



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MINUTES

Charter Authorizing Panel

May 15th, 2025

Arkansas Department of Education

DESE Auditorium

4 Capitol Mall

Little Rock, AR 72201

9:00 AM

I. **Call to Order**

The May 2025 Regular Meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) was called to order by Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray at 9:08 AM.

Present in person were Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray (Chair) and Ms. Edie Stewart, while Dr. John Bacon and Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan joined via Zoom. Absent members were Ms. Toyce Newton, Dr. Tina Moore, and Mr. Phil Baldwin. LaBria Brown, Litigation Attorney for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), Office of Legal Services, provided a legal procedures overview.

II. **Consent Agenda**

The Consent Agenda was introduced by Dustin Wood, J.D., State Director of School Choice, and included the following items:

- Minutes of the April 17 Charter Authorizing Panel Meeting
- Voluntary Recission of Charter for Adventure Online Academy by Waldron School District
- Voluntary Recission of Charter for Centerpoint School District

Dr. Crystal Beshears moved to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. The Charter Authorizing Panel voted unanimously 4-0 to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed.

III. **Action Agenda**

The Action Agenda was introduced by Mr. Dustin Wood, Office of School Choice and Parent Empowerment, and included the following items:

- A. Charter Amendment Request from Arkansas Virtual Academy (ARVA) to increase the school enrollment cap increase from 5,000 to 7,000.
- B. ARVA Presentation and Discussion:

Superintendent Amy Johnson's Presentation

Amy Johnson, Superintendent of ARVA, provided a brief history of the school and presented key improvements in grades across elementary, middle, and high schools. She provided the rationale for requesting an increased student cap to accommodate more families with unique needs (e.g., medical, family trauma, special needs) and responded to questions from the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) members.

Legal Concerns

Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray requested that LaBria Brown, Litigation Attorney, address legal concerns. Ms. Brown reported no issues.

Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan's Comments

Dr. Beshears-Duncan praised ARVA's success and asked about factors contributing to it. Ms. Johnson highlighted the use of intervention tools through Regional Community Coordinators (RCCs), including Adventure Days and social events to foster a community of learners.

Dr. John Bacon's Comments

Dr. Bacon commended ARVA's progress and inquired how the school would sustain it with the proposed student cap increase. Ms. Johnson discussed support for teaching staff, innovative ideas, and a transparent, inclusive culture that removed stigma around underperformance, emphasizing a new learning culture as a turning point.

Ms. Edie Stewart's Comments

Ms. Stewart expressed excitement about visiting ARVA and asked about onboarding new staff and supporting increased student needs (e.g., IEPs, site access, physical therapy). Ms. Johnson outlined strategies for faculty onboarding and addressing additional student requirements.

Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray's Inquiry

Dr. Wright-McMurray asked about ARVA's support for Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. Ms. Johnson detailed ARVA's CTE programs, including an FFA program and a virtual welding course, explaining how they connect real-world experiences through virtual learning.

Dr. Wright-McMurray asked for a motion on the amendment request. Ms. Edie Stewart moved to accept the amendment request which was seconded by Dr. Bacon. The motion passed unanimously 4-0 (Dr. Bacon - Yea, Ms. Edie Stewart - Yea, Dr. McMurray - Yea, Dr. Beshears - Yea).

IV. Adjournment

Ms. Edie Stewart moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Dr. Beshears-Duncan. The motion passed unanimously 4-0, and the meeting adjourned at 9:51 AM.

Minutes Prepared By:

Mr. Seth R. Seaton
Charter Office Team Analyst
Arkansas Department of Education

Minutes Approved By:

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