

The following, in italics, is a fact-based, sourced response from Gary Newton, a Little Rock School District resident and president and CEO of Arkansas Learns, to the Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee's February 11, 2016 Memorandum to the State Board of Education opposing "Expansion of Charter Schools within LRSD Boundary."

TO: The State Board of Education

FROM: The Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee

DATE: February 11, 2016

RE: Statement on Expansion of Charter Schools within LRSD Boundary

May of last year, Commissioner Key emailed the Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee (LRSD CAC) a memo that outlined our committee's responsibilities. In that memo he noted that one of our functions is "to aid the LRSD and ADE leadership in making community-based decisions with promise to move LRSD in a positive direction in terms of academic achievement." Our work this academic year has truly focused on achieving this goal, so as a committee anytime we are aware of actions or decisions that might keep us from reaching this goal, our advisory role inclines us to consider whether we should speak out about the action or decision. The upcoming charter school expansion decision and the expansion of Teach for America (TFA) into the District have both compelled us to share our thoughts regarding these decisions.

The Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee (LRSD CAC) was created by language in a motion passed by the State Board of Education on January 28, 2015, which empowered the Commissioner of Education to assume sole governing authority of the Little Rock School District. The motion stated: "...that a formal body of parents, students, community and business leaders, reflective of the community and philanthropic organizations serve as a Civic Advisory Committee to aid in improving the performance in all schools."

http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/SBE_Minutes_2015/SBE_Minutes_January_28_2015.pdf

The previous Commissioner of Education delegated his authority to appoint the LRSD CAC to Little Rock legislators, who appointed representatives from each of the seven former Little Rock School Board zones from a pool of over 80 candidates.

A removed Little Rock School Board member, Joy Springer, was appointed to represent her former board Zone 1 and is now suing the State Board of Education, Commissioner of Education and Superintendent of the Little Rock School District in federal court to stop all new schools, traditional and charter, in the Little Rock School District and restore the removed school board.

Legislators also appointed two representatives of philanthropic organizations. The previous superintendent appointed two students and two teachers from each of the six Academic Distress schools.

After being named superintendent, Baker Kurrus appointed Greg Adams, the removed member of the Little Rock School Board Zone 4, to serve as co-chairman.

It is not apparent which member(s) of the 34-member committee, if any, represent parents and/or business leaders, nor how the committee is reflective of the community. The only growing cultural demographics in the Little Rock School District are Hispanic and Other, and it doesn't appear as though either of those demographics is represented on the committee.

<http://www.lrsd.org/?q=content/lrsd-civic-advisory-committee>

During the January meeting of the LRSD CAC, the co-chairs of the committee asked if there was an interest in weighing in on the decisions regarding charter school expansion. The committee overwhelmingly responded that yes, the committee should make a statement. During this discussion, it was also noted and agreed upon that we needed to speak to the expansion of TFA in the LRSD. After this meeting, we received a total of eight written responses (seven from our committee members and one from someone from outside of our committee) regarding charter school expansion and TFA. All eight respondents discussed the expansion of charter schools, and three of the eight spoke specifically about TFA.

The decision to bring Teach for America (TFA) to Little Rock was already made and publicly announced by the Governor, Commissioner of Education and Superintendent of the Little Rock School District on January 27, 2016. By its own admission, only three of 34 members “spoke specifically about TFA,” and yet their position in opposition is represented as that of the committee’s.

The committee references one response, which came from someone “outside of our committee,” but it is not apparent how that “outside” response was generated, nor if the

committee sought input from the general public.

The majority of the respondents, seven of the eight, expressed that they are against the expansion of charter schools. Several factors were stated for their reasons for being against the expansion, including:

Seven of eight respondents (six of seven if excluding the one outside the committee), though unnamed, do not reflect a majority of the 34-member committee, but simply a majority of those responding.

- concerns about how the expansion would not allow for equitable educational opportunities for all students in the city of Little Rock;
- concerns regarding the fiscal effects of the expansion on the district; [L]
- how charter schools are not living up to the original intent in the state of Arkansas to [L] provide innovative education to boost the achievement of low achieving students; and [SEP]

According to the Arkansas Quality Charter Schools Act of 2013:

“6-23-102. Legislative intent.

“It is the intent of the General Assembly, by this chapter, to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and community members to establish and maintain public schools that operate independently from the existing structure of local school districts as a method to accomplish the following:

“(1) Improve student learning;

“(2) Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as low-achieving;

“(3) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;

“(4) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;

“(5) Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and

“(6) Hold the schools established under this chapter accountable for meeting

measurable student achievement standards.”

http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Charter_and_Home_School/Charter_School-Division_of_Learning_Services/Arkansas_Quality_Charter_Schools_Act_of_2013.pdf

- concerns about the how charter schools are leading to the segregation of student ^[L]_[SEP]populations in the LRSD, particularly as it relates to students with disabilities, students in poverty, and limited English proficient students.

The Arkansas Department of Education determined that the proposed expansion of eStem Public Charter Schools and LISA Academy would have no segregative impact on LRSD, which has been declared unitary by the federal court in regard to desegregation.

These concerns relate to data on the current status of education in Little Rock. This data, located on the ADE website, was gathered and organized for our committee by Mr. Fredrick Dickins, one of our LRSD CAC Teacher Representatives. The facts and data he presented are as follows:

Facts:

1. The State Board of Education has been the sole governing body for all public schools south of the Arkansas River in Pulaski County since 2014.

The Commissioner of Education, not the State Board of Education, is the sole governing authority for both the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School Districts. Open-enrollment public charters are autonomous, operating under a charter (contract) with the State.

- a. The State Board took over Pulaski County Special School District based on finances

Pulaski County Special School District was taken over by the State for Fiscal Distress.

- b. The State Board took over Little Rock School District based on academics, with additional concern over future finances.

Little Rock School District was taken over by the State for Academic Distress.

2. Between the 2011 and 2015 there have only been five occasions in which a district, to include charter schools, has achieved annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in math, literacy, and graduation on the ESEA Report Cards.

The authors use selective, anachronistic, and no longer relevant measures for assessing and comparing the academic performance of eStem, LISA Academy and Little Rock School District schools.

- a. 2014-15- Little Rock School District and Little Rock Preparatory Academy
- b. 2013-14 ESTEM Charter
- c. 2011-12 ESTEM High and Elementary
- d. Only Little Rock Prep (2014-15) and ESTEM (2013-14, 2011-12) were actually considered achieving schools. Little Rock, as district, met all AMOs in math, literacy, and graduation but is still considered “needs improvement” based on distressed schools. [SEP]

3. The proposed expansion of Quest, ESTEM, and Lisa totals 3000 students that would come largely from the Little Rock School District boundaries. Based on the 2015-16 Arkansas School Finance Manual this equates to the following funds:

Quest, which to this point had not been mentioned by the authors, is not seeking expansion.

Fiscal Year	Matrix Cost per Student	Cost per 3000 students
FY 15	\$6,521	\$19,563,000
FY 16	\$6,584	\$19,752,000
FY 17	\$6,646	\$19,938,000

The authors provide no basis for asserting that eStem and LISA’s proposed enrollment increase would come entirely from students already attending Little Rock School District schools. Further, the authors fail to mention that the district receives 100% of property taxes dedicated to public education whether it has one student or 100,000.

The assessed valuation of the Little Rock School District is \$3,453,638,341, over \$700,000,000 more than second in Arkansas Pulaski County Special School District and double that of fourth place Bentonville Public Schools. It has the State’s 17th highest per-pupil spend (\$15,514) and sixth highest millage (46.4). By the end of 2018, the district will have received over \$1,000,000,000 in State desegregation funding. It was recently reported by the superintendent that the district has been spending eight of twelve capital mills on operations instead of facilities and infrastructure.

Since 1978, the district has built one school west of I-430 – Don Roberts Elementary (2010), which immediately became the largest elementary school in the district. It now proposes to open in 2016 one grade of what will become the largest middle school in the district. Demand has long existed for the district to grow its enrollment by providing public schools proximate to its population, which would more than make up for any present or future loss of previously enrolled LRSD students to open-enrollment public charter schools.

4. The LRSD has purchased the Leisure Arts property and will be operating a 6th grade school, with the intent to expand it to a middle school, by next year. The district plans to build a new Southwest High School and is currently shopping for architects, but there is no planned completion date.
5. The following table depicts the 2015/16 Enrollment Counts for the expanding charters and 5 year average of student status and racial makeup data. All data was taken from the



Statewide Information System or SIS (Quest only has one year of available data on the Statewide Information System).

District	2015/16 Enrollment	SPED% (5 Year	LEP% (5 Year	Foster (5 Year	Poverty Rate(Average of all available	Homeless (4 Year Average)
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		Average)	Average)	Average)	ESEA reports since 2011-12)	
Estem	1,462	6.02%	1.49%	.17%	31.7%	0.06%
Lisa	1,525	4.71%	1.25%	.03%	36.6%	0.45%
LRSD	23,164	12.57%	11.07%	1.14%	71.0%	1.58%
Quest	347	13.60%	0%	0%	80.0%	0.26%

District	2015/16 Enrollment	Black (5 Year Average)	White (5 Year Average)	Hispanic (5 Year Average)
Estem	1,462	46.3%	41.4%	5.6%
Lisa	1,525	39.4%	30.2%	11.1%
LRSD	23,164	66.1%	18.6%	11.6%
Quest	347	51.98%	37.64%	5.19%

Though Quest is irrelevant in this discussion, none of the data submitted for Quest is accurate.

The following are the most current data (2014-15) on the referenced schools' demographics. Source: <http://www.officeforeducationpolicy.org/arkansas-schools-data-demographics/>

District/ Charter	2014-15 Enrollment	SPED % (State Average 11%)	LEP % (State Average 8%)	Homeless % (State Average 2%)	FRL % (State Average 61%)
eStem	1,462	8%	2%	0%	32%
LISA	797	5%	2%	0%	38%

Academy					
LRSD	23,363	11%	11%	1%	75%

District/ Charter	2014-15 Enrollment	Black	White	Hispanic	Other
eStem	1,462	46%	41%	6%	7%
LISA Academy	797	42%	27%	13%	19%
LRSD	23,363	66%	18%	13%	4%
City of Little Rock	197,706	42%	47%	7%	4%

NOTE: You can access all of the data he used by clicking on the following links: Race and status spreadsheets:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BzVoGHwi3XoedlJIYWtELVJFNGs&usp=sharing>

District and School ESEA Reports:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BzVoGHwi3XoeWHBuSGRkUnRRMnc&usp=sharing>

Based on the above data, Mr. Dickins requested the following questions for consideration by the State Board of Education that also relate to the prior concerns listed regarding equity, fiscal responsibility, and the re-segregation of our schools:

1. Knowing the State Board of Education is the sole governing body for public education in Pulaski County, minus the North Little Rock School District, and that there are only three instances of a charter schools in the Little Rock metro achieving all the standards on the ESEA reports since 2011, how will such an expansion improve education for students in the Little Rock School, the Little Rock School District, and Pulaski County as a whole?

Once again, the Commissioner of Education, not the State Board of Education, is the sole governing authority of the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School Districts.

Once again, the authors use selective, anachronistic, and no longer relevant accountability measures for assessing and comparing the academic performance of eStem, LISA Academy and Little Rock School District schools.

On the most recent A-F grades for schools, all three eStem schools received an A or B:

eStem Elementary – A (288 of 300)

eStem High – A (287 of 300)

eStem Middle – B (240 of 300).

LISA Academy High received a B (256 of 300). LISA Academy Middle received a C (221 of 300), but that was still 16 points higher than the highest performing middle school in the Little Rock School District – Pulaski Heights Middle – D (205 of 300).

Ten Little Rock School District schools, of 42 graded, received an A or B:

Forest Park Elementary – A (300 of 300)

Roberts Elementary – A (289 of 300)

Terry Elementary – A (288 of 300)

Carver Elementary – A (277 of 300)

Jefferson Elementary – B (266 of 300)

Parkview High – B (268 of 300)

Williams Elementary – B (265 of 300)

Central High – B (255 of 300)

Gibbs Elementary – (253 of 300)

Brady Elementary – B (240 of 300)

Otherwise, LRSD received 10 Cs, 14 Ds and 8 Fs.

2. Currently Lisa Academy and Estem are larger than 179 of the districts in the State of Arkansas and tend to enroll the most balanced racial mixture, the smallest ratio of LEP, SPED, foster, students in poverty, and students experiencing homelessness to general population students in Little Rock. Knowing that the most successful schools tend to have balanced diversity, how will the Board mitigate the increased ratio of SPED, LEP, and students of poverty in the LRSD that will likely occur should the expansion take place?

(NOTE: This question assumes that the charter schools will continue to maintain their comparatively low SPED, LEP, poverty, homeless rates as compared to the LRSD.)

LISA Academy is the 154th largest system of 257 districts and charters in Arkansas.

eStem is the 83rd largest. As blind, open-enrollment charter schools of choice, neither eStem nor LISA may materially impact their respective demographics without removal of their enrollment caps.

A majority minority school, eStem's cultural demographics (41% White, 46% Black, 6% Hispanic, 7% Other) more closely match the City of Little Rock's demographics (47% White, 42% Black, 7% Hispanic, 4% Other) than any public school, traditional or charter, in the footprint.

LISA Academy, also a majority minority school (27% White, 42% Black, 13% Hispanic, 19% Other), is one of the most culturally diverse public schools, traditional or charter, in the LRSD footprint.

<http://www.officeforeducationpolicy.org/arkansas-schools-data-demographics/>

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/05/0541000.html>

The Little Rock School District, through preferential enrollment and gerrymandered attendance zoning, has created and perpetuated demographic inequity among its schools, over half of which are 70% or more one race. Of those, six are 90% or more one race.

For example, Central High School, which has partial preferential enrollment and is 3/4 over capacity, has a gerrymandered attendance zone which admits residents of the Heights, Hillcrest, Cammack Village, and everything west of there and north of Cantrell, even though Hall, which is 1/3 under capacity, is closer. As a result, Central's demographics are 50% FRL, 29% White, 4% Hispanic, 57% Black, and 9% Other, while Hall's are 85% FRL, 5% White, 71% Black, and 1% Other.

<http://www.lrsd.org/sites/default/files/oldfiles/zones/2001hi.pdf>

Parkview High School, a preferential enrollment magnet, is 59% FRL, 25% White, 15%

Hispanic, 55% Black, and 5% Other.

Forest Heights STEM, a preferential enrollment K-8 school, is 66% FRL, 31% White, 8% Hispanic, 57% Black, and 4% Other.

Williams Elementary, a preferential enrollment magnet, is 55% FRL, 25% White, 5% Hispanic, 57% Black, and 13% Other.

3. Knowing that the district is planning to build new, and improve existing, facilities how do you anticipate the expansion of new charter schools will affect the district's fiscal situation?

Only one new LRSD school, the west Little Rock Middle School, is scheduled to open (sixth grade) next year. Because of long-standing, overwhelming demand, it is anticipated that the school will be at capacity upon opening.

Neither eStem nor LISA Academy oppose the unrestricted expansion of the Little Rock School District to serve all of its resident students.

4. As the sole governing body of public education in Pulaski County, minus the North Little Rock School District, what are the Board's short term and long term plans for improving public education in Pulaski County?

Once again, the Commissioner of Education, not the State Board of Education, is the sole governing authority of both the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School District.

[REDACTED]

5. What are the Board's plans for the Little Rock School District?

Once again, the Commissioner of Education, not the State Board of Education, is the sole governing authority of the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School Districts. [REDACTED]

In addition to these concerns and questions posed by our committee, we did have one respondent who did not speak against the expansion. The one respondent noted the primary reason for not speaking against it was the need for alternatives in Little Rock due to the takeover of the LRSD and lack of communication regarding the future of LRSD. The respondent noted concerns about

families choosing to leave the city of Little Rock if alternatives are not provided.

Of the eight respondents, three also noted their thoughts about TFA. All three expressed concerns about the expansion of TFA into the Little Rock School District. These concerns centered on the need for stability of teachers for students with high needs rather than high teacher turnover rates that can occur with TFA.

The issue is moot, as the Governor, Commissioner of Education and Superintendent of the Little Rock School District already made the decision to accept \$3,000,000 in private donations to bring Teach for America (TFA) to the Little Rock School District.

In summary, the general consensus among our committee, both vocally during our meeting in January and within the majority of the written responses, is that we are against the expansion of charter schools and Teach for America within the Little Rock School District. One of our respondents said it best: “We need the opportunity to demonstrate to others that LRSD does have the right staff that can bring it to the level of success many are waiting to see.” In order to do so, our district and community needs the opportunity to continue its work towards improving the district. As decisions are made, we encourage you to truly consider the question posed above by Mr. Dickins: “How will these expansions improve education for the students in the Little Rock School District and Pulaski County as a whole?” If at any time during the decision making process you realize that these expansions are detrimental to the current work of the district and to the district’s future, we then respectfully ask that you stop the expansions from occurring.

Seven of eight respondents (six of seven if excluding the non-member) of the 34-member LRSD Civic Advisory Committee do not constitute a consensus.

The Little Rock School District, eStem Public Charter Schools, LISA Academy, the other six open-enrollment public charter schools in the LRSD footprint, and inter-district school choice offer a portfolio of excellent education options for LRSD resident students and families. Prohibiting one or more from expanding to meet demonstrated demand and obstructing the ability to employ qualified teachers of choice denies excellence, adequacy and equity to all.