

Arkansas Charter Authorization Panel Meeting
January 16, 2025

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray at 9:15 AM. Members in attendance were Dr. John Bacon, Dr. Tina Moore, Mrs. Edie Stewart, and Mr. Phillip Baldwin (via Zoom).

II. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Dr. Wright-McMurray introduced two new members of the panel: Dr. John Bacon and Mrs. Edie Stewart.

III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Mr. Dustin Wood, State Director of School Choice, presented the minutes from the previous meeting.

IV. Approval of Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Dr. Moore and seconded by Mr. Baldwin. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Legal Review

Mrs. Haley Millwood, ADE Legal Counsel, provided a legal review and outlined procedures for the panel's consideration.

VI. 2025 Meeting Dates

Mr. Dustin Wood presented the proposed meeting dates for 2025. Following a discussion among the panel members, a motion to approve the dates was made by Ms. Stewart and seconded by Dr. Moore. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. Action Item: Friendship Aspire Charter School Amendment Request

Mr. Dustin Wood introduced the next agenda item regarding Friendship Aspire's request for two amendments:

1. Adding a charter school to their current footprint.
2. Requesting an academic waiver to accommodate a special student population and ensure an increase in the enrollment cap.

Mr. Tran presented detailed information about the school's unique educational approach. He highlighted the following:

- The benefits of transitioning their existing dyslexia-focused private school into a public charter school.
 - Data from NWEA assessments and KTPE testing demonstrate measurable growth in student performance.
 - Testimonials from parents and students about the school's positive impact.
 - Plans for statewide expansion and a focus on improving pedagogy across Arkansas.
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VIII. Panel Discussion and Feedback

The panel engaged in a detailed discussion, raising several questions and concerns:

- **Mrs. Millwood (Legal Counsel):** Advised that the panel cannot approve a waiver in its current form. Suggested the charter be approved first, followed by addressing the waiver through the ALE (Alternative Learning Environment) ADE process.
- **Dr. Bacon:** Inquired about the school's funding structure and its financial sustainability.
- **Mrs. Stewart:** Asked about the student-to-teacher ratio, staff certification, and how the expanded numbers would be managed.
- **Dr. Moore:** Focused on the success and integration of students into general classrooms, professional development for staff, and the scope of the certificate waiver.
- **Mr. Baldwin:** Raised questions about financial aspects of the proposed expansion, noting gaps in the documentation.
- **Dr. Wright-McMurray:** Asked about local population needs, current student sources, and barriers

to the school's expansion.

The panel also discussed the timeline for achieving ALE status and the school's plans for students transitioning out of the Friendship network into the general population.

IX. Withdrawal of Request

Following the discussion, Mr. Tran elected to withdraw the request for the amendments. He indicated that the school would return in the coming months with a more comprehensive plan.

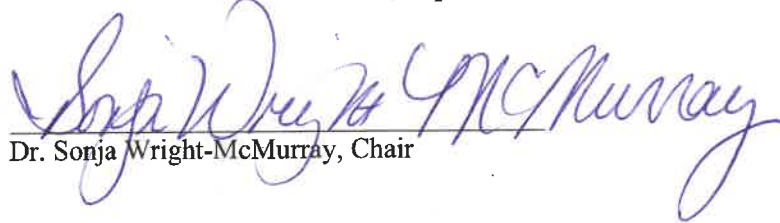
X. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dr. Bacon and seconded by Ms. Stewart. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned.

Minutes Prepared By:

Mr. Seth R. Seaton
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Charter Authorization Panel Chairperson



Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair