State Board of Education Report

Charter Authorizing Panel: October 15, 2026

1. Garfield Scholars Academy (Waiver Request)

Approved Motion
The panel accepted the Charter Office's recommendation to approve Garfield Scholars Academy's request for waivers of superintendent licensure, library media specialist licensure and staffing, and classroom teacher licensure requirements.

Motion Details

- Moved by: Dr. John Bacon
- Seconded by: Mr. Phil Baldwin
- Vote: Passed unanimously

- **Scope:** The waivers cover the superintendent, the library media specialist, and the grades 3-6 elementary classroom teacher.

2. Institute for the Creative Arts (Performance Review)

Approved Motion
The panel amended its August 20, 2026, motion. It rescinded academic monitoring site visits for 2026-2027, required limited academic progress reports, and kept all financial monitoring requirements in place.

Motion Details

- Moved by: Ms. Toyce Newton
- Seconded by: Ms. Edie Stewart
- Vote: Passed unanimously

- **Progress & Plan:** ICA earned an A letter grade and a Level 1 Support designation in its 2026 accountability results.
- **Key Requirement:** Within 30 calendar days after the fall and winter interim assessment windows, ICA must submit interim assessment results, a leadership analysis of whether the school is on track to sustain its progress, any current academic concerns, and an update on its 2026-2027 academic improvement goals.
- **Accountability:** Monthly financial reporting continues. The Charter Office will conduct an on-site financial monitoring visit no later than December 15, 2026.

3. The Grove Academy (New Open-Enrollment Application)

Approved Motion
The panel approved The Grove Academy, located in the Mabelvale-Otter Creek area of Little Rock, Pulaski County, to open as an open-enrollment charter school in the 2027-2028 school year.

Motion Details

- Moved by: Ms. Edie Stewart
- Seconded by: Ms. Toyce Newton
- Vote: Passed unanimously

- **Background:** The Grove Academy is a proposed K-5 school in the Mabelvale West Corridor of southwest Little Rock. It will open in August 2027 with 90 students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 and add one grade each year to reach 308 students by Year 5. The founder, Dr. Terri Guy, is a former southwest Little Rock principal and reading specialist and will serve as CEO and Head of School.
- **Need:** The assigned schools are Otter Creek Elementary and Mabelvale Elementary, both rated D, and Mabelvale Middle, rated F.
- **Progress & Plan:** The model is literacy first, with a protected K-2 literacy block and a daily intervention window. The budget shows a surplus every year. At 70 percent enrollment, it still shows a surplus in four of five years.
- **Key Requirement:** The school must complete the pre-opening checklist, including securing adequate financing and an appropriate facility.
- **Accountability:** The Charter Office will monitor pre-opening checklist compliance monthly to confirm all requirements are met before opening.

4. Imboden Area Charter School (Renewal)

Approved Motion
The panel accepted the Imboden Area Charter School Board's petition to voluntarily transfer its charter to Freedom Education Services, as unanimously approved by the school board on October 13, 2026.

Motion Details

- Moved by: Ms. Edie Stewart
- Seconded by: Dr. John Bacon
- Vote: Passed unanimously

- **Background:** The Division proposed revocation or, in the alternative, transfer of the charter. Its notice cited a negative legal balance (negative $102,452.15 at the end of FY 2025-2026), a FY 2026-2027 budget well below actual costs, bank reconciliations that did not balance (a $205,861.07 variance in July 2026), difficulty meeting payroll, and unmet special education requirements.
- **Performance:** The letter grade fell from a B in 2024-2025 to an F in 2025-2026. Enrollment fell from 70 students in 2024-2025 to 31 students reported for 2026-2027.
- **Progress & Plan:** On October 13, 2026, the Imboden Area Charter School Board voted unanimously to petition for a voluntary transfer of its charter to Freedom Education Services.
- **Key Requirement:** The revocation hearing is scheduled for November 3, 2026.
- **Accountability:** The panel approved the transition agreement. The parties may begin due diligence and transition planning pending the Panel's November 2 action and final consideration by the State Board of Education on November 12, 2026.