

ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

AUGUST 18, 2026
5:00 P.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S

BOARD MEMBERS:

DR. JOHN McALLISTER, Chair
MR. JERRY BELEW, Vice Chair
MS. CARY SMITH, Secretary
MR. PHILLIP BOWEN
MR. ROBERT FAGAN

NON-VOTING BOARD MEMBERS:

MS. NICOLE WALSH, Superintendent

ALSO APPEARING:

MR. JACOB OLIVA, Secretary of Education
MS. COURTNEY SALAS-FORD, DESE Chief of Staff

LOCATION:

ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
- Woolly Auditorium
2600 West Markham Street
Little Rock, Arkansas 72203

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P R O C E E D I N G S

I. CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR McALLISTER: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to call this meeting to order. First off, we have S1, who will be doing the Pledge of Allegiance.

S1: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

CHAIR McALLISTER: So this Tuesday, on the 14th, we had board member of the month, and I had lunch with the students of the month. And it was S1 and Mr. S2. S1 is from the blind school, and Travis is from the deaf school. S2 is a football player. And Mr. S1, he says that he wants to go to, I think, UA Little Rock, I believe, thinking about doing broadcasting. He said he didn't want to do that all the time. He said it's cool, but not all the time. So we sat down and we had lunch and it was really great. Thank you all for inviting me.

SUPT. WALSH: Thank you so much for coming.

S2 wasn't able to join us. He is on the football field and in very sweaty pads, he told me. So he did not want to come and be here like that. So

1 -- but S1, if you're not unfamiliar, has done some
2 really awesome work with University of Arkansas
3 Little Rock and the Travelers as well. He's
4 broadcasted for baseball games a couple of different
5 times. And so we look forward to some new
6 opportunities like that for him as well this year.

7 Ms. Smith: Hey, I saw a video this last weekend
8 of S1 getting to do some tackle drills on the
9 football field, tackling some dummies. He had a
10 great time. That's a big smile, Dallas.

11 SUPT WALSH: That's awesome.

12 **II. REMINDER OF NEXT MEETING -SEPTEMBER 15, 2026**

13 CHAIR McALLISTER: All right. So next we have
14 the -- sorry. Next we have the reminder for the next
15 meeting which will be September the 15th, 2026. Is
16 that okay with everyone?

17 (ALL ANSWER AFFIRMATIVELY)

18 CHAIR McALLISTER: Okay.

19 **III. CONSENT ITEMS**

20 **A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES, FINANCIAL STATEMENT & PERSONNEL ITEMS**

21 **B. PERSONNEL ITEMS**

22 **1. RESIGNATIONS/TERMINATIONS**

23 CHAIR McALLISTER: Next we'll move on to the
24 consent items. First, I need approval of the
25 minutes, financial statement and personnel items.

1 MR. FAGAN: Mr. Chair, I move to approve the
2 financial report and personnel items and the minutes
3 of last month's meeting as submitted to the board.

4 MR. POWELL: I second that motion.

5 MR. BELEW: Second.

6 CHAIR McALLISTER: We have two seconds. All in
7 favor?

8 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

9 CHAIR McALLISTER: Is there anyone against it?
10 Is there anyone abstaining? If not, we will accept
11 the board's -- the minutes, financial statements and
12 personnel items.

13 **IV. ACTION AGENDA**

14 **1. AR APP 2026-2027 ASURANCES UNDER ESSA & IDEA (SIGNATURE)**

15 CHAIR McALLISTER: Next we have action items.

16 SUPT. WALSH: So this action item, as it was
17 presented to -- for assurances, is our AR App. It is
18 submitted, oops, sorry, I turned my microphone off.
19 The AR App is submitted to the Department of
20 Education annually. It is updated. It took 17
21 forms, I'm told. I did not experience the 17 forms
22 into STAR. It took 17 forms and made them into one
23 awesome form that we get to fill out. It includes
24 everything from dyslexia interventions and grant
25 proposals to high impact tutoring plans, reading

1 plans, and really encompasses -- it's our strategic
2 plan for our school. What are we going to do to move
3 ourselves forward in the next year and then ongoing?
4 That has been submitted and has been returned to us
5 for revisions. We have revised the few things that
6 were asked to be revised. I think there were two
7 typos and one question and so we were able to resolve
8 those very quickly. So kudos to our leadership team
9 for getting that done in a very timely manner and
10 with very little revision and it has been resubmitted
11 for finalization. So if I could just get approval to
12 sign those assurances and get that sent. That's the
13 last step for the final approval.

14 CHAIR McALLISTER: All right.

15 Next we have discussion items.

16 SUPT. WALSH: We need to vote for the action
17 item.

18 CHAIR McALLISTER: Oh, sorry. We need to vote
19 for the action item

20 MR. POWELL: I have a question.

21 SUPT. WALSH: Yes, sir.

22 MR. POWELL: This isn't late? I see due date is
23 June 30th.

24 SUPT. WALSH: Yes. So that's the submission --
25 the original submission date --

1 MR. POWELL: Oh, okay.

2 SUPT. WALSH: -- and it comes back for
3 revisions, and the final date is September the 1st.
4 Great question. Thank you for asking.

5 MR. FAGAN: Mr. Chair, I move to approve the
6 signature of the assurance policy.

7 MS. SMITH: Second.

8 CHAIR McALLISTER: All right. It has been moved
9 and seconded. All in favor?

10 (UNANIMOUS CHORUS OF AYES)

11 CHAIR McALLISTER: Anyone against? Is there
12 anyone abstaining?

13 Then the action item has been approved.

14 SUPT. WALSH: All right. Moving to discussion
15 items, before we get too far along, I'd like to
16 welcome Secretary Oliva and Courtney Salas-Ford, his
17 chief of staff. We have a couple new staff members
18 that I think you'd like to introduce, and we're so
19 grateful for you being here. Thank you so much for
20 joining us for the beginning of our school year.
21 This is my year three, I can't believe that, and I'm
22 looking forward to this being our shift year from
23 everything being kind of fires and putting out things
24 and making quick moves to really planning for the
25 future and moving in a meaningful way and having our

1 board participation from that. So thank you so much.
2 I'm excited for our new partnership, our new
3 partners.

4 SECT. OLIVA: Thank you, Nicole.

5 Jacob Oliva, Secretary of Education.

6 And wanted to come and check in with the board.
7 It's been probably a few months since I've been here,
8 and I know there's a lot going on. And it's, as
9 Nicole said, it's the start of a new school year, so
10 I know for me personally, I think this is the most
11 exciting time of the school year when -- when
12 students have been off for the summer, there's just
13 an excitement and buzz to get our young little
14 scholars back in our hallways and teachers work
15 really hard to prepare and get our schools and
16 classrooms right. And across the state, I think
17 we're at 100 percent now with all of our schools
18 back, so we have about 1,040 schools and over 40,000
19 classrooms and they're all filled with Arkansas
20 students. And I think we're kicking off to what's
21 going to be a great year. I do want to introduce
22 some folks and then maybe just kind of give a little
23 update on some stuff that we're working on as a
24 state.

25 Nicole introduced -- or mentioned Courtney

1 Salas-Ford. She's our chief of staff and works very
2 closely with Nicole here at the School of Deaf and
3 Blind and kind of any other topics that arise,
4 whether it's with helping with personnel or budget
5 and finances and support. She's -- she's really one
6 of our agency's main contacts on a daily basis. So I
7 just want to make sure the board knows who she is and
8 feels comfortable reaching out to her. She's a
9 valuable member of our team and anybody in the
10 community can reach out to her or myself as well. We
11 want to be fully open and transparent and able to
12 support the school to the best of our abilities.

13 But we do have two new faces that I think we're
14 meeting for the first time that are also going to be
15 assigned to help directly support the work of this
16 board and support the school as well. And so Allyson
17 Tate, we call her Aly, I hope that's okay. She works
18 in our office for me and she's kind of in charge of
19 working as a board liaison and commission and then we
20 -- I like to use this term called all other duties as
21 assigned or some people might call it special
22 projects. So she gets a little bit of everything but
23 she helps us coordinate and will help coordinate with
24 Nicole, maybe Tiffany or some of the other folks, all
25 the logistics of this board but she also helps us

1 with our library board and our state board and our
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission, and a bunch of
3 other stuff that we -- we're involved with. And then
4 Caitlynn Cochran, I don't know what you -- her
5 official title is going to be.

6 MS. COCHRAN: Just attorney.

7 SECT. OLIVA: She's an attorney.
8 Congratulations. I don't know if that's a promotion
9 or not. We might have just promoted Caitlynn.
10 Congratulations, but she's an attorney. She's been
11 working in our office quite a few months, maybe
12 almost a year now.

13 MS. COCHRAN: A year in November.

14 SECT. OLIVA: A year in November, she's joined
15 the team and has been a viable member, helping us
16 work on a lot of the issues and opportunities that we
17 have in the state. But she's going to be
18 specifically assigned, I think, to be the direct
19 support and liaison for our agency for anything that
20 may come up that has a legal question or sometimes
21 the boards, there's questions around Robert's Rules
22 or procedures and motions and some of the intents of
23 Caitlynn's are is going to be our expert and you're
24 going to see her here at all the meetings.

25 I don't know if you all want to say anything or

1 -- this is your chance.

2 MS. COCHRAN: This is your chance.

3 MS. TATE: Hi, I'm Aly Tate. It's very nice to
4 meet you guys.

5 Like the Secretary said, I am the boards and
6 commissions liaison for ADE. I will be your direct
7 line to ADE leadership. Any issues that you come
8 across, I work with Nicole. I'm going to be working
9 with you guys directly as well. I'm here to help
10 you. So anything you need, please feel free to reach
11 out to me. I'm happy to give you my email and my
12 cell phone number and we will work together to make
13 this board even better.

14 MS. COCHRAN: Hi, Caitlynn Cochran.

15 Like Aly said, you know, I'm excited to be here
16 and ready to learn lots and make new friends. You
17 can also have my email and my cell phone number if
18 you need anything.

19 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah, we'll share that.

20 MS. COCHRAN: Happy to be here.

21 SECT. OLIVA: So we'll be sure to share all of
22 our contact information so that they have it.

23 Lots of wonderful news happening around
24 education in the state of Arkansas. I don't know if
25 anybody's been following along, but we worked some

big educational priorities or some really big educational policies over the past few sessions, one of them being called Arkansas LEARNS, the other one called Arkansas ACCESS. And it's really been our blueprint for how we want to improve learning as a state. And it really touches everything from early learning to K-12, career and technical education, parental empowerment, secondary and beyond. So we've been working on building out this system in Arkansas to help improve opportunities for students in overall achievement and performance. And this was year three of building an implemented system. We started in 2023, and we look at how our students are doing in 2026, three years later, under a complete overhaul and design. It's really exciting to see that three years after the system's being implemented, we have more students reading at or above grade level, same within math and science, than we have ever before. And when we look at overall student performance as a state, we had, what the experts would say, statistically significant increases. So to put it in perspective, last year, when we looked at, like say, overall English language arts score, the state went up about .08 percent and we're like, wow, you know, more students are learning and every percentage

1 points like 350 students. So when you're looking at
2 hundreds of students are now performing above grade
3 level, that's something to celebrate. In the
4 previous year, we went up about one and a half
5 percent in math and maybe about the same as science.
6 Well, this past school year, same assessment, same
7 opportunities, making sure we're supporting teachers,
8 making sure we're supporting students, building out
9 the system, we had about a 6.5 percent increase in
10 ELA, over a seven percent increase in math, and over
11 an eight percent increase in science. That doesn't
12 happen by accident. And what I always like to
13 remind everybody is we have built an incredible
14 system. And what we've done is we've provided
15 clarity and alignment. And I always like to say bad
16 systems beat good people every single time. And
17 unfortunately, we didn't have a really good system
18 where teachers knew what they were supposed to teach
19 and students were measured whether or not they were
20 learning what we want them to learn. Well, now we
21 have a system that can do that. And when you look at
22 overall achievement, it was about a 20 percent
23 increase in achievement as a state for all of our
24 subjects last year. And I always like to tell
25 people, we didn't hire 35,000 new teachers; right.

1 We were able to take the talent that's working in our
2 schools and leading our schools and working hard
3 every day and give them the right support and tools
4 they need to be successful. And because we're able
5 to do that, we're seeing monumental gains. Well, we
6 also want to make sure that's happening here. So
7 this is a big year, I think, for the School of Deaf
8 and Blind because when we were tasked to develop a
9 blueprint to provide more opportunities for students
10 to excel and perform at or above grade level, when we
11 said all students, we mean all and that is something
12 that's really important to us at our agency. And I
13 think to this board and especially to the community
14 watching that students in this learning environment
15 deserve the best opportunity as well and as we were
16 kind of going down even through the past few years
17 looking at this blueprint to implement to improve the
18 state there was one thing that was really clear is
19 that this school had probably been neglected for far
20 too long and when we looked at the conditions of the
21 facilities and the master plan and even the
22 curriculum that we're reusing and just making sure
23 that the teachers here had those right resources that
24 every other teacher deserves, I think we were a
25 little bit behind. So we started going down a

1 journey to build a path and I know we've had some
2 legislation to look at kind of unifying and
3 coordinating some of the administrative oversight and
4 costs and burdens to the schools so that we can put
5 more dollars into classrooms because that's where
6 your budget starts. And I always like to say your
7 budget is a value statement where you start budgeting
8 is what you value in a starting classroom. So Nicole
9 kind of alluded that this is like a big year I think
10 for his campus well this is a big year and we want to
11 be there alongside you and support you because yeah
12 we're going to build state-of-the-art facilities but
13 those facilities are only as good as the talent we
14 put in them and the opportunities for the students so
15 that's a one big piece of the puzzle that we want to
16 get right. And as we're going through -- we need to
17 hear from the board. Nicole needs to hear from the
18 board. Nicole and I have talked a lot about trying
19 to get the board more involved in some of these
20 decisions and sharing information so that we're
21 together and unified because I'm going to -- I'll be
22 -- always be honest and transparent. I don't know
23 everything and I'm not the expert on everything. Our
24 team isn't going to be experts, one person, one board
25 member is not going to be expert, but collectively,

1 whatever challenge we see or face, I think together
2 we can come up with a unified plan to support and
3 implement. And so as we go into the school year, I
4 know I'm excited. This past year when we look at
5 some of the historic gains in overall achievement,
6 it's not even just showing up on the state
7 achievements, but even just in national rankings.
8 For the last 20 years, Arkansas education has been
9 ranked between 45th and 50th nationally, period. So
10 I get questions a lot about like why are you changing
11 over things so much so fast? Because our students
12 deserve better. And if we don't act with urgency,
13 then we're failing another generation of students.
14 Well, those same metrics that have been ranking
15 Arkansas between 45 and 50th for the last few decades
16 just came out with their latest measurements about a
17 month or so ago. And while we have not arrived, I
18 think we're excited to say that on both U.S. News and
19 World reports and I want to say CNBC's, like, states
20 for growth or something like that reports -- national
21 reports indication, we're ranked 36 on both of them.
22 That's a big deal for this state. We're not in the
23 40s; right? I know this is tough work, and it's a
24 lot of hard work, but it's paying off, and it's
25 paying off for our students who deserve excellence.

1 So the other opportunities I think we have is,
2 yeah, this is a big year, it's a big transition,
3 there's a lot of things we want to get right, but
4 also sometimes -- even though sometimes we have the
5 best intent to get the right legislation and rules
6 put in place, sometimes they're not perfect; right?
7 Like I will tell you that LEARNS isn't perfect,
8 ACCESS isn't perfect, but it was a starting point.
9 So we're always looking to improve. We started our
10 legislative session in January. Is that --

11 MS. SALAS-FORD: January 11th.

12 SECT. OLIVA: January 11th. She had it down to
13 the date. I would just say sometime next year, you
14 know, the 27th. There's things that we see, or the
15 community sees like that says hey, you know, there's
16 some things that are holding us back or there's some
17 unintended obstacles or some barriers like this
18 doesn't make sense this is handcuffing us from
19 helping kids. We have a small window that we need to
20 hear from you pretty quickly so that we can put pen
21 to paper because it's already August and before we
22 know it'll be the time we get to Thanksgiving and
23 Christmas is January. So I just wanted to come in
24 today and tell you how much I appreciate your
25 sacrifice and commitment and diligence to this board.

1 I think we have a lot to celebrate as a state. We
2 still have a lot of work to do, but we need to make
3 sure we're hearing from you and that we're doing it
4 right and we're doing it together because there's a
5 lot of decisions that are going to be made. And I've
6 been talking with Nicole, and she'll tell you we need
7 your input --

8 SUPT. WALSH: Yes.

9 SECT. OLIVA: -- and we need you to be involved.
10 That's the role of this board. And if we need to
11 schedule more workshops, if you need me to come and
12 explain things, if you need anyone of our -- to help
13 provide that input, this isn't to be done in
14 isolation. And we need to hear from the
15 stakeholders. We need to hear from the people in the
16 audience. We need to hear from parents. We need to
17 hear from students. We -- we're going to be making a
18 lot of decisions that are going to have, I think,
19 some legacy lasting impacts for how we support deaf
20 and blind students across the state, not only in this
21 school, but for those families that are being
22 supported out in their communities. We've got all
23 needs all, and we've got to support them all. So I
24 just wanted to introduce and just check in with you
25 and happy to answer any questions. And I told Nicole

1 too, because I, like -- like, I know you're under
2 construction, but sometimes it doesn't -- I don't
3 realize what does it mean when you're under
4 construction; right? But if you ever want to host a
5 meeting at our agency, it's probably a little more
6 conducive because I think we're set up probably a
7 little better to livestream and create more of a
8 dais. We can set those up anytime.

9 SUPT. WALSH: Thank you. I greatly appreciate
10 that.

11 Board, would we be interested in maybe hosting
12 our meeting next month at?

13 SECT. OLIVA: You don't have to. It's just --

14 SUPT. WALSH: Yes. Or maybe we can talk about it
15 and decide from there.

16 MR. FAGAN: Secretary, I wanted to ask you, you
17 remember when you and I met with the governor and
18 legislators, when we first talked about merging, one
19 of the big critical things the governor also wanted
20 was hubs around the state. And I hadn't heard
21 anything about that in a long time, and I was
22 wondering what your thoughts are about creating these
23 hubs for deaf and blind students who didn't want to
24 stay in public school, and that we still provide
25 educational services for them.

1 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. So I think that's a great
2 question, and that is definitely part of the mission.
3 And I don't think we've arrived, and I have those
4 same questions. Where are we with these hubs? Where
5 are we with these students? I haven't pulled the
6 data in a while, but I want to say it's still around,
7 like, 2,000 students that qualify for deaf and blind
8 services that are out in their communities, whether
9 it's through their local school district or co-op or
10 private provider, how are we supported? We need to
11 make sure they have access to quality as well. And
12 I'm -- some of them may be getting it. I think
13 that's part of the question is to get a survey and
14 needs assessment done and, like, a good landscape map
15 of where are most of our students being served? And
16 how are they being served? And is there a way for
17 this school to be a better support of that service?
18 So that conversation needs to keep happening.

19 CHAIR McALLISTER: I have a suggestion.
20 Normally, we get quality individuals from
21 universities. Recently, at the University of
22 Arkansas at Little Rock, they've decided to cut
23 programs, especially those that facilitate education
24 for deafness and blindness. With that being said, is
25 there a way that we could talk about providing some

1 funding on some work with UA Little Rock to keep
2 those programs specifically for blindness as the TBI
3 and O&M program, which O&M is important for
4 individuals to feel independent when they go to
5 college or on school campuses to be able to get
6 around. And for deafness, we have a deaf education
7 program where we used to educate individuals who want
8 to teach deafness -- teach at the deaf school, but
9 it's on the books and nobody's in it and they're not
10 talking about bringing them back. Actually, they cut
11 the program.

12 SECT. OLIVA: Like a teacher prep program?

13 CHAIR McALLISTER: Yes, of course. So that
14 individuals who want to teach at the deaf school be
15 able to, you know, it's like TBI, same as TBI, but
16 it's in the field of deafness. Recently, we've had
17 underfunding in those programs.

18 SECT. OLIVA: I think these are great
19 suggestions and that's why I said this is a great
20 time to kind of whiteboard or write up some of these,
21 even if it's like a formal proposal from this board
22 right, like, that you all vote and feel like this is
23 something that we should take as a legislative
24 priority because -- and you're making me think;
25 right? You're asking me good questions because we've

1 done a lot, like -- so let's talk about the teacher
2 part first. We know the reality tells us the
3 biggest, the research tells us, the biggest indicator
4 of student performance is the teacher standing in
5 front of the classroom. And the more we can invest
6 in teachers in the classrooms, the better we create
7 opportunities for students. So we definitely, even
8 in the last three years, going this year, hear a lot,
9 especially in small rural areas -- and even though we
10 may not be geographically a smaller rural area, but
11 maybe the type of teacher we're trying to attract
12 would fit into that bucket; right? I think that's
13 kind of a fair lens to look at. Writing, recruiting,
14 retention and recognition plans for teachers, there's
15 a real challenge. We have school districts in the
16 state where there's only one high school in the
17 entire community, in the entire school district, that
18 does not have one certified teacher in the high
19 school because nobody in the community is certified
20 to teach everything and the students have to take all
21 their courses online and they're proctored by a
22 parapro. So that's a reality. That's hard to amend,
23 and I think that's probably a reality. But one of
24 the things that the governor was able to do with
25 Arkansas LEARNS was to raise teacher salaries, and I

1 know here it's a little bit nuanced because they're
2 considered state employees, and this is where I think
3 there's legislative opportunities because some of the
4 way we do contracts, it just doesn't make sense.
5 Welcome to government; right? Like, it's not
6 perfect, but we got to try to figure this out. Like
7 I said, I don't know all the answers we need to
8 identify the issues. But there are some
9 opportunities for, like, teacher apprenticeships and
10 teacher loan forgiveness programs, and there's some
11 pots of money. My wonder is if we follow back up
12 with our folks, especially if there's a university
13 that's willing to do, like, a deaf education degree
14 program. I think there's -- I don't know if there's
15 any in the state that have that, but we may be able
16 to put -- some set aside funding for candidates that
17 want to go in there to help pay for their tuition.
18 Like, I feel like we should be able to do that under
19 some of the purview we have because maybe that would
20 entice some folks that were thinking about going in
21 this, we should actually do it.

22 MS. SMITH: So I know one thing that has always
23 been discussed, and it's been hit on a little bit
24 more recently is that it's always been said that
25 within their first three years of being employed by

1 this school, they either need to have their deaf ed
2 degree or their TBI. And so we're setting them up
3 for failure by saying, but you got to go out of state
4 or do it all that.

5 SECT. OLIVA: Is that a state rule or law?

6 SUPT. WALSH: No. It was a rule that was put in
7 previously and an expectation, but it is something
8 that we are holding true to. We have staff here who
9 are under ALPs to get their deaf education and blind
10 education now that they can take the test. So we are
11 doing in-house preparation for those assessments.

12 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. Can I talk about the other
13 question you had real quick?

14 DR. McALLISTER: Yeah.

15 SECT. OLIVA: So I don't forget. Because you
16 talked about the blind services and some of the
17 grants that got cut.

18 CHAIR McALLISTER: Programs. Programs.

19 SECT. OLIVA: Programs.

20 CHAIR McALLISTER: Programs that got cut.

21 SECT. OLIVA: University programs. I think,
22 like, just kind of follow-up questions is maybe some
23 -- because I literally met with the university
24 systems president this morning. So it's like, man,
25 this is like a few hours later. I could have asked

1 him. He was literally in our office this morning.
2 But we have more meetings, so that's okay. Was that
3 -- I guess I just need to know more information. Was
4 it like a university decision, or was it a state
5 allocation?

6 CHAIR McALLISTER: Yes, sir. That was a
7 university decision. And the reason they said was
8 because it was low graduation rates, but when we --
9 it was not those graduation rates. It was voted on
10 by the faculty and the faculty Senate not to get rid
11 of the program. Ninety-nine percent voted not to get
12 rid of the program. University continued with it and
13 they're really supposed to follow what the faculty
14 senate says, but they didn't. And so I wanted to
15 give you an overview of how destitute blindnesses in
16 this state. And like I said, it's about 1,900
17 students --

18 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah.

19 CHAIR McALLISTER: -- who qualify for services.
20 We have 27 O&Ms, and most of them are housed at the
21 Arkansas School for the Blind. So if you broke them
22 down into caseloads, do you see how many people would
23 be on one person's caseload? If we talk about TBIs
24 and O&Ms, it's 27, most of them housed here. And so
25 if you broke down 1,900 people, children, you can see

1 how many people would be on a caseload. Now, if we
2 add adults into that mix, it's even more. And so
3 when we talk about, when we think about having
4 quality services for individuals who are deaf and
5 blind, I think that it starts with investing, with
6 universities investing back into these programs that
7 will bring these individuals into the state who want
8 -- may want to stay. I'm from out of state, so I
9 can't -- I stayed. I love this state. I like
10 helping people. I've been helping people my whole
11 life.

12 SECT. OLIVA: So let's -- I feel like --
13 because, like, I can't -- I wish I could wave my
14 magic wand and make that decision; right? Like,
15 that's definitely way out of our purview. But I do
16 think, in this, I'm not saying you need to do this
17 now or today, and Nicole can schedule a workshop,
18 like, you may just want to have like a separate
19 workshop around what we think should be legislative
20 priorities. So let's say, like, I'm making up a
21 number, it was a million-dollar budget item that got
22 cut, like, you could put as a board that you're in
23 favor of restoring the one-million-dollar line item
24 to provide these services to the University of
25 Arkansas Little Rock. We can share that; right? But

1 if I don't know that, it's hard for me to share
2 because our season is picking up where we're going to
3 be meeting with staff and legislators and we want to
4 share what the constituents want to see. And if you
5 can package it, helps us a whole lot more, if that
6 makes sense. Because I don't know all the nit and
7 gritty, but if you can give me the overview and the
8 right people to connect with.

9 Courtney, I don't know if you wanted to add to
10 that?

11 MS. SALAS-FORD: Well, yeah, and I think again
12 that is part of where Aly and Caitlynn will kind of
13 come in and that they're going to be attending the
14 meetings. They are your go-to; they're your
15 communication. They can help discern what is a
16 legislative decision or a legislative recommendation,
17 what is a university decision that we may not have
18 any authority over, but that's a conversation that at
19 least the secretary can have, or the commissioner of
20 higher education can have. You know, Nicole and I
21 meet at least twice a month. And so these three
22 people are the best way to get those types of issues
23 to me and to the secretary so that we can help get
24 those to the right place. And so, again, same thing.
25 We may not can fix everything, but we at least can

1 generally figure out where maybe that needs to go.
2 Is it something that we do have authority over or if
3 we don't?

4 MS. SMITH: So what do you --

5 CHAIR McALLISTER: Even with ESVI, they --
6 Educational Services for the Vision Impairment
7 Services, they -- they received cuts in their funding
8 and now they're down to four people for a whole
9 state. That's --

10 MS. SALAS-FORD: That's a direct grant under us,
11 so that is something we can look into, and I --

12 CHAIR McALLISTER: Yeah.

13 MS. SALAS-FORD: -- can ask about why.

14 SECT. OLIVA: And use numbers, use data.

15 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah.

16 SECT. OLIVA: Right, like when you say we have
17 1900 students that may be served and the caseloads
18 are one in 600, what is the recommendation, what is
19 the state average? What would it cost? Like, if you
20 can get that to us. And when I tell you our seasons,
21 I mean, we're pretty much already in season. Even
22 though it officially starts in January, we're
23 meeting, it never stops. We've been meeting with
24 legislatures all week. They're asking a lot of
25 questions. Everybody's trying to formulate their

1 plans. So I'd say work with Nicole and the team.
2 But the sooner -- and it could be just this; it could
3 be a bunch of different individual items or one
4 complete package of items. If we don't know, it's
5 hard to advocate.

6 CHAIR McALLISTER: So I have blindness already.
7 I'll just have to work with someone on deafness. And
8 I have all the stats on blindness.

9 SECT. OLIVA: That would be great.

10 CHAIR McALLISTER: I'm doing research on it, so
11 --

12 SECT. OLIVA: That would be very helpful.

13 MR. POWELL: Yeah. I guess this is kind of a
14 recommendation. It seems like every month, or not
15 every month, we hear about issues with trying to
16 staff certain positions. And I know Nicole's doing
17 everything she can, and I know some of this -- part
18 of it because she's constrained by the state rules;
19 right? You can only -- you have position
20 classifications, the salary ranges and all that so I
21 -- I don't have a specific and so I was just
22 wondering this way we could maybe go to the
23 legislature to try loosen those restrictions
24 or --

25 SECT. OLIVA: Or change the job classifications.

1 And I think we all agree that definitely needs to be
2 on your legislative proposal because -- and I get it;
3 right? Your state employees everybody tries to fit
4 into a bucket, but a teacher contract is very
5 different than a 250 year -- day a year contract
6 that's eight hours a day. And I do think that would
7 require some legislation, specific legislation and --
8 and I know we're looking at that because it's
9 frustrating, and it hurts with recruiting and
10 retaining. And -- but I will say, being part of the
11 state and the teacher retirement system, I mean, it's
12 -- there is no better state to be a teacher. But we
13 got to treat the teachers -- I remember even with
14 Arkansas LEARNS, I think, the law basically stated
15 that every teacher's salary would be raised to
16 \$50,000 a year minimum and get guaranteed at least a
17 \$2,000 a year raise. Well, the intention is for all
18 teachers to get that, but it didn't include state
19 employees, and they weren't included in that raise,
20 and people were really hurt and mad and I was like,
21 you should be. And we had to go back and work with
22 getting an appropriation because the way the law is
23 written to at least get them to where they needed to
24 be, which is a good thing, but it still doesn't mean
25 it's fixed. So I -- we made some progress. We've

1 got to add that to the list.

2 MS. SALAS-FORD: And I think one thing we could
3 do is provide you all with a list of how right now
4 everything is classified. Because like you said --

5 SECT. OLIVA: Yes. We can get that to you.

6 MS. SALAS-FORD: -- it is set by the state
7 Office of Personnel Management. And even though we
8 make requests, those requests are not always adhered
9 to or responded to the way we would like. But at
10 least you all can see where we're starting at and
11 help --

12 SECT. OLIVA: We definitely can get you that.

13 MS. SALAS-FORD: -- advocate for those and help
14 make those requests.

15 MS. SMITH: : Yeah, I think that the average
16 kid, even here, that we are educating is different
17 than what it was 50 years ago, 70 years ago. And we
18 have more resources in the state like behavioral
19 health specialists and things like that that we've
20 identified as a need. And we've identified it as a
21 need because we contracted out because we can't hire
22 somebody in; right? So I think that would be really
23 helpful if we saw all of what it is because maybe we
24 don't need a certain position that we once had.
25 Maybe things have morphed and evolved, and we don't

1 need that anymore. So I think that is a great
2 opportunity for us.

3 I have a question of what both of -- all of you
4 -- or you see is our purview of this board. What is
5 our role? Is it -- is it advocating for all blind
6 and deaf children throughout the state of Arkansas?
7 Is it solely for the students on this campus? Is it
8 to show up and approve items? Is it to show up and
9 ask for questions and reasoning behind why we're
10 doing what we're doing? I just want to know a
11 clearer picture because I think that's where some of
12 the assumptions happen.

13 SECT. OLIVA: Sure. I think it's all of it.
14 And I think that's up to the board to decide. So I
15 think if you read the law, right, and then laws are
16 funny because you have the way the law reads, you
17 have the intent of the law, then you have people
18 implement the law, which is why we have judges
19 because nobody ever agrees on a law; right? The law
20 is based to be the direct purview, I think, over this
21 school; right? But I don't think it's mission or
22 creed or outside the scope to talk about these hubs
23 that are making sure we support everybody. If we're
24 the centralized location that's supposed to be the
25 best services that we're providing in the state and

1 we have the experts, I think it'd be criminal not to
2 share that knowledge and expertise across the state.
3 And I think that needs to be part of the conversation
4 of this board. The role of a board is -- is to help
5 with governance and oversight. Like, you have a
6 superintendent that makes day-to-day decisions, the
7 superintendent should be informing you on those
8 day-to-day operations and decisions. If there's
9 questions or things that are happening, it is well
10 within this purview of this board to ask questions
11 because that's why we need you. You're appointed to
12 this board to be representatives of different parts
13 of the community and the different students that the
14 student body represents, and you're their advocates;
15 you're their face. And you should be free to ask
16 questions, and if we can't answer them, it's okay for
17 us to say, we need to table that . I don't know the
18 answer, but we can come back and get you the
19 information and the right data or have a better
20 discussion. The priority of this board is this
21 facility; right? It's this school, but it's -- I
22 think it's within their purview to take care of all
23 of our students as well. And I don't -- Nicole, I'll
24 let you add to that.

25 SUPT. WALSH: I would love that.

1 I think it's -- I think we bring -- this board
2 as a whole brings a really unique perspective, every
3 person in this -- on this board works with these
4 students or is a member of the community or has
5 worked here previously or has some tie in some way.
6 And so I think you bring a lot of knowledge and
7 expertise. And I do think that bringing some -- I
8 love the idea -- I had not thought of having a
9 legislative priorities workshop, but I think that's
10 an excellent place for us to start that conversation.
11 I do think that's probably going to be separate from
12 our conversation that we're --

13 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. There needs to be a
14 workshop.

15 SUPT. WALSH: Yes.

16 SECT. OLIVA: They may need to come and vote on
17 it --

18 SUPT. WALSH: Yes, I think so.

19 SECT. OLIVA: -- when you're done.

20 SUPT. WALSH: Yeah. I think we workshop it and
21 --

22 SECT. OLIVA: Like, as a body, you all stand
23 behind. Like, you need to take a couple hours, you
24 know? You have a business meeting; right? This is a
25 business meeting. Typically, business meetings are

1 more formal. You may have a student spotlight, but
2 you're going to have action items; you have consent
3 items. You may have some board discussion, but it's
4 a business meeting. I think -- and Nicole and I've
5 talked about this, you also need to schedule
6 workshops that are still publicly noticed; right?
7 You can't have meetings without letting people know
8 you're going to meet, but it -- it's not as formal.
9 Maybe it's in a round table and it's collaborative
10 where we're just talking about brainstorming the next
11 quarter, the next six months, the next year, the next
12 legislative priorities, and let's get all that. Some
13 of that may come to a board meeting, but we need to
14 make sure we're creating a space where you feel
15 comfortable sharing your voice and your opinions as
16 well. And if that's not happening, we want to help
17 do that --

18 SUPT. WALSH: Absolutely.

19 SECT. OLIVA: -- right? We don't want anybody
20 to feel like that they're not a valuable member of
21 this team. It takes all of us working. We're not
22 always going to agree; right? But at the end of the
23 day, when the board votes and takes action, we need
24 to be a united front to the community. And I mean, I
25 work with a board too. I wish I could tell you every

1 vote was unanimous, it's not -- we have some
2 contentious votes that are split by one and at the
3 end of the day we're still going to be arm in arm and
4 love each other even though we may have disagreed
5 because we're one board and we're trying to implement
6 the purview and the mission of this state, the
7 priorities of the legislature and the governor and
8 most important to us, what's right for students. And
9 I can tell you I'm the expert. Nicole's not the
10 expert. None of us are experts. Collaboratively,
11 we're all experts in education and in parenting. We
12 all have kids, and we know what's right, and we need
13 to do it better. We cannot do this alone. And if
14 that's the way it feels, today's a new day. It's a
15 new year. We're going to get this organized. We're
16 going to get it right.

17 SUPT. WALSH: I think that brings me -- oh, I'm
18 sorry -- okay. I think that brings me to the next
19 part of this workshop component. I think it's really
20 important. We were going through today our schedule
21 of how we're going to approach board meetings moving
22 forward as a collective, as a leadership. I think
23 it's so important that when we get to -- what is the
24 third week, so it would be two weeks before we have
25 our board meetings. I would really like to schedule

1 times. It can be Teams meetings, phone calls. I
2 know that most of you I speak to almost on a weekly
3 basis, but it's so important that we have a chance to
4 sit down and have a conversation. It can be out of
5 here, it's 10 o'clock at night, it really doesn't
6 matter to me but being able to run through things
7 with you and get your priorities and your thoughts
8 about things are going to be so important. So I know
9 in previous years and up to this point, because I'm
10 learning too, that we just sent agenda and said, do
11 you have anything else to add? But I think it's
12 going to be really important moving forward that we
13 have some solid conversation about what are our
14 priorities? What are our points for next month?
15 What is important to you to discuss? I've got a
16 couple of fun things for us to talk about today,
17 which I'm excited about, but it's not just going to
18 be about the fun things, it's going to be about the
19 hard things too. And so having a chance to set that
20 up and sit down with you individually and have those
21 conversations is going to enable me to do a better
22 job of bringing you things that you value, that are
23 important to you.

24 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. And as you're coming up
25 with items, like, simple examples, you may be

1 reviewing, I don't know, a code of conduct; right?
2 Like this board needs to have influence of the code
3 of conduct. But when you approve the code of
4 conduct, you have got to rely on Nicole and her team
5 to implement it. You know what I mean? Like, you
6 can't start calling her and questioning why they made
7 the decisions they did if they're following the
8 board's code of conduct; right? Like, that's getting
9 into operations. But having the conversation around
10 what constitutes a violation of the code of conduct,
11 y'all need to figure it out, or dismissal -- I don't
12 even know, whatever roles and procedures schools
13 have, when we establish that as a board, we got to
14 empower the team to do it. If the team's not doing
15 the intent, then that's -- then we need to have a
16 different conversation. But that's why you hire
17 principals and lead teachers and campus folks is to
18 implement the priorities of this board. And that's
19 why it's really important. And we're talking about
20 having workshops to say, hey, I think we need to talk
21 about this. I don't know what it is. I always like
22 to say -- and I -- you know, I'm not an expert in
23 anything, but I've learned -- I've worked a lot of
24 boards before. But I think a perfect example is
25 y'all are building a new school. I almost pointed

1 that way, but it's over there. You guys are hiding
2 from me today. We're building a new school. Nicole
3 doesn't need to tell you how many pieces of
4 two-by-fours they ordered and how many screws they're
5 sticking in the wall today and how many gallons of
6 paint are going on the wall. But I think you all
7 should know how many stories it is, how many
8 classrooms there's going to be, where's the office,
9 what's it going to look like? Like, we've got to
10 keep you informed. We're building a school. These
11 are the big decisions. These are the big priorities.
12 These are the things that are happening. When you
13 get into the weeds of building a school, we don't
14 need to know how many tiles they're laying on the
15 floor. That's too far. That's too far. So
16 sometimes it's hard for boards to understand that
17 because they want to make all the decisions about the
18 number of tiles they're putting on the floor versus
19 the overall way we're going to support students in a
20 building. So it's work. We're never always going to
21 have it right. That's why we meet; that's why we
22 collaborate. I want to be a part of this. I can't
23 make every meeting, but I try to get involved as much
24 as I can. I think we have more meetings here
25 tomorrow --

1 SUPT. WALSH: Yeah.

2 SECT. OLIVA: -- and try to get to schools. But
3 we have to do what's right for students. I know just
4 me personally, I've spent a lot of time in the last
5 two years in F districts and F schools and it's sad.
6 It's sad and we're fixing it. We're going to be
7 announcing some schools that went from an F to a B or
8 a D to an A this past school year because of our
9 focus our persistency and our diligence to get it
10 right. So we can get there. So --

11 MR. POWELL: Yeah. No, I couldn't agree more.
12 I think we just want to make sure we have a clear
13 sense of direction and our voices heard. I think
14 we've gotten caught up in the last two meetings on
15 what we can can't do and it just made us all -- I'll
16 speak for myself it's made us all a little weary
17 about next steps moving forward because we're told we
18 can't do that. Okay, well, we thought we could do
19 this. And yeah, I couldn't agree more what you said
20 about the law. You have the intent, the message and
21 what it actually means. And I won't into a whole
22 legal lawyer stuff, so I'm glad with those. I think
23 that's part of the issues we've had this past summer.
24 It's like, okay, well, what are we doing here then?
25 But -- so I appreciate you being here, listening to

1 us, and we would love to keep collaborating with you.
2 It means a lot to us.

3 SECT. OLIVA: And if something's coming up let
4 us know; right? Like, you don't need to get --
5 you're volunteer members on this board, the last
6 thing you should be doing is losing sleep or saying
7 the last place I want to go to tonight is this board
8 meeting because it's awkward. Like, if that's
9 happening we got a problem. Let's just be honest.
10 And this should be a place where there's hard work,
11 it's rewarding work, but it's appreciated and
12 deserving work. And you talk about what can be
13 decided, what can be decided. I'm up for discussion
14 on anything. I don't hide from anything; right? We
15 may not be able to take action on everything, but if
16 the board decides they want to have a discussion, I
17 think that's great. I do feel -- I still feel
18 strongly that when you're in this format, it's a
19 business meeting. And when you come to this meeting
20 in this dais and you call a meeting to order, you
21 should stick to the agenda. Now, there are times
22 that an emergency item may have to be added because
23 you notice an agenda to the public five days in
24 advance, whatever it is, you need to stick to that
25 agenda. That's only fair to the public. If you

1 start adding things that are on the agenda, then it's
2 not fair because some people may want to bring in
3 public comment on that. So I feel strongly about
4 creating a space where you can have workshops
5 together to determine what goes on the agenda and
6 have that conversation. And I think that's where
7 things get wonky because people are wanting this to
8 be a business meeting, but other people are wanting
9 it to be a workshop and we're trying to make the same
10 meeting serve two purposes. Let's bifurcate that;
11 right? Let's just be clear. What you're bringing up
12 today, that's a great workshop item, but today we're
13 sticking, Chair, to the agenda; right? Like, that's
14 where the chair needs to come in and make sure they
15 stick to the agenda because that's what the public is
16 expecting you to discuss. But as far as topics,
17 questions, and concerns, everything's on the table.

18 Nicole, I don't want to speak for you --

19 SUPT. WALSH: Oh, absolutely.

20 SECT. OLIVA: -- but if we can't answer it, then
21 we got to ask why we're doing it.

22 SUPT. WALSH: That's right. Absolutely.

23 SECT. OLIVA: And so -- but you need a space to
24 ask those questions. Sometimes a business meeting's
25 not that space.

1 I'm taking away too much time.

2 MS. SMITH: I think you perfectly identified the
3 gap in that, you know, we might get the board agenda
4 two days before the board meeting, and by then it's
5 there's not really an opportunity -- it's already
6 been approved by ADE. You can't add or take away
7 from it or anything like that yet. So I do think
8 your plan is going to help.

9 SECT. OLIVA: Well, and to Nicole's defense,
10 some of that could be our agency's fault. I -- we're
11 not perfect. Sometimes things get sent to us and
12 it's like a black hole and it gets added to a list.
13 So if you're not getting meeting notices until like
14 two days from then, that's not appropriate either.
15 And we -- like, I need to know that. And we need to
16 make sure our folks -- and I think that's why we have
17 two new faces here that are going to make sure that
18 doesn't happen because this is that important to us
19 that we're literally assigning staff and making this
20 a primary function of our job to make sure that's not
21 happening because we know it is. And I'm defending
22 Nicole because she'll send us stuff and it may not be
23 getting to where it needed to be, which is why we
24 have two brand-new faces because that's how important
25 this is.

1 SUPT. WALSH: And I will speak to -- and I don't
2 know Aly or Caitlynn that well. I've just met that
3 this last week. But from so far, from all the things
4 that we've experienced in the meetings that we've had
5 and the conversations we've had, I do have full and
6 complete confidence that we're going to have a great
7 working relationship. They are very personal people.
8 They -- like we said, we're going to give you their
9 phone numbers and their email addresses. And please
10 contact them. CC me in it so we can have a
11 conversation, and I can get back with you. I don't
12 want this to be a secret, and I do -- I want to go
13 ahead and just say, truly it has been two years of
14 fighting fires. And I think that's been a lot of it
15 too. And I'm hoping that this start of this new
16 school year, it feels different this year. We have
17 fixed all the big gaping giant black holes and put
18 policies in place. Doesn't mean they're perfect or
19 they're right or the work is done. But I think now
20 we're able to kind of step forward and start really
21 honing in on that stuff and get some more streamlined
22 processes in place that allow you guys to be more
23 heavily involved. And I think that's important.

24 CHAIR McALLISTER: Could we speak to executive
25 session?

1 MS. SMITH: Okay. I have four opportunities for
2 four sets of ears here.

3 SECT. OLIVA: Well, hold on.

4 SUPT. WALSH: I know what you're going to say.

5 MS. SMITH: What about that empty parent rep
6 over there?

7 SECT. OLIVA: Well, I --

8 MS. SMITH: That's one of those that may have
9 fallen in the black hole.

10 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. Well, I know that's not
11 under our agency's purview, so there is a boards and
12 commissions. I know some folks have applied
13 previously, but if they weren't appointed, then we
14 need more applications.

15 CHAIR McALLISTER: Okay.

16 SECT. OLIVA: So I need your help with that.

17 MS. SMITH: So how do we help you with that?

18 SECT. OLIVA: Give us names to submit, have them
19 directly apply, like we can send you the link.

20 MS. SMITH: Do we post that to open it up to --

21 SECT. OLIVA: I think we could.

22 MS. SMITH: -- all the parents?

23 SUPT. WALSH: I can add it to ParentSquared.
24 Sure.

25 SECT. OLIVA: I think we can. I don't want to

1 sound like I'm the expert on the board and
2 commissions, but I believe they have a website where
3 anybody can go in and apply to be on a certain board
4 or commission.

5 MS. SMITH: You're right. It's a very
6 cumbersome application process --

7 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah.

8 MS. SMITH: -- but you absolutely can. So I
9 think if we could send out a direct link

10 SECT OLIVA: We need to share it. Yeah. We
11 need help. We need names. So let's get it filled.
12 We need names.

13 SUPT. WALSH: I will have that posted to
14 ParentSquared.

15 SECT. OLIVA: And maybe go into a newsletter.
16 Like literally, let's put the link in the newsletter
17 and we want to -- it's important we have to get this
18 right.

19 SUPT. WALSH: Okay, absolutely. I can make that
20 happen.

21 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah. And I'll just add, I
22 think that's where again, Aly will be able to help
23 communicate, you know, each month when she comes to
24 the meeting, like, that things are maybe not within
25 our control or purview, but she is going to be a

1 constant repetitive reminder to those who are making
2 those decisions, like, this is something that's still
3 needed and can update you all that, you know, yes,
4 we've submitted. Some things weren't decided, but
5 let's try again. So she can also help keep you all
6 updated on that.

7 SUPT. WALSH: Okay.

8 MR. POWELL: I'll say one last thing. No, I'm
9 honored to be on this board. Building this new
10 school is going to be such an example, not only in
11 the state, but across the country. Now look, I just
12 want to make sure we, as a board, we want to make
13 sure we don't have to revisit this issue 20 years, 30
14 years, 40 years from now when we have to read in the
15 news that, you know, grades fell or they have to
16 build a new building or something like that. So I
17 think we're all committed to not only the short term,
18 but long-term success that the next -- you talk about
19 generations. We want the next six generations to be
20 able to go to this school.

21 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. I think we're on the
22 beginning of a new legacy. And it's probably the
23 most exciting time for this school, probably in the
24 last 100 years.

25 SUPT. WALSH: I keep using the word legacy.

1 This is a legacy project. And our school as a whole
2 is a legacy project. Everything we do, we have to be
3 thinking about the next generation and who comes
4 next. And our pre-Kers that are just turning three
5 and are entering our school yesterday, on the day
6 after their third birthday, are going to be adults
7 and who are they going to be and what is their career
8 path going to look like. And so everything we do
9 needs to have that thought process in mind of what is
10 the end goal. And so everything you do is a legacy.

11 SECT. OLIVA: So one last thing, I'll just kind
12 of kick the hornet's nest because I think there was
13 questions at a meeting about what's appropriately --
14 what's appropriately discussed in executive session
15 and what's not. So I don't know, is that still a
16 wound that needs to be healed or am I opening --

17 CHAIR McALLISTER: We'd like to hear from you.

18 SECT. OLIVA: Am I kicking a hardest next that I
19 should have just left alone or --

20 CHAIR McALLISTER: No.

21 SECT. OLIVA: Everybody's smiling.

22 So I think, Courtney, this is where I put you on
23 the spot.

24 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah, thanks.

25 SECT. OLIVA: I'm going to let Courtney answer

1 that.

2 CHAIR McALLISTER: We knew what was supposed to
3 be done, but we were just --

4 SECT. OLIVA: So I just want to make sure I
5 understand because I think the question, and I don't
6 want to speak out of line, was what could be
7 discussed in executive session that stays in
8 executive session or what can be shared in the
9 public? I'm not sure if I understand what the issue
10 is.

11 CHAIR McALLISTER: We were talking about
12 executive session as it pertains to the
13 superintendent's evaluation. And we were told that
14 we could not go into executive session to evaluate
15 the superintendent and then they were -- we would
16 have told that if we did go into executive session
17 that we would receive misdemeanors for an action that
18 is -- that should be in executive session. I
19 wouldn't want somebody evaluating me in front of the
20 whole world. That's like not cool.

21 SECT. OLIVA: Do you want to take a stab at
22 that?

23 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah. So I may rely on
24 Caitlynn a little bit too, and that's where it is
25 difficult because again, you all are in the law

1 referred to as, like, a board, but you are a state
2 agency. And so we ask for your evaluation of the
3 superintendent, but under the law it says you can
4 only go into executive session to discuss the
5 continued hiring or firing, I think, or discipline of
6 the superintendent. And so an evaluation is not
7 typically considered one of those items. I will tell
8 you that Caitlynn and the rest of our legal staff,
9 you know, they represent you all and they're going to
10 provide you the best guidance that they can. We also
11 consult with the Attorney General's office because if
12 there was any type of lawsuit or alleged criminal
13 conduct, you know, the Attorney General's office
14 would end up representing you. And so a lot of the
15 times our legal staff will consult with them for
16 their advice and then we end up just being the one to
17 convey that. But in that situation, it's one of
18 those where it's difficult because the legal team is
19 trying to advise you in what the law says. And
20 legally it does say that you can only go into
21 executive session, again, to discuss the continued
22 employment -- do you remember the -- do you have the
23 exact language pulled up? But I didn't, sorry, I
24 don't have it pulled up.

25 SECT. OLIVA: I was wondering if there's

1 lawsuits or something like that?

2 SUPT. WALSH: It's hire, fire --

3 CHAIR McALLISTER: Yeah.

4 MS. SALAS-FORD: Was it hire --

5 SUPT. WALSH: It's hire, fire, promotion
6 demotion.

7 MS. SALAS-FORD: Thank you. Hire, fire,
8 promotion, demotion. And so from a legal standpoint,
9 an evaluation is not considered part of that.
10 Something that we discussed after the fact was that
11 maybe instead of you all discussing it as a board,
12 maybe I can meet with you all individually. Because
13 you -- because again, if it's not an executive
14 session, you all can't be discussing something
15 without a public meeting. So maybe it would be
16 better if I met with you all individually and got
17 that kind of feedback. That was a little bit of a
18 bumpy process where we were learning as well and
19 working with new kind of advice from legal counsel.
20 But we will figure it out going forward. If you have
21 any questions like that again in the future, Caitlynn
22 is going to be your go-to. If Caitlynn doesn't know,
23 she's going to consult with our chief counsel and
24 with me. I'm chief of staff, but I was chief
25 counsel, so I know a little bit about the law and

1 we'll -- we'll help walk you through that and we will
2 make sure that we are staying more involved with you
3 and that we're here walking you through that and
4 explaining the reasons why and maybe not just giving
5 statements that -- that can come across a little
6 harshly. So --

7 SECT. OLIVA: Yeah. And -- and I want to make
8 sure you know that we want your feedback; right?

9 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yes, absolutely.

10 SECT. OLIVA: Like, this isn't done in an
11 isolation. Nicole wants your feedback this is how we
12 get better. We -- we want to get better and I don't
13 know -- I wasn't at the meeting, but it may not have
14 been conveyed as well as the intent, which is why we
15 wanted to clarify that.

16 MS. SALAS-FORD: Lawyers sometimes are just
17 difficult.

18 MR. POWELL: No, that's very helpful, because I
19 mean, that's really all we want, is we know,
20 especially Arkansas state law, there's a lot of gray
21 areas.

22 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yes.

23 MR. POWELL: And I think we really appreciate
24 that. Yeah, I think we want somebody to come tell us
25 right before or at a meeting, like, misdemeanor, or

1 like --

2 MS. SALAS-FORD: Yeah.

3 MR. POWELL: Okay, well, I don't know if I want
4 to be on the board anymore.

5 SECT. OLIVA: I've never heard of that
6 happening, but --

7 MS. SALAS-FORD: Right. It is what the law
8 says, but there's easier, better ways to convey that.

9 MS. SMITH: So just for clarity's sake, since we
10 are not a board who hires, fires, promotes or demotes
11 anyone --

12 SECT. OLIVA: Well, you can make a
13 recommendation.

14 MS. SMITH: -- unless we can make a
15 recommendation to you, Mr. Secretary, to fire, hire
16 or demote, then there's no other reason, there's no
17 other causation for us to go to executive? So if we
18 are brought with, there was an incident last year, a
19 personnel issue, hit the news, all the things,
20 there's no reason for the board to go to executive
21 session to discuss that person's performance or
22 anything?

23 MS. SALAS-FORD: Unfortunately, no, under the
24 law that you're not permitted to do that.

25 MS. SMITH: Okay. So --

1 SECT. OLIVA: But if you want to change the law,
2 y'all can come together and write a list. Like I
3 said, it's not perfect; right? Like, you -- that's
4 -- this is why I said you may want to make some
5 legislative priorities. Because if you feel like
6 there needs to be a separate thing that you're
7 allowed to provide evaluations, write that
8 recommendation. Like, if we don't know it's an
9 issue, we don't know to ask, and that helps us.
10 Like, I think that's just something you need to ask
11 if that's what you want to do.

12 CHAIR McALLISTER: I think that the argument was
13 that how would we know if we wanted to promote,
14 demote or fire someone if we couldn't freely evaluate
15 them? That's what the --

16 MS. SALAS-FORD: Right.

17 CHAIR McALLISTER: That's what the --

18 SECT. OLIVA: Well, I think -- yeah. I think
19 that's easier if -- they call it one of the seven
20 deadly sins. Like, hopefully that never happens,
21 Nicole. But if one of those things happen, it makes
22 it really easy to come together for a meeting to say
23 somebody was arrested for such and such, such, such.
24 As a board, we want to recommend termination. If
25 it's performance-based, I think that's why Courtney's

1 saying let's meet because we want to get better;
2 right? Like, the role of teaching and learning is to
3 improve outcomes. If somebody feels like there's
4 some performance opportunities, then we need to know
5 about it to get better. But then if we're seeing as
6 an agency, hey, we're not meeting our performance
7 goals, then we may be conveying that to the board and
8 saying, we have some concerns we think you should
9 meet. And we've done that with other boards.

10 SUPT. WALSH: Anything else?

11 SECT. OLIVA: I don't want to -- I feel like
12 that was doom and gloom. I want to end on a high
13 note. Like --

14 CHAIR McALLISTER: No that's not doom and gloom.

15 SECT. OLIVA: Okay. Well it just seems so
16 serious; right? Like, this should be a bright spot.
17 And I just want to go back and say I really do
18 appreciate everybody in this room. Everybody here
19 is making us better. I know we're not perfect, but I
20 know deep in my heart and deep in everybody's heart
21 around this table and in this auditorium, we're all
22 here because we care and we all have ideas on how we
23 can improve. So let's work together. We cannot work
24 against each other. We have to be a united front.
25 We may disagree with how we get there but at the end

1 of the day I know what we're doing every day on this
2 campus is what's better for students. I know we're
3 excited about our new faces at our agency here to
4 support you. And I know that this school year -- I
5 mean, last school year was amazing, but I'm telling
6 everybody, 26-27 is the school year that Netflix is
7 going to make a movie about in the State of Arkansas
8 because it's going to be incredible. And y'all are
9 going to have a big part of that story. So thank
10 you. Way over my time. I'm going to let you all go.
11 We got to get to our next spot.

12 SUPT. WALSH: Bye, everybody, thank you so much
13 for coming.

14 SECT. OLIVA: Courtney's my driver.

15 CHAIR McALLISTER: I want to thank Secretary
16 Oliva --

17 SECT. OLIVA: Thank you, all.

18 CHAIR McALLISTER: -- for his presence today.

19 SUPT. WALSH: Thank you.

20 (The action agenda concluded)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

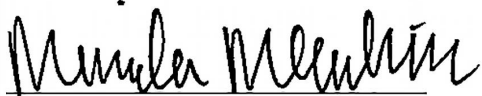
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COUNTY OF PULASKI)

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MIRANDA MCENTIRE, CCR

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