



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MINUTES CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

August 20, 2026

Arkansas Department of Education

DESE Auditorium

4 Capitol Mall

Little Rock, AR 72201

9:00 AM

I. Call to Order

The August 20, 2026, Regular Meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) was called to order by Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair, at 9:10 a.m.

Present in person were:

- Chair Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray,
- Dr. John Bacon,
- Mr. Phillip Baldwin,
- Dr. Tina Moore,
- Ms. Edie Stewart,
- Ms. Toyce Newton

Absent:

Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan

II. Changes to Agenda

None

III. Action Agenda

1. Review and Consideration of School Improvement Plan
 - a. Institute for the Creative Arts

Dr. Rosilee Russell, staff representatives and legal counsel from the Institute for the Creative Arts appeared before the Charter Authorizing Panel to respond to the June 2026 deficiency letter and to present their school improvement plan for approval.

A motion was made to accept the Division's recommendation that the School's (Institute for the Creative Arts—Fort Smith) current academic, financial and operational conditions warrant heightened intervention and oversight and, therefore, approve the following actions:

1. **Issue a formal Notice of Performance Breach** based on unresolved financial and reporting concerns that raise significant questions regarding the school's financial sustainability and compliance with its charter obligations.
2. **Require the School, within thirty (30) days, to submit a reconciled financial statement** aligned with the Arkansas Department of Education's UBER financial reporting data and certified by both the Board Treasurer and the school's independent Certified Public Accountant.
3. **Require the School, within thirty (30) days, to provide all New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) and sublease documentation**, including the executed sublease agreement and any lease service coverage ratio covenants, to enable the Authorizer to determine whether prior Commissioner approval was obtained or required pursuant to 6 CAR § 31-411(a)(5)
4. **Require monthly financial reporting** that includes:
 - o Revenues and expenditures compared to budget;
 - o Cash position and days cash on hand;
 - o Enrollment compared to projections; and
 - o A written explanation for any budget variance exceeding ten percent (10%).

All reported figures shall be reconciled to the Department's UBER financial reporting data and the school's reconciled financial statement.

5. **Conduct two authorizer monitoring visits**, one in October 2026 and one in February 2027.
 - o The **October 2026 visit** shall assess implementation of the school's improvement plan, the effectiveness of the Tier 3 intervention framework, and the quality of mathematics instruction and programming. The visit shall also include a review of private fundraising efforts, including donor outreach activities, pledged contributions, and funds received.
 - o The **February 2027 visit** shall evaluate the winter interim assessment results against the benchmarks and performance targets established in the school improvement plan. The visit shall also include a review of the school's financial condition, including cash position, year-to-date financial performance, and projected cash flow for the remainder of the school year.
6. **Adopt the school's submitted improvement plan as the official corrective action plan**, utilizing the school's stated performance targets where appropriate, and monitor progress toward the identified goals, benchmarks, and outcomes.

Further, the ADE Charter Office is asked to issue all required notices, implement the monitoring and oversight activities necessary to carry out this action, and provide reports to the Authorizer on the school's progress toward satisfying the conditions and timelines established in this motion.

Motion: Phillip Baldwin

Second: Edie Stewart

Vote: Passed unanimously

IV. Consent Agenda

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the June 18, 2026, Charter Authorizing Panel meeting.

Motion: Ms. Toyce Newman

Second: Dr. Tina Moore

Vote: Passed unanimously

V. Reports

There were no reports.

VI. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

The next meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is scheduled for September 17, 2026.

Minutes Prepared By:

Ms. Regina Rihani
Charter School Office Staff
Arkansas Department of Education

Minutes Approved By:

Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair
Charter Authorizing Panel
Arkansas Department of Education