

Minutes
State Board of Education
Special Meeting
Monday, March 15, 2004

The State Board of Education met via telephone conference call on Monday, March 15, 2004. The call originated in Room 303A in the State Education Building. Dr. Charles D. Watson sounded the roll and verified that a quorum was present. Shelby Hillman, Vice Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

The following Board members were present: Shelby Hillman, Vice Chairman; Sherry Burrow; Luke Gordy; Randy Lawson; MaryJane Rebick; Diane Tatum; and Dr. Jeanna Westmoreland.

The following Board members were absent: JoNell Caldwell and Dr. Calvin King.

Renewal for Benton County School of the Arts Charter School

Ms. Hillman recognized Jim Boardman to present the new information from Benton County School of the Arts Charter School. Mr. Boardman stated that materials distributed addressed the additional information requested by the Board.

Mr. Lawson expressed appreciation to the Benton County staff for addressing the items of concern and providing the additional information in a relatively short time. Further, due to past actions of the Board and the new accountability bill recently enacted by the legislature, he requested that in the future, when presenting test data that both norm-referenced test data along with criterion-referenced test data be included in any presentation for all schools, both charter and otherwise. Mr. Boardman stated that Department staff had prepared a form for just such presentations and he expected that it would be utilized in the future. Mr. Lawson stated that he believes norm-referenced data, along with criterion-referenced data, are useful in the process of observing student progress.

Ms. Rebick stated that she believes the reason for establishing charter schools is to establish an education climate that demonstrates higher performance and overall test scores can be raised. She affirmed that charter schools must not lose site of the fact that they are expected to perform well beyond the minimum expected for all schools.

Ms. Tatum asked if the State goals in question were consistent with those expected under No Child Left Behind. Mr. Boardman assured her that was the case. Mr. Boardman noted that the projected gains were 20% greater both in literacy and mathematics than those expected under No Child Left Behind.

Mr. Gordy recognized the commitment of the school to embrace the challenge of the Board to adopt challenging goals.

Ms. Rebick asked if charter schools were subject to state audit like other public schools. Mr. Boardman assured her that was the case.

Dr. Westmoreland moved approval of a three-year extension of the Benton County School of the Arts Charter. Ms. Burrow seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Renewal of Academics Plus (Maumelle) Charter School

Mr. Boardman was recognized to summarize information received from Academics Plus Charter School (Maumelle). Mr. Boardman reported that the new information for Academics Plus sets performance standards higher than expected state values.

Ms. Rebick inquired as to the reasons for students opting not to continue enrollment at Academics +. Dr. Caroline Proctor responded by citing a number of reasons for students not returning which included: failing grades, participation in sports not provided at Academics +, families relocating, transportation problems, etc.

Mr. Gordy stated that he was not surprised at the higher dropout rate because of the expectation for higher performance.

Dr. Westmoreland moved approval of a three-year extension of the charter. Mr. Lawson seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Proposed Revision of Rules Governing Arkansas Better Chance Program for Public Comment

Janie Huddleston was recognized to introduce this item. Ms. Huddleston stated that changes in legislation (Act 49) governing the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program enacted by the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003 of the Arkansas General Assembly necessitated revision in the Rules. She noted changes include determining priority for funding grants, sanctions for failure to submit required reports, additional requirements for tracking and reporting, professional development for teachers, and a requirement to include more content – math and literacy readiness training for children.

Ms. Burrow asked if work had been done to determine the number of potential children who would be eligible to attend ABC Programs. Ms. Huddleston stated that approximately 7,000 additional children could be served and there are that many waiting for an opportunity for service. Ms. Burrow also inquired about home visitation and/or home instruction. Ms. Huddleston stated that both would be part of the expanded program.

Dr. Westmoreland asked about teacher preparation for the ABC Program. Ms. Huddleston stated that the Rules require the lead teacher to have a degree and state P-4 licensure and clarified that this teacher could be the only teacher or could supervise other non-licensed teachers.

Ms. Burrow inquired if transportation and child safety on school buses were concerns. Ms. Huddleston stated that safety issues have been addressed and that some schools can provide a safety harness for very young children. She confirmed that funds are allocated to address such issues.

Ms. Tatum asked which agencies or institutions could apply for ABC grants. Ms. Huddleston responded that “any willing provider” can be a grantee – this could include school districts, faith-based organizations, or some other community entity.

Mr. Gordy inquired as to how programs would be evaluated. Janinne Riggs stated that the intent would be to align assessments with the requirements of Act 35 [2nd Extraordinary Session of the 83rd General Assembly].

Ms. Rebick moved approval of the Rules for public comment. Ms. Tatum seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Dr. Westmoreland moved adjournment. Ms. Tatum seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

The minutes were recorded and reported by Dr. Charles D. Watson.

Tom Courtway, Interim Director

JoNell Caldwell, Chair