to click on
8 the link I embedded. There it is. So that would be
9 the length of each bus route.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay. Right there. The gold bottom
11 right box, furthest route 55 minutes.

12 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah, 55 minutes. So that would
13 be the longest a student would have to ride. So the
14 first pickup --

15 MR. WOOD: To get to Western Grove?

16 SUPT. LEWIS: Excuse me?

17 MR. WOOD: To get to Western Grove?

18 SUPT. LEWIS: No, that's St. Joe. So we've got
19 them color-coded there. That's to St. Joe.

20 MR. WOOD: Okay.

21 SUPT. LEWIS: Western Grove, and then Bruno-
22 Pyatt. So you would add 15 to 20 minutes. And what
23 we did, I know there was a comment earlier about an
24 extended day, like the day -- you know, we're adding
25 more time to the students' day for them to get home.

1 What we've done -- if you can scroll down some more
2 and get to our bell schedule -- you have to meet 120
3 clock hours to have a credit for a class. Okay. So
4 we have went through -- if you'll keep going -- there
5 you are, there's the bell schedule. So you have to
6 have 120 clock hours to have a credit for a class.
7 All right. And what we've done is we've adjusted
8 that bell schedule to get out of school and the bus
9 leave to go back to St. Joe and Bruno-Pyatt -- to
10 leave Western Grove about 4:00. So we've adjusted
11 our bell schedule for them to get back to those two
12 campuses to get on their shuttle buses to go home.
13 So you're really not adding maybe but more than 5
14 minutes at the end of the day there. You would add
15 some time in the morning -- I'm not going to deny
16 that -- because they'd have to get there a little bit
17 earlier than normal, get on the bus to come to
18 Western Grove. So you would, yes, add some time
19 there. But at the end of the day, what we thought it
20 would be a better fit so they would not get home so
21 late, we adjusted our schedule so they could leave
22 Western Grove about 4:00, get back to St. Joe, to
23 Bruno-Pyatt, about 4:20-ish, get on another bus, you
24 know, start the routes and go from there.

25 MR. WOOD: So at least one student going to St.

1 Joe currently has a 55-minute bus ride and we're
2 looking at adding 15 to 20 minutes to his --

3 SUPT. LEWIS: Correct.

4 MR. WOOD: -- ride to school?

5 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes.

6 MR. WOOD: His or her. Okay. That's difficult
7 to digest.

8 SUPT. LEWIS: And that's -- you know, that could
9 be longer, that could be shorter, depending on who
10 moves in, who moves out.

11 MR. WOOD: I understand.

12 SUPT. LEWIS: That could be.

13 MR. WOOD: Yeah. Someone, it might've been in
14 the opposition, mentioned the tax base and the
15 population base of the school communities as a part
16 of the whole school district. Can you speak to that?
17 In fact, the numbers were pretty staggering and I
18 don't -- I didn't write them down as it was said, but
19 it was something to the tune of 80% of the tax and/or
20 population base lives in the two communities that are
21 being consolidated into Western Grove?

22 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah. I believe he said 73% of
23 the tax base, 80% of the voters, I believe is what he
24 said. No, I can't speak to that and I can't verify
25 that.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay.

2 SUPT. LEWIS: You know, that may be correct. I
3 go by our student population.

4 MR. WOOD: Sure.

5 SUPT. LEWIS: To me, that's where our biggest
6 source of funding comes in, so that's the number I
7 pay attention to the most.

8 To refer back to the, you know, people coming in
9 and building rental properties, rental properties,
10 that doesn't help us; that doesn't bring kids in. We
11 need kids. You know, just like they mentioned about
12 a couple of businesses coming. Well, those
13 businesses, as far as I know, are going to Marshall.
14 I mean they -- Searcy County has a school district.
15 If businesses open there, I don't see, unless people
16 are moving and living in the St. Joe, Western Grove,
17 Bruno-Pyatt area, how that helps us. Like I said at
18 our board meeting -- and someone had mentioned
19 beautiful country up there, and if I had a big tract
20 of land I'm not sure I'd want to sell it either for
21 businesses or for housing additions; I'd probably
22 want to pass it down to my kids. So I understand
23 that. But as far as speaking to the --

24 MR. WOOD: Okay.

25 SUPT. LEWIS: -- tax base --

1 MR. WOOD: Sure. Lastly, academically, looking
2 at the three campuses, I looked at ready or exceeding
3 in reading. And at Bruno-Pyatt, 27.8% are ready or
4 exceeding; Western Grove, 35.5% are ready or
5 exceeding; and in St. Joe, it's 47.4. So this
6 consolidation request would close your most
7 successful campus and -- at least as measured in
8 reading.

9 SUPT. LEWIS: Right.

10 MR. WOOD: So my question -- and 47.4% is pretty
11 dang good, even -- you know, I know we have a, you
12 know, small sample size here.

13 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes, correct.

14 MR. WOOD: But it's 12% better than -- well, 10%
15 better than the district average and it's almost 10%
16 better than the state average. I'm concerned about
17 that. I'll -- I can defer to local school boards
18 considerably, but tell me have you identified what
19 the successes are academically on the St. Joe campus?
20 And what is your plan to preserve those successes if
21 we approve the consolidation request?

22 SUPT. LEWIS: Right. So they do a great job.
23 There's no denying that. And they've got a great
24 intervention program in place that helps with that.
25 The teachers there and the principal do a great job

1 of that. The K-6 is sound. You know, even if -- and
2 I heard there was mention earlier of, you know, what
3 happens later; now we're going to close K-6. Well,
4 none of our campuses are big enough to move all K-6
5 and 7-12 into one place, so that's not even an option
6 right now -- or any time, for that matter. But to
7 preserve what you're talking about, I mean we still
8 want to take those good practices that those teachers
9 are using, especially K-6 -- and we've actually
10 already started that, implementing some of those
11 practices on the other two campuses in the elementary
12 grades. You know, there we do this -- you know, I've
13 got my reason for it, but where we do this, if it was
14 approved, you would still have to have a reduction-
15 in-force on the same teachers; so it's not the walls
16 that make the good test scores, it's the teachers.

17 MR. WOOD: I agree with you. But I'm concerned
18 about a reduction-in-force policy that might edge out
19 the talent at St. Joe's and prefer, you know, talent
20 at Bruno-Pyatt that's only performing at half the
21 clip that St. Joe's is performing. So how do you
22 prioritize excellence among your teaching community?

23 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, I think prioritizing
24 excellence is high on the list of priorities for
25 educating a child. We're not going to have any of

1 those teachers, like Mr. Hill said, if we don't start
2 making some drastic plans, because I could be
3 standing in front of you in a couple of years and
4 say, "We're on fiscal distress; I'm sorry." So as
5 far as how we prioritize that, I think we take some
6 of those pieces that those teachers have used and try
7 to share them with our staff. We've doing that in
8 our PLC meetings right now. We have grade level PLC
9 meetings and we have subject level PLC. So we're
10 trying to do those things now. And I'm not taking
11 anything away from any teacher, anywhere across the
12 district. I mentioned earlier we know that smaller
13 class sizes sometimes -- it's easier to outperform
14 the classes that have had bigger schools -- or bigger
15 classes. Not always, but sometimes. So that -- I
16 hope that answers your question.

17 MR. WOOD: I guess. I just want to -- I just
18 want it to be known that I have a concern following
19 the rigid RIF policy when we clearly have high
20 performance on one campus that we're going to close,
21 if it's approved. And if that policy were to
22 promote, you know, individuals that may not have the
23 same achievement in their classrooms, then I'm
24 concerned about that. Ultimately, you'll be
25 accountable to that and your board will be

1 accountable to that. But --

2 SUPT. LEWIS: I'd like to add one thing, without
3 going too much in detail. I am taking some steps as
4 Superintendent to improve some areas. It takes a
5 little bit of time. This is just my second year.
6 This issue, right here, has consumed obviously a lot
7 of my time this past semester. But there are steps
8 being taken to improve academics at each of the other
9 campuses. I can't go into detail on that, but I can
10 assure you that that is happening.

11 MR. WOOD: That's all for me.

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Ms. Hunter?

13 MS. HUNTER: Okay. I think my first question is
14 really more of a point of clarity, and I think it is
15 with Mr. Treat.

16 MR. TREAT: Yes.

17 MS. HUNTER: Yeah. So it's been mentioned at
18 least three times in this discussion about a donation
19 --

20 MR. TREAT: Yes.

21 MS. HUNTER: -- by Simmons Bank to the community
22 to buy some time, I think?

23 MR. TREAT: To the St. Joe school.

24 MS. HUNTER: Yeah. So I'd really like just to
25 make a -- I work at Simmons Bank, and it is my

1 understanding that it is not a donation of Simmons
2 Bank.

3 MR. TREAT: They have a -- they had someone
4 leave a substantial amount of money that's in the
5 care of Simmons Bank-Marshall, and so they want --
6 that is designed to be used for education. And so
7 that's what the head of Simmons Bank in Marshall
8 would like to do with it, is to help the St. Joe
9 school buy time so that we can find solutions for the
10 future.

11 MS. HUNTER: Okay. All right. Thank you for
12 that clarity. I think it's important for everyone to
13 understand it's not a corporate donation for that
14 purpose.

15 So my next questions are to Mr. Lewis. So, and
16 if it was in the materials I apologize. But, you
17 know, when I think about, you know, kind of class
18 sizes and I think about the feeder impact -- and so
19 the K-6 on each of these campuses, are they
20 continuing to grow or are they shrinking like the 7-
21 12 are shrinking?

22 SUPT. LEWIS: No. They're maintaining; they're
23 staying pretty consistent. That's not been -- you
24 know, the elementary, as far as efficiency goes,
25 according to the funding matrix, is better than what

1 the high school is. But it's still not where it
2 needs to be. We've taken some steps to try to help
3 with that, but the elementaries have basically stayed
4 consistent and not -- there's not been a drop-off.

5 MS. HUNTER: So then what happens whenever you
6 hit 7th grade? I mean, you know, to lose 21% of your
7 population, you know, in that -- I mean where do they
8 go? I think, you know, we kind of asked that
9 question a little bit. But why do they go? And, you
10 know, what's different between the, say, K-6 and 7-
11 12?

12 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, part of that 21%, like Mr.
13 Hill said, was that large digital population that we
14 had two years ago. You know, I have called parents;
15 I don't call every parent that leaves, but some I
16 call. Some I don't have to call because they tell a
17 reason. But a lot of the reasons I hear is more
18 opportunities here and more opportunities there, I
19 want to go play football or I want to play volleyball
20 or, you know, so-and-so has, you know, this club or
21 that club. That's what I hear. I never hear that
22 it's bad teachers or mad at the principal or mad at
23 the coach or anything like that; it's just that sort
24 of thing. You know, another reason we've had some
25 people leave, I believe, is because these discussions

1 have happened. I'm not going to deny that. We've
2 had a few leave because of that. But we've also had
3 some folks leave because the majority of the work is
4 in Harrison, gas \$3.30 a gallon -- they move. I mean
5 that's just what they do. So that's the -- I would
6 probably put -- and that's part of the goal of this
7 is to get more stuff for our kids where we can at
8 least level off, stop the bleed. At least we can
9 have our kids stay with us once they get into 7th
10 grade and let -- and give us an opportunity to give
11 them the best education possible.

12 MS. HUNTER: So you touched on, you know, one of
13 the things I had written down. Is the departure more
14 choice related or is it that families are simply
15 leaving the communities? Do you have any --

16 SUPT. LEWIS: No, I think it's more choice. I
17 mean I think they're choosing to leave. I don't
18 think there's anything --

19 MS. HUNTER: School choice?

20 SUPT. LEWIS: -- school-wise. There's some
21 school choice, there is. Yeah. I actually have some
22 of those numbers. Number of students who have
23 school-choiced out, 21-22 was 18 at Bruno-Pyatt, 7 at
24 St. Joe; 22-23, so far 8 at Bruno-Pyatt and 6 at St.
25 Joe. And then my secretary texted me just a little

1 bit ago; we've had four more, I believe she said, due
2 to intent to home-school.

3 MS. HUNTER: Okay.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Ms. Saum, did you have any
5 questions?

6 MS. SAUM: No.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. I do have a couple of
8 questions that I want to ask. One thing was you said
9 you had students going to Western Grove for athletics
10 or some sort of extracurricular. Do you have any
11 choosing to go to Western Grove for academics?

12 SUPT. LEWIS: We've had a few students transfer
13 to the Western Grove campus. I can't say it's
14 strictly because of academics. I think it's more
15 because their parents work north --

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

17 SUPT. LEWIS: -- and then it's easier for them
18 to pick them up, because Western Grove is further
19 north. Excuse me. But I've not had any specifically
20 say, you know, "We're going there because you have
21 these classes."

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

23 SUPT. LEWIS: Because any class that we have we
24 offer all three, either --

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

1 SUPT. LEWIS: -- in-person or -- you know, like
2 I said, we share a teacher. And then like when our
3 science teacher is at one campus, she Zooms in to the
4 other campus and we have a para in there.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

6 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. I have one
8 question for the Department, a financial question.
9 Good morning.

10 MS. FREER: Good morning.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I know that y'all have a
12 fiscal distress watch list that are districts that
13 you keep an eye on when you see things going the
14 wrong direction. Is Ozark Mountain on your watch
15 list or on your radar in any way?

16 MS. FREER: I don't believe so, but I would have
17 to check with that office --

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

19 MS. FREER: -- for verification.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So you don't know. Okay.
21 What puts them on your radar?

22 MS. FREER: Again, I don't work with that part
23 of Finance.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Oh, okay.

25 MS. FREER: So I would have to --

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I'm sorry.

2 Okay. Mr. Oliva?

3 Thank you.

4 SECRETARY OLIVA: Typically, when you're
5 monitoring a school district you're going to watch
6 when their unrestricted fund balance falls below the
7 threshold, which is pretty much around 5%, I think.
8 When a school district's unrestricted fund balance
9 falls below that daily there would be concerns.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So maybe --
11 well, I guess Mr. Rogers -- okay. All right. We'll
12 just let that one go.

13 One last question of Mr. Lewis. You were
14 talking about your board make-up and I know the vote
15 was 43 to bring 7-12 to Western Grove. So the
16 majority of your board voted to do this. But there
17 were only two from Western Grove, you said, that
18 represented that district. So you had two others
19 from St. Joe or Bruno-Pyatt to vote --

20 SUPT. LEWIS: Two from Western Grove -- are you
21 asking who voted for it?

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes.

23 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah. Two from -- the two from
24 Western Grove and two of the three from Bruno-Pyatt.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. So those

1 are the ones that voted for it. Okay.

2 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. All right. And it
4 was a 4-to-3 vote?

5 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes, ma'am.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I think that was all of my
7 questions. Does any board member have a follow-up
8 question you would like to ask?

9 Dr. Moore.

10 DR. MOORE: I've heard you mention that there's
11 the future to build a new high school. So with that
12 in mind, was there any consideration of closing just
13 one of the two high schools for the next year and
14 then, you know, the next one? Or you felt like it
15 was better to -- best to do all three at one time?

16 SUPT. LEWIS: The -- by doing that you really
17 wouldn't have -- from the financial aspect of it --

18 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

19 SUPT. LEWIS: -- you really wouldn't have any
20 cost savings because you would still need the same
21 amount of teachers. And as far as the, you know,
22 building goes, like was mentioned before, you know,
23 we're applying for partnership funding in 2024. If
24 we get that, then you have to pass a millage; that
25 would be the following year. So let's just say you

1 broke ground in 2025, you're still three years out,
2 according to the architect, for a new either 7-12 or
3 K-12. So that's five years away. Like Mr. Hill
4 said, we don't have that time to wait on that. So
5 this is just a short-term -- that's what I --

6 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

7 SUPT. LEWIS: You know, I understand the
8 emotional part of this. I get it. I mean, I totally
9 do. I've been a small school guy my entire life. My
10 first school that I ever worked at is closed now, and
11 it was DuValls Bluff. Loved that place. But you've
12 got to -- you know, things are changing and we've got
13 to make some decisions here to short-term so there is
14 a long-term. And I know that there's the threat of
15 -- people say they will vote for a millage increase.
16 I get that. But this has got to be done so we can
17 get to that point, so we can get everybody in a new
18 building or -- either 7-12 or K-12 or whatever. This
19 is not a long-term thing, if we can get that done.

20 DR. MOORE: I can't imagine your overhead right
21 now running the three different -- are they each --
22 is it each a K-12 campus or all K-12 students are on
23 the same campus? Is that correct?

24 SUPT. LEWIS: Say it again. I'm sorry.

25 DR. MOORE: Each of the campuses is a K -- each

1 is a K-12?

2 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes.

3 DR. MOORE: Is it one building or do some have
4 two buildings?

5 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, one campus is basically all
6 under one roof, with their ag department separate.
7 Another campus, I would say there's probably -- has
8 an ag out -- the ag building is out, the gym is out.
9 And then one campus, the St. Joe campus has several.
10 You know, we're all older schools.

11 DR. MOORE: Yes.

12 SUPT. LEWIS: And, you know, back in those days
13 you just -- you built as you needed instead of all
14 being under one roof. So that's another reason we'd
15 like to get under one roof is it's safer for our kids
16 too.

17 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

18 MS. McFETRIDGE: Ms. Newton?

19 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, Ms. McFetridge.

20 MS. McFETRIDGE: Yes. If the State Board does
21 approve your petition, how are you planning to move
22 forward with the community? How will you help bring
23 this community together to really accept all of this
24 change? I know it's been difficult so far, but
25 you're not there yet. How -- what will you do? Do

1 you have a plan moving forward?

2 SUPT. LEWIS: I'm going to have -- we have a
3 transition plan in place. I'll just use my notes.
4 Basically, the first thing we'll do is, like I
5 mentioned earlier, we'd have a guiding coalition of
6 students from each campus. Because really we want
7 them to get together to give us some ideas of ways to
8 make the culture better and think -- and tell us some
9 things that we might not be thinking about. I think
10 educators miss out sometimes by not asking kids
11 what's wrong in a school or what could be better. So
12 we want to do that.

13 We'll have some summer meetings with our parents
14 and our students from all three high schools -- kids,
15 parents, everybody -- to start the process of here's
16 what the day would look like, the transportation
17 piece. We would have student orientation days. We
18 would send out videos, either through social media or
19 Remind, through those -- to those parents that could
20 not make it. And basically what we would do is we
21 would remove all things Western Grove Warriors on the
22 Western Grove campus and it would all be Ozark
23 Mountain High School Bears. I think that would be --
24 I'd mentioned the culture piece earlier; that's going
25 to be one of the top priorities for us. And I think

1 by taking down everything Western Grove and putting
2 up Ozark Mountain High School that would help with
3 that.

4 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. How about your business
5 community? How are they feeling about all of the
6 change that you're bringing forward?

7 SUPT. LEWIS: I'm sorry. Did you say how the
8 students are feeling about it?

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Business community.

10 MS. McFETRIDGE: Your business community.

11 SUPT. LEWIS: Oh, business community. Well, I
12 know that some of the businesses are against that.
13 We are small communities with not a lot of business.
14 A lot of our folks work in Harrison or go south to
15 Marshall, and the local businesses have been against
16 it. A lot of those are gas station type, food
17 places, and I think there's a concern of them losing
18 business --

19 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay.

20 SUPT. LEWIS: -- by losing teachers in those
21 schools.

22 MS. McFETRIDGE: So how will you work with them
23 to really heal everyone?

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: How will you work with them to
25 heal them? How will you work with the communities to

1 heal the communities?

2 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, I think that this whole
3 process has not been perfect. And I, you know -- but
4 if I did it again, there's things I would change,
5 obviously. But I feel like reaching out to them --
6 you know, we're pushing so hard for career type
7 pathways now. I would really like to, even if it's
8 not just about the consolidation effort, in saying
9 I'm sorry this has had to happen, please support us.
10 I'd like to have those conversations also of, hey,
11 what can we do to better educate our kids that they
12 become better employees for you. So we have a two-
13 way street there to knock out both efforts.

14 MS. McFETRIDGE: Okay. All right. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I do have -- I think they've
16 got somebody from Finance here to maybe answer my
17 question on fiscal distress maybe. I don't know if
18 they're listening to me or not. Okay. They're
19 working. Ms. Freno.

20 MS. FRENO: Thank you, Ms. Newton.

21 Saliha is checking, but we do not think that
22 Ozark Mountain is on any kind of a pre-fiscal
23 distress watch.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. And could she just
25 maybe speak in general what makes a district go on

1 the watch? Does she have -- be able to do that?

2 MS. FRENO: I don't know if she can.

3 Unfortunately, a lot of our finance people are on the
4 road today --

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

6 MS. FRENO: -- who handle those types of things.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. That's
8 fine. No problem. Thank you.

9 One other question, Mr. Lewis. Thinking about,
10 you know, everything that we do as a board is we try
11 to always make a decision based on what is best for
12 these students. Okay. In thinking about that, talk
13 to me a little bit about the difference in what a
14 student's education would look like next year keeping
15 the three separate high schools versus having the one
16 high school. What would be the difference for the
17 individual students?

18 SUPT. LEWIS: If we kept three instead of having
19 one?

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Right. What cuts would you
21 make, what would you be able to add? Talk to me a
22 little bit about that.

23 SUPT. LEWIS: Well, again, we're giving them
24 what the State says we have to give them. Okay. But
25 I think we'd all agree that -- I mean we saw these

1 four students earlier come up here and talk. You
2 know, that's not the bare minimum. I mean, I know
3 you have to have, you know, your CTE classes. I get
4 that. But we don't have FCCLA. You know, they're
5 missing out on some opportunities that we could give
6 them if we're running more efficient. You know, we
7 started band this year; you know, we're bussing them
8 there to practice band. And I'm proud of them. I
9 mean they played at four games this year. We said to
10 start small. But I've got kids asking about choir,
11 you know, why do we not have a choir. Well, it's --
12 you know, you've got to have more than one or two
13 kids to have a choir most times. It's not a duet.
14 But there's just going to be more for them if I can
15 get them all together. So if they're not, and
16 they're still at their current locations and we start
17 deficit spending, I mean what's that going to look
18 like? Now, we're going to have to have teachers --
19 you know, one math teacher teaching virtually to the
20 other kids.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

22 SUPT. LEWIS: And, again, some kids can do that;
23 that's -- they can. But if you start having to cut
24 more staff and cut more programs, I mean I don't know
25 that we can cut more --

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

2 SUPT. LEWIS: -- and do what's best for kids.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. So that was my
4 question, if there would have to be staff cuts or
5 more virtual in order to meet the standards?

6 SUPT. LEWIS: If we keep the current decline in
7 enrollment and raises, which we all want, happen,
8 we'll be in trouble.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. All right.
10 Any more discussion from the Board?

11 Ms. Saum.

12 MS. SAUM: Do you have any staff members that
13 are currently with their license teaching the 7-12
14 level as well as the K-6 level? Are there any
15 teaching across those two that would be impacted if
16 the 7-12's were closed?

17 SUPT. LEWIS: Yeah, special ed. obviously.
18 We're blessed in that area with some really good
19 ones. Art, P.E., the specials. But most of our K-6
20 are just K-6. Some teach, you know, 4-6 English and
21 then another teacher will teach the math. And at one
22 campus they don't rotate like that. So it's kind of
23 a different make-up in each area. But we don't have
24 any staff that -- I don't believe that fall back from
25 7th grade, below, as far as core classes and

1 electives go.

2 MS. SAUM: And that was the second part of my
3 question is concerning special education. Will you
4 have the staff to support, especially at those core
5 content levels at the high school, the inclusive
6 practices changes that will be in place?

7 SUPT. LEWIS: Yes. And we actually have started
8 that some this year. So it actually would probably
9 be a little easier if we had all of our high school
10 kids for the inclusion process. You know, that's
11 something we've worked hard on this year, as
12 everybody has or should have. So we feel confident
13 in that area. We do hope to, if this is approved,
14 start a life skills classroom that I think would
15 benefit our -- some of our students.

16 MS. SAUM: Okay. I appreciate it. Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Okay. Discussion
18 or -- from the Board on the matter?

19 MS. WOODS: I'll just make a comment --

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

21 MS. WOODS: -- and open the floor for
22 discussion. So I'm sitting here and part of it feels
23 premature on the one hand just because they're not
24 failing and they're not in fiscal distress. On the
25 flipside, we often see schools that are failing and

1 in fiscal distress, and we're like why didn't you
2 raise the horn three years ago. That's the conundrum
3 that I'm in right now.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Other
5 discussion?

6 MR. WOOD: I would like to acknowledge the
7 difficult nature of the question. But at the same
8 time defer the appropriate amount to the local board
9 and the decision they made and the Superintendent.
10 Having been on a local board I know that the hardest
11 decision you ever make is closing a school. And I
12 come from experience in Little Rock where the
13 communities we were impacting were neighborhoods, as
14 opposed to entire -- literally entire communities.
15 So I know that it is a heavy decision that they've
16 made. It's hard. I know that they will be
17 accountable to the people who fund the school
18 district and vote for leadership in their community,
19 and they've stuck their neck out and said that they
20 believe that this is in the best interest of the
21 students. They have made a rather compelling
22 argument. I have voiced my concerns about the
23 academics and I also know that that will be weighing
24 heavily on them as they make decisions, that the last
25 thing they want to do is regress academically because

1 of a decision like this. We have to trust them to
2 make good decisions. Should they not, they'll be
3 accountable to the local people. And at some point
4 they may even be accountable to us for making
5 decisions that don't support the academics. But I am
6 compelled at this point to support the decision of
7 the local board.

8 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any other discussion?

9 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

10 SUPT. LEWIS: Can I -- I'm sorry.

11 DR. MOORE: No. I was just going to echo that.
12 And that when I look -- sort of dig down into the
13 district further, students are missing a lot of
14 opportunities. We see the average ACT is 17; our
15 state average is 19. Students aren't taking AP
16 exams. And, quite frankly, I could see how when you
17 have, you know, three high schools with 40 students
18 each it's hard to really robustly offer those. And
19 so whatever decision we make I do want to charge the
20 district to really doubling down and looking how can
21 they provide more and more opportunities for
22 students, because every student deserves, whatever
23 path they are on, to reach their potential there.

24 MR. SUTTON: It seems like -- to your point, it
25 seems like we've seen this before when you have K-12

1 campuses within one -- with several campuses within
2 one district. It seems like it's not a good formula
3 to me, unless they're real big.

4 I was just going to also echo something that
5 Jeff said. I am certainly for small districts. I
6 came from small districts, was on a board that took
7 in a couple of other districts. I know the impact of
8 schools leaving their communities. The one thing
9 different here though is you're still going to have
10 K-6; I mean it's not like, you know, the schools are
11 gone. So you do have that emotional, on the left
12 hand; on the right hand, I mean running schools
13 fiscally correct is extremely important. Otherwise,
14 it puts everybody in the district in peril. So I'm
15 -- as much as I want -- I would like to say we -- you
16 know, every community in this country should have its
17 own district and the community gets behind it and
18 what-have-you, or it's own school or campuses. In
19 this case, because the numbers seem to bear out that
20 consolidation of the 7-12 would be better, I think it
21 would be a great compromise if there was a new
22 building built for all of the 7-12 and it happened to
23 be, you know, on the campuses of -- now I've lost my
24 train of thought -- of --

25 MS. WOODS: St. Joe.

1 MR. SUTTON: What?

2 MS. WOODS: St. Joe.

3 MR. SUTTON: St. Joe, yeah. Geez. I think that
4 would be great. But I would also probably support
5 the request to close the 7-12 based on the decision
6 of the local board.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other discussion?

8 Okay. We are ready for a motion.

9 MR. WOOD: All right, I'll do it.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

11 MR. WOOD: I move that we approve the petition
12 from the school district to consolidate the campuses.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion from
14 Mr. Wood to approve the petition of the Ozark
15 Mountain School District to transfer their students
16 to the Western Grove campus for 7-12.

17 MS. FRENO: Ms. Newton?

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes, ma'am.

19 MS. FRENO: For clarity, the -- it's not -- it's
20 not a consolidation -- necessarily a consolidation.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

22 MS. FRENO: That's a term of art. It's just to
23 move the 7-12 -- grades 7-12 from Bruno-Pyatt and St.
24 Joe to Western Grove. And pretty much your motion
25 was fine, but I want -- just for pure clarity wanted

1 to make that point. Is that what you mean?

2 MR. WOOD: A hundred-percent.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right.

4 MR. WOOD: Yes.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. So we have a
6 motion by Mr. Wood to transfer the students in grades
7 7-12 from St. Joe and Bruno-Pyatt to the Western
8 Grove campus.

9 Do we have a second?

10 MR. SUTTON: I'll second that.

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Seconded by Mr. Sutton.

12 We'll do a roll-call. Mr. Oliva, you are our
13 secretary. There should be a form that's somewhere
14 in there in all of your paperwork stuff. You can
15 start here.

16 SECRETARY OLIVA: Okay. So we'll do a roll-call
17 and start with Vice Chair Dr. Moore.

18 DR. MOORE: Yes.

19 SECRETARY OLIVA: I know -- I think Ms. Kathy
20 McFetridge is online, so I don't know if we get her
21 vote.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes. Ms. McFetridge.

23 MS. McFETRIDGE: My vote is yes.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

25 SECRETARY OLIVA: Mr. Henderson.

1 MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

2 SECRETARY OLIVA: And I think I saw Dr. Hill
3 online. I don't know if he's still available.

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I don't think he's made it
5 yet. Okay.

6 SECRETARY OLIVA: Okay. Mr. Sutton.

7 MR. SUTTON: Yes.

8 SECRETARY OLIVA: Ms. Woods.

9 MS. WOODS: Yes.

10 SECRETARY OLIVA: Ms. Hunter.

11 MS. HUNTER: Yes.

12 SECRETARY OLIVA: And Mr. Wood.

13 MR. WOOD: Yes.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

15 SECRETARY OLIVA: And, Chair, do you have a
16 vote?

17 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I don't vote unless it's a
18 tie.

19 SECRETARY OLIVA: Oh, okay.

20 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: So the motion passes. The
21 students from St. Joe and Bruno-Pyatt will transfer
22 to the Western Grove -- no, not Western -- yeah,
23 that's right -- Western Grove campus. So we wish you
24 the very best and I ask you to keep the -- all the
25 students of your district in mind as you go through

1 this transition process. And if there's anything
2 that we can do to help you during the transition,
3 please don't hesitate to call on us.

4 SUPT. LEWIS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. How about we take
6 a 5-minute break and then we will come back to the
7 rest of our agenda.

8 (BREAK: 11:18 a.m. - 11:29 a.m.)

9 2) ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. I think our 5-
11 minutes are more than up. But it's kind of like as
12 teachers we've got to be careful about giving your
13 kids a break, because they really do have to take a
14 break. We will have everyone back in just a second.

15 So we're going to move on to -- the next part is
16 Annual Statistical Report. Ms. Freer.

17 And I'm sorry, Ms. Freer, for putting you on the
18 spot a while ago. Usually it's Mr. Rogers and I
19 think he's traveling right now.

20 MS. FREER: He is.

21 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yeah.

22 MS. FREER: No problem.

23 All right. We have the annual statistical
24 report for the 2021-22 school year. It is required
25 by law (A.C.A. 6-20-2203) DESE is required to submit

1 the annual statistical report to the State Board,
2 Governor, and House and Senate Education Committees
3 by February 15th of each year.

4 And the report contains data on revenues,
5 expenditures, and fund balances for each traditional
6 school district, open enrollment charter, and
7 education service cooperative.

8 The reports are pulled from the statewide
9 eFinance system and there are summary pages for all
10 traditional school districts on page 2 of the report,
11 open enrollment charters on page 253, and education
12 service cooperatives, page 237.

13 For traditional school districts I will point
14 out that the per pupil expenditures went up
15 approximately \$1,000 from the year before, and the
16 average teacher salary went up approximately \$950.
17 For open enrollment charters the per pupil
18 expenditure went up \$1800 and average teacher salary
19 went up \$150.

20 And, finally, the report contains rankings at
21 the back of the report, rankings by selected items
22 such as per pupil expenditures, average daily
23 attendance, ADM, FTE and classroom teacher salary.

24 So it's a lot of data, I realize, but a lot of
25 researchers use this data for various purposes.

1 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We'll see if we have
2 any questions from the Board.

3 Anyone have a question on the annual statistical
4 report?

5 Dr. Moore.

6 DR. MOORE: I do have -- oh --

7 [LOUD SQUEAL FROM MICROPHONES]

8 DR. MOORE: And I came in a second later. This
9 includes federal funds, including ESSER funds? Is
10 that correct?

11 MS. FREER: Yes, it does.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay. I joked this morning with
13 Jeff that I usually give a sermon when this comes out
14 every year because I think it has so much information
15 that oftentimes get overlooked. I think the ranked-
16 by-per-pupil expenditures is very enlightening. And
17 it's quite interesting to see the large increases
18 because of that ESSER funds and I worry about that
19 cliff when those funds run out. I know that's
20 something you all are talking to districts about and
21 they're looking at, but it's quite shocking.

22 Also, in pulling up the data, I mean looking at
23 the districts under state control, we're looking at
24 Earle and Marvel-Elaine at \$19,000 per kid, which is
25 well above the state. But I know a lot of that is

1 from that federal funds. But just talking here. But
2 I think it -- a lot of times people, especially when
3 talking about big capital, they forget that these --
4 a lot of these decisions are made locally, teacher
5 salary and other things, and they need to dig into
6 the finances to understand what's going on. And
7 we're looking at Little Rock about \$16,000 per kid
8 last year spent; where is that money going?
9 Springdale is at \$11,000 and they have much higher
10 teacher salaries. We all know this in here. But
11 these are hard conversations to have, and the more
12 data we have the better and this is a great set of
13 data to start this conversation.

14 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Mr. Sutton.

15 MR. SUTTON: No.

16 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: No?

17 MR. SUTTON: I found what I was looking for.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. All right. Any other
19 questions from board members?

20 Okay. We do need a motion to approve the
21 report.

22 DR. MOORE: I make a motion to approve.

23 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: We have a motion by Dr. Moore.

24 MR. HENDERSON: Second.

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Henderson to

1 approve the report.

2 All in favor?

3 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

4 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

5 Okay. Motion passes.

6 MS. FREER: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Thank you, Ms.

8 Freer.

9 3) FOR FINAL APPROVAL: DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
10 EDUCATION RULES GOVERNING HOME SCHOOLS

11 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Our next is Final Approval of
12 Rules Governing Home Schools. Ms. Freno.

13 MS. FRENO: Thank you, Ms. Newton. Lori Freno.

14 In December, the Board approved the rules for
15 public comment release after Governor's office
16 approval. We released them for 30 days, had a public
17 comment hearing. We only received one public comment
18 and that was in support of the rules; it just said
19 that they supported the rules as written because all
20 it does is incorporate Act 623 of 2021 into our
21 current rules.

22 And so at this point we're asking you all to
23 please give us your final approval of these rules.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Are there any
25 questions?

1 Okay. We're ready for a motion.

2 MS. WOODS: I'll move to approve.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I have a motion by Ms. Woods
4 to approve the rules governing home schools.

5 DR. MOORE: I'll second.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Dr. Moore.

7 All in favor?

8 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

10 Okay. All right. Thank you, Ms. Freno.

11 5) EDUCATIONAL SERVICE COOPERATIVE EVALUATIONS

12 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. We pulled item 4,
13 so we're moving on to item 5, Educational Service
14 Cooperative Evaluations, ARC.

15 MS. SMITH: Hey, this is Stacy -- Stacy Smith,
16 Deputy Commissioner.

17 So Arkansas River Co-op evaluation is attached
18 and their narrative summary. They've got an
19 excellence rating. They did a nice job. Many of you
20 have actually been to that co-op before, actually
21 visited the Explore Academy. So it was a great
22 visit, had a good team with us there. But if you
23 have any questions, I could answer them.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. Any questions on the
25 Arkansas River Co-op? This is the one that's in Pine

1 Bluff.

2 MS. SMITH: Uh-huh.

3 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Dr. Moore.

4 DR. MOORE: I did.

5 MS. SMITH: Yeah.

6 DR. MOORE: I haven't asked this before. They
7 have 134 staff members. Do y'all have a sizing model
8 for co-ops?

9 MS. SMITH: So they actually have some grants
10 for Team Digital across the state that actually
11 service and work with members all across the state.

12 DR. MOORE: Okay.

13 MS. SMITH: And they also hold --

14 DR. MOORE: Is that -- would that be -- that's
15 -- is that Virtual Arkansas, or that's different?

16 MS. SMITH: So they have some Virtual, and they
17 had more Team Digital.

18 DR. MOORE: Okay.

19 MS. SMITH: They also have the largest HIPPY
20 program in the state. They actually cover like four
21 or five different --

22 DR. MOORE: I noticed that.

23 MS. SMITH: I mean they're like a huge area for
24 that.

25 DR. MOORE: I wrote down they have 41 HIPPY

1 staff members.

2 MS. SMITH: Yeah. So they've got several staff
3 members there. So there's -- they also have like an
4 early parent program that has staff members that's
5 completely funded differently.

6 DR. MOORE: Okay.

7 MS. SMITH: So while it's a large number, not
8 all of it is funded. They have other grants that
9 also fund this program, some other revenue sources.

10 DR. MOORE: Okay. Which co-op is the largest,
11 do you know offhand?

12 MS. SMITH: The largest co-op would probably be
13 -- I would say Arch Ford, Northwest Arkansas, or Guy
14 Fenter, one of those.

15 DR. MOORE: And similar --

16 MS. SMITH: Uh-huh. And when you're talking
17 about the number of staff -- so when you get to Arch
18 Ford, Virtual Arkansas is really hosted there. So
19 that is our digital state school, the virtual school.
20 And so most of the employees in the state -- at one
21 point you had those virtual employees divided up into
22 three different co-ops; you had CTE down at one co-
23 op, you had career and technical at another, and then
24 you had the core subjects at Arch Ford. Those have
25 all been moved to Arch Ford, so that kind of

1 inflates, it looks like, the number of people. But
2 those virtual teachers actually serve the entire
3 state. And there's a large grant that comes from the
4 Department for that program.

5 DR. MOORE: Okay.

6 MS. SMITH: Did that help?

7 DR. MOORE: Yeah.

8 MS. SMITH: Okay.

9 DR. MOORE: Yeah, I'm trying to understand these
10 staffing models. I understand it's difficult because
11 of all --

12 MS. SMITH: Right.

13 DR. MOORE: -- the different programs.

14 MS. SMITH: And there's a set number of the
15 staff that's at the co-op that is directly funded by
16 the Department for work in that region. For example,
17 we fund three literacy specialists there and we fund
18 probably two math specialists and a science
19 specialist. So that comes from a grant fund from the
20 Department. And so there are goals, specific goals
21 written for those employees to do in their region
22 around those topics. So when we develop our
23 professional development in Learning Services they
24 train those specialists in the co-op and then they
25 deliver that PD. Okay?

1 DR. MOORE: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any other questions?

3 Mr. Sutton.

4 MR. SUTTON: I was just going to -- this is
5 probably a stupid question. But how --

6 MS. SMITH: Mr. Sutton, a stupid question, come
7 on.

8 MR. SUTTON: How are the co-ops funded?

9 MS. SMITH: Y'all are getting into a whole
10 'nother thing. So I am happy to pull that
11 information together for you and bring that back to
12 you. They have a set amount of money that comes from
13 the State, but then they have other revenue sources
14 too, and every co-op is different. So I'm happy to
15 give you their individual financial report. Earlier
16 this year, if you remember, this summer, I gave you
17 their annual reports, and in that annual report they
18 actually had to put their budget in there.

19 MR. SUTTON: Yeah.

20 MS. SMITH: And so I'll be happy to pull those
21 back up and send them to you. So there's several
22 different revenue streams.

23 (COURT REPORTER'S NOTE: Dr. Hill arrived to the
24 board meeting.)

25 MR. SUTTON: One of which I assume is every

1 district that's a member of that co-op?

2 MS. SMITH: Some districts pay a consortium fee
3 to be a member of their co-op.

4 MR. SUTTON: Right.

5 MS. SMITH: Some pay by PD, when they attend.
6 So it's different each place.

7 MR. SUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

8 MS. SMITH: Okay. All right. Thank you.
9 Appreciate it. Yes.

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: All right. Go ahead.

11 MR. WOOD: Is there objective data to illustrate
12 the effectiveness of the co-ops beyond, you know,
13 survey results and --

14 MS. SMITH: So --

15 MR. WOOD: -- you know, attendance? But like
16 just effectiveness, impact on academics?

17 MS. SMITH: So within our grant -- okay, so, for
18 example, in the literacy grants we've put in there
19 specifically that they have to support the Level 4
20 and 5 schools; they have to put in their grant the
21 data sources and show improvement from that. They
22 have to do it for math. Our math specialists,
23 literacy specialists and science specialists here at
24 the Department monitor those grants for those
25 specific positions, to monitor progress from those

1 pieces. Now when you start talking about larger
2 things, like the HIPPY program -- so the funding for
3 that, where they're getting that funding from a
4 different source, they would have metrics for that
5 system. You're asking me in general for their region
6 how effective they have been, that would be their
7 local boards plotting that information or asking
8 those questions with their superintendents.

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. Why would that not be a
10 question that's observed at the state level?

11 MS. SMITH: So the rubric for their evaluation
12 is very clear-cut; it's actually in our rules, and so
13 it is held to tightly. And so what I observed them
14 on and what we did the evaluation, as a team -- I
15 mean all the way down to the evaluation committee is
16 determined by rule. We have to have someone from
17 Higher Ed., have to have someone from a local
18 business, have to have a teacher, have to have an
19 administrator, have to have -- I mean there's just --
20 have to have somebody from DESE. I mean there is a
21 nine-member committee that's made up of different
22 folks there. And we follow a very tight rubric for
23 that evaluation process. Part of that is them
24 showing their metrics to us and telling us about
25 their programs and successes that they've had.

1 MR. WOOD: Okay.

2 MS. SMITH: And like one of the rubric pieces is
3 about meeting above standards for accreditation. And
4 so they have to show in their evaluation how they're
5 assisting districts in meeting that or going above.
6 Okay? And so during the evaluations we would
7 interview up to 30 to 45 people, depending on the co-
8 op and the number of districts that they serve. We
9 set up multiple group interviews where the committee
10 members actually interview different superintendents,
11 interview teachers. Co-op people were not in the
12 meetings during those interviews.

13 MR. WOOD: You know, we have a significant
14 amount of data available to the Department. Can --
15 could it be tracked down to the granular level of the
16 interventionists that the co-op employees to go into
17 schools and, you know, the amount of time spent with
18 students versus --

19 MS. SMITH: So they actually do --

20 MR. WOOD: -- the increase in performance?

21 MS. SMITH: So I don't know about the
22 performance level. I do know that the co-ops do keep
23 up with the amount of time that their specialists are
24 at their different schools. And they actually meet
25 with their school superintendents to show this is how

1 often our -- like this was the cost analysis of --

2 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

3 MS. SMITH: -- how we've benefitted or assisted
4 your -- in your school district. And so one of our
5 co-ops, literally they have a log for all their
6 specialists and they meet on that log every week
7 about where have you been, what have you done, what
8 were the outcomes. And so in-house they're doing
9 those pieces.

10 MR. WOOD: Okay.

11 MS. SMITH: Can they improve? Yes. Yeah, they
12 can. Are they failing?

13 MR. WOOD: And my questions are not a criticism.

14 MS. SMITH: You know --

15 MR. WOOD: My questions aren't meant critically.

16 MS. SMITH: Yeah.

17 MR. WOOD: I just -- you know, obviously,
18 reading is an important focus and reforms around how
19 we address literacy are forefront and we invest a lot
20 of money in co-ops. And I can't imagine a more
21 important outcome from them than students reading
22 better. And so to be able to see them demonstrate we
23 work with X number of students and those students,
24 you know, grew X percentage in our time with them,
25 would be helpful.

1 MS. SMITH: So they're not directly -- I get
2 what you're saying though.

3 MR. WOOD: Okay.

4 MS. SMITH: And so while they're not directly
5 working with students, they're directly working with
6 teachers.

7 MR. WOOD: Okay.

8 MS. SMITH: But we do need to be tracking our
9 teacher data and who they're coaching, directly
10 coaching with.

11 MR. WOOD: Yes.

12 MS. SMITH: And so that is one of the things
13 that our staff is constantly working on with our
14 specialists who are out in the field is making sure
15 that they have the appropriate techniques to actually
16 get results from teachers on how they're keeping up
17 with their data to determine whether or not they're
18 being effective. Dr. Pride from Learning Services
19 has actually launched a whole new initiative on
20 improving our coaching strategies within our state
21 around high quality instruction materials and how to
22 use that material to improve reading instruction. So
23 that's another piece. And we are way off topic.

24 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay.

25 MS. SMITH: So, I'm sorry.

1 MR. WOOD: Well, really I don't think so.

2 MS. SMITH: Okay. Okay.

3 MR. WOOD: I think that's kind of very
4 important.

5 MS. SMITH: Yeah. I mean there's a huge -- and
6 I would love to sit down with you and kind of go over
7 some of those pieces sometime, any time you'd like.

8 MR. WOOD: Well, I think it's important for the
9 public too, not just a private conversation between
10 me and you. Because I mean we're talking about, you
11 know, the public's money that we invest in all of
12 these outreaches, and effectiveness is the ultimate
13 question. And I just -- I'm interested in learning
14 that, but I know other people, you know, are
15 interested in learning that as well.

16 MS. SMITH: Well, and every one of these co-ops
17 is unique; every one of them offer some similar
18 services and then have some very unique services that
19 are unique only to them. For example, this
20 particular evaluation really highlights the
21 alternative learning pieces within the Pine Bluff
22 community. The Arch -- the Arkansas River Co-op has
23 several ALEs that they run for the community and they
24 have a really big community partnership piece there.
25 Those of you that saw the Explore Academy, that's

1 based off of the NOLA or Star Academy out of New
2 Orleans. That was extremely successful in actually
3 replicating that in several other areas. They've had
4 other districts from around the state travel there to
5 see that. So I mean part of those are starting pilot
6 programs and them overseeing and being -- you know,
7 the effectiveness of it. The administrator and the
8 teachers at the Explore Academy are co-op employees.

9 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: I just want to say just from a
10 teacher viewpoint how valuable the co-ops are,
11 especially to the rural districts. You know, they
12 provide so many services that you saw when we were
13 talking about Western -- or Ozark Mountain. You
14 know, it's difficult for them to provide for
15 students, but it's also sometimes difficult to
16 provide things for teachers, things that teachers
17 need. And co-ops come through so many times and
18 provide those professional developments, to provide
19 the coaching support, provide networking
20 opportunities with -- you know, sometimes you're the
21 only -- you know, we talk about in PLCs lots of times
22 singletons, you know, being the music or the art or
23 whatever. But when you get sometimes in a small
24 district you may be the only literacy teacher, you
25 know, or the only math teacher and they also need

1 those opportunities to network and learn from others.
2 And so I don't want it ever understated how valuable
3 co-ops are to districts and how important their
4 support is to districts.

5 MS. SMITH: Yeah. I will say throughout all the
6 evaluations the smaller districts have -- their
7 statements have been the most powerful about the
8 support from the co-ops. The larger districts do not
9 rely on the co-ops --

10 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Right.

11 MS. SMITH: -- the way the smaller school
12 districts do.

13 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Yes. All right. Anything
14 else discussion-wise?

15 Okay. We need a vote to approve this
16 evaluation. Do we have a motion?

17 MS. HUNTER: So moved.

18 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Okay. We have a motion from
19 Ms. Hunter to approve the evaluation for Arkansas
20 River Co-op.

21 MR. SUTTON: I'll second.

22 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Seconded by Mr. Sutton.
23 All in favor?

24 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

25 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: Any opposed?

1 All right. That is -- are there any new
2 business items to discuss?

3 All right. Gina, is the lunch here, do you
4 know?

5 MS. WINDLE: Yes.

6 CHAIRMAN NEWTON: It is here. Okay. So we're
7 going to stop here because we're to the reports. I
8 think this would be a good opportunity, because Ms.
9 Sharon needs to get her things together. And we'll
10 stop here and we'll go to lunch, and then we'll come
11 back after lunch for reports.
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15 (The Action Agenda was concluded at 11:48 a.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)
) ss.
 COUNTY OF SALINE)

I, SHARON K. HILL, CCR, a Certified Stenomask Reporter and Notary Public before whom the foregoing proceedings was taken, do hereby certify that the same is a true and correct transcription before the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, State Board of Education, in Little Rock, Arkansas, on February 9, 2023, that the said proceedings was reduced to typewritten form by me or under my direction and supervision; and that the foregoing pages constitute a true and correct transcription of all proceedings had in said matter.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I have no contract with any parties within this action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial agency, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties to the action.

WITNESS, MY HAND AND SEAL, THIS DATE: February 18, 2023.

SHARON K. HILL, CCR
 Certified Court Reporter
 Certificate No. 670