



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MINUTES

CHARTER AUTHORIZING PANEL

January 29, 2026

Arkansas Department of Education

DESE Auditorium

4 Capitol Mall

Little Rock, AR 72201

9:00 AM

I. Call to Order

The January 29, 2026, Regular Meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) was called to order by Dr. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Chair, at 9:05 AM.

Present in person were:

- Dr. Wright-McMurray
- Dr. John Bacon
- Ms. Edie Stewart
- Dr. Tina Moore
- Mr. Phil Baldwin
- Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan

Absent were:

Ms. Toyce Newton

II. **Changes to Agenda:** No changes to the agenda.

III. Action Agenda

1. Little Rock School District Conversion Charter Application for Hall High School

At the December 2025 meeting, the following Little Rock School District staff: Dr. Jermall Wright, Superintendent, along with Dr. Shay Loring and Mr. Carlton McGee appeared before the panel. The District representatives delivered a presentation

about the proposed charter at Hall High School. After discussion, the chair deferred a decision on the application until the January meeting.

On return, at the January 2026 meeting, the CAP heard a presentation by district staff: Mr. McGee, Dr. Wright, and Mrs. Shameka Montgomery. The presentation was followed by discussion and questions. Dr. Tina Moore moved to accept the proposed application for a district conversion charter for Hall High School. Seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

2. Charter Amendment Request—Cabot Panther Academy

The Cabot School District is requesting to amend their existing charter for the Cabot Panther Academy to:

- (1)** Add a new campus/site to house the K-6 Cabot Panther Academy students at Magness Creek Elementary School in the district.
- (2)** Increase their enrollment cap from the current 500 to 650.
- (3)** Change grade levels served to add grades Kindergarten through Fourth Grade to the charter's current (5-12) authorized grade levels. These students would be served in a hybrid--not completely digital--instructional model.

The following Cabot School District representatives: Mr. Aaron Randolph, Dr. Melanie Duerkop, Mrs. Stacy Allen, and Dr. Amy Morrow appeared before the panel. The presentation was followed by discussion and questions from the panel. Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan moved to accept all amendment requests made by the Cabot Panther Academy. Seconded by Dr. Tina Moore. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

3. Review of District Strategic Plans for School Districts that Received a "F" Letter Grade

Assistant Commissioner Dr. Darrell Smith led a discussion of the accountability profiles created by charter school office staff and the current landscape documents submitted by charter leaders whose charters received an "F" letter grade.

a. Friendship Aspire Academy Network

The following representatives presented on behalf of Friendship Aspire Academy Network: Dr. Phong Tran, Mrs. Tonikka Dickerson, Mrs. Ashley Williams, Dr. Carol Redfield-Mims, Mr. Johnny Laine, Jr, Mr. William Kendrick, and Mr. Joe Harris. Dr. John Bacon moved to accept the school improvement plans and signed statement of assurances for all listed Friendship Aspire Schools. Seconded by Ms. Edie Stewart. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

b. Future School of Fort Smith

The following representatives presented on behalf of the Future School of Fort Smith: Mr. Boyd Logan and Mrs. Susan Pruitt. After discussion and questions, Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan moved to accept the school improvement plans and signed statement of assurances for the Future School of Fort Smith. Seconded by Dr. John Bacon. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

c. Garfield Scholars Academy

The following representatives presented on behalf of Garfield Scholars Academy: Dr. Melanie Kennon, Mrs. Cheryl Harrison, and Mrs. Joy Sawyer-Johnson. After discussion and questions, Ms. Edie Stewart moved to accept the school improvement plans and signed statement of assurances for the Garfield Scholars Academy. Seconded by Dr. John Bacon. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

d. Institute for the Creative Arts

The following representatives presented on behalf of the Institute for the Creative Arts: Dr. Rosilee Russell, Mr. Michael Johnson, and Mrs. Kelly Lucero. After discussion and questions, Dr. John Bacon moved to accept the school improvement plans and signed statement of assurances for the Institute for the Creative Arts. Seconded by Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan. Vote was unanimous with no one opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

IV. Consent Agenda

Minutes of the December 18, 2025 Meeting:

It was moved by Ms. Edie Stewart with a second by Dr. Crystal Beshears-Duncan to approve the minutes of December 18, 2025, Charter Authorizing Panel Meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 PM.

The next meeting of the Charter Authorizing Panel is scheduled for THURSDAY, February 19, 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