Petition for Closure of Isolated School

The Harmony Grove School District (Ouachita County) seeks to close Grades 7-12 at its Sparkman campus, which is an "isolated school" as defined by Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-601, and transfer the students in Grades 7-12 to its Harmony Grove High School. The law affords two ways by which an isolated school "or parts thereof" may be closed. First, the local Board of Directors must unanimously vote for the closure. Second, if the vote is not unanimous, the school may be closed if the majority of the local Board of Directors voted for the closure *and* closure is approved by the majority of the State Board of Education. *See* Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b)(1)-(2). In the present case, a majority of the Harmony Grove Board of Directors voted to close Grades 7-12 at the Sparkman campus and reassign the students to Harmony Grove High School but the vote was not unanimous (5-2 vote).

A school district board of directors seeking the State Board's approval to close an isolated school must file a Petition that contains:

- An identification of the specific isolated school or parts thereof that the local Board of Directors voted to close;
- A statement of all reasons that the isolated school or part thereof should be closed;
- A statement of how the closure will serve the best interests of the students in the district as a whole;
- A statement as to whether the closure will have any negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate any valid court order form a court of proper jurisdiction; and
- A copy of the final motion approving the closure by the local Board of Directors.

Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b)(2)(B)(i) and (ii)(*a*)-(*e*). The State Board has the authority to approve or disapprove the Petition, but shall approve the Petition only if it finds the closure to be in the best interests of the students in the school district as a whole and finds that the closure will not have any negative impact on desegregation efforts or violate any valid court order. Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-602(b)(2)(C)(i)-(iii).