MAKING THE CONNECTIONS THAT COUNT

A REPORT

TO THE ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

from the

LITTLE ROCK AREA PUBLIC EDUCATION

STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

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July 27, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The Little Rock Area Public Education Stakeholders Group prepared this report for the Arkansas State Board of Education. The Stakeholders are a volunteer committee of seven Pulaski County citizens who were recommended by leaders in the community and jointly appointed by the Chair of the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education.

Report Purpose, Scope, and Process

This report fulfills a charge, issued by the State Board of Education, that focuses on the public schools located south of the Arkansas River in Pulaski County.

The Board's charge encompasses open-enrollment public charter schools and traditional public schools located within the borders of the Little Rock School District (LRSD) and the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD). The primary thrust of the charge is to explore ways in which the traditional schools and charters can collaborate with one another to promote student achievement and fiscal efficiency in the public education system south of the river.

We Stakeholders initially met twice a month, and later monthly, in public meetings that began on June 6, 2016 and continued for a year. Our work culminates with formally presenting this report to the State Board at its August 10, 2017 meeting. Throughout our tenure, we met in the auditorium of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), where each meeting was streamed in real time and is archived on ADE's website, *www.arkansased.gov*.

Over the months, we listened to many speakers, studied their presentations, writings, and charts, asked numerous questions, and discussed answers. We're very grateful to those who shared their expertise, views, data, and suggestions with us during one or more of our meetings. Their names and affiliations are listed in *Appendix A*.

Additionally, to deepen our understanding about a host of school matters, we read widely on own initiative or at the suggestion of the speakers we heard. Our scrutiny included: local, state, and national reports about various school research, with an emphasis on collaboration between charters and traditional schools; data spreadsheets and tabulations; federal and state education laws and regulations; the written minutes and many hours of video recordings of the State Board's meetings; reports from and about the local schools and school districts; local newspaper articles; and records of the Pulaski County school desegregation case.

We also learned a great deal from one another. The scope of members' individual backgrounds and expertise includes law; business; urban planning; strategic planning; coalition building; elementary, secondary, adult, and special education; non-profit and volunteer management; community organization; challenges facing English language learners and immigrant communities; and programming for children receiving special education services.

We are deeply grateful to those who dutifully assisted us in our work, especially Ms. Deborah Coffman, Chief of Staff at ADE; Dr. Denise Airola, Director of the Office of Innovation in Education at the University of Arkansas; and Dr. Jay Barth, a member of the State Board of

Education who served as our liaison with the Board. We extend special thanks to Ms. Lynn Bell, who graciously formatted the overall structure of our report.

We sincerely hope the Board finds our explorations, reasoning, and recommendations useful, and that the broader community may find our observations and suggestions beneficial to the future of public education in the Little Rock area.

Report Organization

The remainder of this Introduction is devoted to a Background section that sets the stage for the work we undertook in carrying out our charge. The report then divides into three sections, identified below, and ends with a brief Conclusion followed by Appendices A, B, and C.

Part I – Collaboration focuses on cooperative efforts between open-enrollment public charter schools and traditional public schools, offering an array of ideas for ways to initiate, facilitate, and support mutually beneficial relationships among the schools.

Part II – Strategic Planning and Research considers some of the elements included in the original charge to the Stakeholders Group and offers related observations and suggestions, with an emphasis upon the critical connection between ongoing research and comprehensive planning for public education in Pulaski County.

Part III – Policy Issues and Questions offers our observations and views about the process of authorizing new or expanding charter schools. We also list certain policies relevant to our charge, posing questions about them that were unanswered during the term of our service.

We didn't achieve one element of our charge, which was how to include our findings and recommendations in the state's enactment of ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act. As the December 2015 federal law that replaces its predecessor, No Child Left Behind, ESSA was new to us. Additionally, ADE was still conducting meetings around the state to gather public input on certain aspects of the yet young law. Furthermore, we had no budget adequate to underwrite a researcher to gather data on certain relevant topics, as our charge had initially envisioned.

As the result of our uninitiated ESSA status and inability to commission research, we believe currently employed professional educators are far more qualified than we are to address how the observations and ideas in our report can be factored into ESSA.

A terminology note is in order: Several times In the report, we refer to the State, meaning the State of Arkansas and including the General Assembly, which passes the laws that govern public education; the Governor, who sets the policy agenda for education; and both the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the State Board of Education (SBE), which recommend policy and law and administer policy and law concerning public education.

And finally, we use **bolding** in this document in various ways, intending the darker print to serve as helpful signposts. Bold is used for titles of sections and subsections; to accentuate some topic sentences or phrases; to stress information and points we believe are particularly insightful or otherwise significant; and to identify the ideas, suggestions, and recommendations we offer to the Board, ADE, and the public for thoughtful consideration.

Background

For those who recently may have come to the current public education issues in Little Rock, we believe it appropriate to paint a picture, in broad strokes, of the background against which the Stakeholders Group was formed.

Most people date the many changes in Little Rock's school systems to the desegregation crisis at Central High School in 1957. But the story more precisely begins several years earlier as *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* made its way through the federal courts. Sensing the inevitability of school desegregation, Little Rock's city fathers began to integrate the schools, but they also worked to further segregate the city, consigning blacks to the east side of town and whites to the west. Eventually, Urban Renewal and other federal programs were used to further move black housing eastward and open the west side to suburban development designed primarily for white families.

The Central High crisis was inexorably followed by one federal lawsuit, action, and appeal after another during the last several decades of the twentieth century. The State of Arkansas was ultimately found culpable, in significant part, for racial inequities in the county's schools and, therefore, responsible for redress. Eventually in 1989, the parties reached a settlement agreement. Under its terms, the three Pulaski County school districts began annually receiving millions of dollars in desegregation funds to enable the districts to fulfill the commitments of their court-approved desegregation plans.

Since the 1970s, and significantly accelerating in the 1980s and 90s, families with school-aged children, predominantly white, began fleeing Pulaski County for public schools in Cabot, Conway, Bryant, and Benton. At the same time, enrollment increased in the county's private schools, home schools, and the newly established public charter schools. As a result, enrollment in the county's traditional public schools became increasingly skewed toward poor and minority populations in proportions greater than those subgroups were represented in the community at large.

At the state level, in 1992 the Lake View School District in Phillips County sued the State of Arkansas over the State's school funding formula. Ultimately, in what has become known as the *Lake View decision*, the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the State constitution required an *equitable and adequate* education for all Arkansas children. The State's school funding formula was revised and the SBE was given greater authority in supervising school districts that had heretofore been accorded local control to a broad degree.

Fast forward to the early twenty-first century.

In June 2011, the SBE took over the PCSSD, thus dismissing its elected school board, because the district was categorized as *in fiscal distress*. In January 2015, the SBE voted by a five to four margin to take over the LRSD, because six of its schools were categorized as *in academic distress* and had failed to make improvements in a timely manner. The decision followed a long period of State supervisory actions about academic shortcomings in the district.

Because the State had deposed a majority African-American school board and taken control of the largest school district in the state, the LRSD takeover has resulted in significant controversy in the community. Many have voiced the perception that losing local governance was unreasonable, citing that only 6 of the district's 48 schools were in academic distress.

In March 2016, ADE's Charter Authorizing Panel recommended approval of four applications for new or greatly expanded open enrollment charter schools within Pulaski County. The charter applicants requested a total of 4,107 new seats within the county, although 1,000 of those were for the Arkansas Virtual Academy, which is most likely to have a statewide enrollment. Two of the charter schools, eSTEM and LISA, asked for expansions that would create multi-campus charter systems with 2,982 new seats inside the footprint of the LRSD. The Charter Authorizing Panel recommended approving all the applications, including those from eSTEM and LISA. The SBE scheduled a special meeting on March 31, 2016 to consider the charter applications.

At that meeting, the Board heard extensive testimony, some urging that parents should be able to choose among the public schools (both traditional and charter); others spoke against additional charter seats in the Little Rock district. Some promoted certain applications and applicants, while others spoke against specific applications. But the testimony that ultimately most informed the motion to create the Stakeholders Group was the call, from several citizens, three Little Rock state legislators, and LRSD Superintendent Baker Kurrus, for a long-range, comprehensive strategic plan for all public education in south Pulaski County. The plan was to be data driven, rather than ideologically based.

Formation of the Stakeholder's Group and Its Charges

After testimony ended at its March 31, 2016 special meeting, the SBE approved the recommendations of the Charter Authorizing Panel to expand the charters as requested, with the vote five to three for LISA and five to two for eSTEM. Immediately after that vote, Board member Dr. Jay Barth moved:

> In accordance with Section 6-23-703 of the Arkansas Code, which allows the State Board of Education to take other lawful action on public charters, I offer the following motion…. Working with an outside consultant firm, the affected school districts and the charter schools in the area, the ADE shall provide a strategic plan for public education, traditional and open enrollment charter schools south of the Arkansas River in Pulaski County, to guide the evaluation of future charter proposals. This comprehensive plan should be provided by the time of the December 2016 ADE State Board meeting.

The Board delayed action on Dr. Barth's motion until its April 14, 2016 meeting, when Dr. Barth moved:

> ADE will facilitate the engagement of a research facilitator to review the issues below, with the goal of producing non-binding recommendations that aid the board's decision-making, inform communication among all stakeholders, and identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination among charter schools and traditional schools. The recommendations should lay the groundwork for a multi-function model that can be adapted for use in other areas of the state.

Dr. Barth continued his motion to identify a group, to be known as the Stakeholders Group, and its charge. The minutes read:

> Before selecting a facilitator, a small (5-7 person) stakeholder group of individuals that represent traditional public schools, open-enrollment charter schools, and the Little Rock community as a whole shall be formed. The group shall be selected by the Chair of the

State Board of Education and the Commissioner based upon recommendations from charter leaders in Pulaski County south of the river, superintendents of the Pulaski County school districts south of the river, State Board of Education members, members of the General Assembly representing Pulaski County south of the river, and city officials south of the river. The stakeholder group should 1) identify data questions; 2) define key terms; and 3) set measurement parameters that must be addressed by the research facilitator in addressing the issues below. The stakeholder group, in collaboration with ADE, should select the research group. The ADE should engage the Office of Innovation for Education to act as a liaison between the research facilitator and the stakeholder group to provide data-informed recommendations. The recommendations shall be non-binding.

The issues to be addressed by the research facilitators are the following:

- How every student can have access to a school that is achieving;
- How schools can best meet the educational needs of a student population markedly diverse in terms of income levels, achievement levels, English-language learners, and students with disabilities;
- How to be most cost effective and fiscally efficient in the delivery of education;
- How to respond to patterns that students with certain characteristics (in terms of achievement levels, demographics, etc.) are more likely, at present, to seek out open-enrollment charter options;
- How facilities should be modernized and spread across the area based on the current demographics of the area with an eye to future demographic patterns;
- How collaboration between traditional public schools and open-enrollment charter educational offerings can maximize the achievement of students and fiscal efficiency of the system of public education south of the river.

A quarterly report should be provided to the State Board regarding the status of the efforts outlined in this motion. The first quarterly report should reflect the ADE and Office of Innovation for Education's recommendations on how to proceed with the study outlined above, including a projected timeline for completion.

The State Board of Education voted five to three to create the Stakeholders Group.

After appropriate consultations, State Board Chair Newton and Commissioner Key appointed the following members to the Stakeholders Group: Mr. Tommy Branch, Ms. Tamika Edwards, Ms. Ann Marshall Grigsby, Mr. Jim McKenzie, Mr. Antwan Phillips, Ms. Leticia Reta, and Ms. Dianna Varady. ADE engaged Dr. Denise Airola, University of Arkansas Office of Innovation in Education, to assist the Group. At our first meeting on June 6, 2016, the Group elected Mr. Branch as Chairman and Mr. McKenzie as Vice-Chairman.

Over the next several months, the Stakeholders Group heard testimony from the superintendents of the traditional public school districts, representatives of charter schools in the county, ADE staff, university researchers, and others, all listed in *Appendix A*. With the assistance of Dr. Airola, we developed and refined a set of topics and questions for the proposed research facilitator to address. That the SBE's charge to the Group was extensive and complex quickly became apparent to all.

At our September 26, 2016 meeting, as we were preparing to seek proposals for a research consultant, information gathered by Dr. Airola indicated that no single consulting group working in the field had the breadth of expertise to address all six areas of inquiry the Board had defined for our Group. Dr. Airola estimated consultant costs in the range of $375,000 to a half million dollars and a timeframe of some 18 months.

At that time, Commissioner Key informed the Group that no monies were budgeted for a research effort of such scale, saying he had anticipated only a nominal cost, $10,000 at most. He further noted that, since the Stakeholder's recommendations were initially expected by December 2016, and because the state procurement process would take about six months, an overall two-year timeframe was well beyond what the Board had envisioned. Given these constraints, he suggested the Group seek further guidance from the State Board.

We returned to the Board for direction in how to proceed. At its October 13, 2016 meeting, the Board determined the Stakeholders should narrow their focus, concentrating on how to improve cooperation and collaboration between open-enrollment charter schools and traditional public schools. From the minutes of the October 13 meeting:

> The Board recommended focusing on question #6, how collaboration between traditional public schools and open enrollment charter educational offerings can maximize the achievement of students and fiscal efficiency of the system of public education south of the river. The work should move forward focusing on (1) What is working? (2) How do we get collaboration? and (3) How to include this information in ESSA? Dr. Barth was appointed to be the liaison with the Stakeholders Group.

This scope, then, became the new charge for the Stakeholders Group.

In fairness, it should be said that some Stakeholders had been motived to accept the invitation to join the Group because the promise of a researcher was included in our original charge. We were disheartened to learn that a professional researcher wouldn't be assisting us. As a result, our own research, study, and subsequent insights and recommendations have not always fulfilled the reach and scope we had originally envisioned.

Part I
Collaboration

Introduction and Background

When the State Board narrowed the scope of its original charge to the Stakeholders, our focus became *cooperation and collaboration* between traditional and charter schools. Our emphasis counters the prevailing trend of framing charters and traditional schools as opponents in the name of *competition and choice*, still widely promoted as a means to improve schools. To the contrary, we believe the shared power of collaboration is far more potentially beneficial to schools than competition, which tends to produce adversaries instead of allies for improving education.

Initially, as charter schools began to appear across the country, many educators and the general public envisioned charters as "break the mold" schools where new ideas and approaches to teaching and learning could be introduced, explored, expanded, or refined for export to other schools as models for inspiration, emulation, or adaptation. Eventually different ideological and political forces began to interject other visions, not of education ingenuity that could lift all schools, but a thrust toward charters as an alternative commodity to compete against the traditional schools in the name of choice: a free-market paradigm to compete with the old central-planning paradigm.

Charter proponents on both the national and local scene have steadily touted the virtues of competition between public charters and public traditional schools. In the process of promoting such views, advocates have succeeded in framing charter schools as worthy competitors *against* traditional schools, rather than colleagues *allied with* traditional schools to promote top-quality education for all children. Competition results in winners and losers, which begs the question: Which schools and which students are we content to pronounce losers? Moreover, a competitive paradigm exacerbates differences between schools, rather than stressing what they share in common, which is the basis for potential collaboration.

Pitting the two types of schools against each other in the name of competition has created deep fissures, dividing schools and communities—across the nation, here in Arkansas, and particularly in Pulaski County—into opposing camps of thought, ideology, and loyalty. Such a corrosive split is counterproductive and thwarts collaboration. Repairing the breach requires a plan and resources targeted toward win-win reconciliation and reciprocity.

When constructive collaboration is the objective, we urge abandoning the competitive paradigm that has cast traditional and charter schools in adversarial roles. Instead, advocate the concept of teamwork toward success for students in all schools, founded upon a mutually beneficial partnership-building process.

The CRPE Perspective

The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) is associated with the University of Washington at Bothell. CRPE describes itself as a non-partisan, self-sustaining institute, identifying as a national leader in district-charter collaboration through its work with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. CRPE staff members Dr. Jordan Postmetier and Dr. Sean Gill made a presentation about their research capabilities to the Stakeholders on September 26, 2016 shortly before Commissioner Key informed the Group that any available monies were inadequate to fund research. Nevertheless, the presentation was helpful and pointed the Group toward CRPE's numerous articles and reports, available to the public at *www.crpe.org*.

In January 2017, CRPE published *Bridging the District-Charter Divide to Help More Students Succeed,* a report that coincidently speaks directly to the charge given the Stakeholders to identify ways in which charters and traditional schools can collaborate with each other. CRPE researchers based their report on lessons learned from 23 cities that had formally signed District-Charter Collaboration Compacts, an effort supported by the Gates Foundation. (CRPE often uses "district-charter" when referring to schools within a public school district and to the charter schools in the same area.)

While we highlight some of the report's findings here, our profile is necessarily lean. Instead, we commend CRPE's *Bridging the Divide* report to SBE and ADE staff, as well as all educators and the general public, to read in detail at *www.crpe.org*. The report's findings, suggestions, and cautions are thought provoking. Below, we point out several of the findings and conclusions CRPE identified, subsequently addressing some of them more thoroughly in later portions of our report.

Common Issues and Problems

Among the cities they studied, CRPE researchers noted several common issues and problems along with lessons learned. Some of the identified problematic areas squarely apply to public education in Pulaski County. Those areas are listed below, along with references to where we further address them in this document.

1. **Inconsistent discipline policies and practices among the schools, including approaches to suspension or expulsion**, **have led to suspicions** that charter schools are "dumping" disruptive and hard-to-teach students back into the traditional schools. We revisit this challenging issue in a section about *School Discipline* on *page 11*.

2. **Neighborhood "quality school deserts" are areas where the public has no ready alternative** to unsafe or ineffective neighborhood schools to which they have nearby access. The study revealed a significant equity issue when parents of lesser means are unable to transport their children to schools that portend better learning opportunities but are located at a distance.

    Expanding on this topic in the next part of this report, we discuss the acute need for comprehensive, long-term strategic planning for Pulaski County's public schools. In concert with that plan, the county urgently needs a tightly focused plan to guide decisions about locating or expanding charter or traditional schools. That plan will factor in areas that are underserved due to a dearth of successful schools or a lack of ready

programming targeted to fit the particular needs of the area's children. See *Strategic Planning,* beginning on *page 29,* and *Rethinking Charter Authorization, page 38.*

3. **Hostility between district and charter schools prevents educators from learning from one another**, clearly the situation in Little Rock where the current political environment verges on toxicity. The report warns that attempting collaboration in a toxic political environment can often do more harm than good. We noted this troubling issue in the *Introduction*, above, and revisit it in other parts of this report as well.

4. **Barriers to accessing and judging different types of public schools in the area impede equitable access to reliable information.** Not all parents have the same access to accurate information about both charter and traditional schools no matter who operates the school, especially on a comparative basis that allows parents to weigh the benefits and feasibility of one school relative to others. Read about our concept of an *Information and Registration Center* beginning on *page 24*.

5. **Inequities exist in the ability of public charter schools to access mechanisms to fund facilities** versus those available to traditional school districts.

6. **The level at which charters recruit and enroll students receiving special education services raises equity issues**, as the numbers of these unique students aren't represented in charter schools proportionately to their numbers among the public incidence. Beginning on *page 14*, we discuss the need for all public schools to align their enrollment proportions and programming for students needing special education services, as well as English language learners, addressed starting on *page 17*.

Stable Leadership and Commitment

In addition to the common issues noted above, CRPE also observes that charter-traditional school cooperation in many cities' schools didn't last beyond leadership transitions, either administrative or political. The partnerships faded and dissolved, wasting education leaders' time and even leading to increased mistrust between sectors.

When collaborations collapse, their failure can deepen doubts that cooperative ventures are worth attempting. Those advocating or participating in shared ventures must understand that collaboration is a serious undertaking to be viewed neither as a pipe dream, a quick fix, nor a political palliative. Instead, education partnerships are serious undertakings that are investments in the future for children, families, and communities.

In all instances, start-up success and sustained progress are nurtured by stability in leadership and top-to-bottom commitment. Partners must embrace mutual goals *and* a clearly defined partnership structure that will support and protect the relationship through all sorts of external and internal pressures and changes. See *pages 23*, *28 g,*, and *Appendix B's* sequential process for creating education partnerships.

Potential Policy Wins

The CRPE report describes "clear policy wins" in some of the studied cities, but cautions that **considerable commitment and coordination are required to support broad cooperation; the more complex the attempted cooperation, the greater the challenge.** CRPE identified concepts and actions that have been successful to varying degrees in some cities:

- replacing chronically struggling neighborhood schools with high-performing charter schools;

- citywide common enrollment systems to address some of the burdens of choice. The "burden of choice" refers to the substantial load parents bear when trying to individually identify and research all the potential school choices available to them and their children. *The researchers stress that coordinating school enrollment across an entire city is challenging and thus not a logical starting point for fledgling cooperation.*

- more equitable and transparent discipline practices across all schools;

- coordinated cost-sharing systems to provide students receiving special education services greater access to choice and innovative practices;

- coordinated transportation services; and

- common accountability tools that allow families as well as district and charter administrators to track school performance across a city, regardless of who governs the school.

CRPE researchers also point out that the most successful efforts they studied depended upon extraordinary leaders, dubbed "boundary spanners," who were able to work successfully across district-charter lines.

Bridging the Divide also observes that state education agencies can consider ways to support local cooperation through financial incentives, accountability systems that put district and charter schools on an even playing field, family-friendly policies around enrollment, accessible and transparent school information, and transportation to school.

Equity in Student Discipline, Special Education, and for English Language Learners

In CRPE's *Bridging the Divide*, which we repeatedly reference in this report, the researchers found that, in the cities they studied, student discipline and special education practices were among the most common—and beneficial—areas of cooperation between charters and traditional schools. Measuring along an axis of costs versus benefits, the researchers rank both school discipline and special education programming as "low cost/high benefit;" that is, the benefits accrued in those two arenas were high in the cooperating schools, while the expended costs or resources were low.

We strongly believe that students, staff, parents, and the public must be able to count on symmetry and equity in programs, policies, and practices across the public schools, especially in relation to fair discipline, comprehensive special education, and programming for students who are English language learners (ELL). Although not specifically studied in *Bridging the Divide*, we add ELL to our discussion, because those children's needs are unique and their enrollment in the local public schools is continuing to rise.

Consistency in these areas from one school to the next is vital in maintaining confidence that parity for students prevails on all campuses. A level of uniformity also serves to quell charges that "difficult to educate" children are being underserved or even turned away from any public school.

The following three sections address school discipline, special education, and English language learners in turn, providing some background around these three subjects, which present challenges to some extent in all our local public schools. As potential areas of cooperation and a means to synchronize practices and programming between charters and traditional schools, we offer recommendations as well as suggestions for start-up discussion points for state agencies, school leaders and staff, as well as the public.

School Discipline

School rules governing student conduct and a discipline system to enforce those rules is a challenge faced by every school in the nation. *Student discipline* generally refers to the way in which a school defines appropriate behavioral standards for its students and the means the school uses to elicit, guide, support, or control that behavior in relation to the behavioral standards.

Discipline is highly subjective, with the definition of what constitutes appropriate behavior as varied as the who-what-where-and-when of the diverse participants, activities, locations, and times that comprise the learning environments we call schools. Some regard discipline as negative and punitive, a means for enforcing a rigid, external system that compels submission to rules through a system of punishments and possibly rewards. Military discipline, for example, is a type of such a systematic method to obtain obedience. Others view discipline as the positive process by which an individual learns self-control by internalizing a high level of personal conduct such that external controls and coercions are unnecessary or minimal.

No matter how discipline is defined and practiced, it is nonetheless a major concern for all members of a school community. Whether that school is a charter or traditional school, maintaining appropriate student deportment is crucial not only to the teaching-learning process, but to the sense of public confidence that must undergird our schools no matter their classification or location. For every school, the challenge includes ensuring a discipline system that is constructed, implemented, and enforced fairly and consistently for all students.

At our July 11, 2016 Stakeholders meeting, we asked for data about student discipline in the local schools. The following month, Dr. Gary Ritter, from the Office for Education Policy (OEP) at the University of Arkansas, helpfully presented and discussed discipline data for schools in southern Pulaski County. His report covered a three-year period that extended through the 2014-15 school year.

In both traditional and charter schools, the data showed a significant range in the numbers of disciplinary infractions and the rates, by race and by gender, at which students were disciplined. Overall, the data showed that African-American students, particularly males, were sanctioned at rates disproportionately high to their population in the studied schools. Dr. Ritter explained that most disparities in discipline by race/ethnicity groups were between schools rather than within individual schools, indicating that some schools may be stricter in discipline policy enforcement.

After his presentation, Dr. Ritter agreed that we could send additional discipline questions for OEP to consider, so we submitted the following:

1. Has OEP researched student drop-out data for the same south-of-the-river schools over the same three-year discipline data time period and, if so, could such data be used to measure potential relationships between drop-out rates and discipline rates? (In informal conversation after the meeting, Dr. Ritter said such research hadn't been done but readily could be.)

2. Has OEP planned research to address a point raised during the presentation of the discipline data, which is the degree to which discipline policies and/or enforcement of discipline policies may differ among schools? As noted in the presentation, differences in the discipline data among schools might be attributable to differences among the policies themselves and/or varying enforcement levels.

3. Has OEP done or planned to research the extent to which (a) the availability of severe versus less severe discipline options (for example, OOS: out-of-school suspension versus ISS: in-school suspension) and (b) the scope of available disciplinary sanctions may influence misbehavior and/or affect the consequences meted out for misbehavior, but to what degree, if at all? For instance, a student acting out in School A might think, "A day or two in ISS isn't so tough," while the principal in School B is thinking, "Without ISS, I have no other option but OOS for this student's misbehavior."

4. Has OEP done or planned research to define or characterize the overall environment, policies, and practices within a school—often collectively known as "school climate"—to enable study of the relationship between climate and the overall and subgroup discipline rates and the relationship between severity of discipline infractions and disciplinary consequences?

While our inquiries remained unanswered, which may have been due to our lack of a budget to underwrite research, we believe our original questions are still vital to ask *and* to be answered.

Thus, we encourage the Board and ADE to pursue the answers to these questions and others that can shed significant light on how equitably and effectively the schools are approaching student behavior and discipline. That approach includes establishing clear behavior standards and discipline policies, identifying a reasonable range of disciplinary options, and assuring that disciplinary actions are evenly and fairly applied among all students across all public schools.

All schools can agree that behavior guidance and discipline for students is an area meriting attention. The data we saw clearly show that, to varying degrees, building and classroom managers need help in the discipline arena. **We offer the following suggestions as topics**

and activities school staff members can discuss and help one another address.
Sharing ideas and encouragement about this important aspect of school life is a process that can help bring the public schools into mutually beneficial conversations and action.

1. **Explore each school's discipline management plan and the degree to which staff regularly assess how consistently the plan is followed, how well it's working, and the extent to which the plan undergoes changes in concepts, implementation, or both.** Discuss how each school measures success, and talk over the mechanics of the decision-making process for improving and following the plan.

2. **Assess the schools' staff development programs, especially training in positive discipline and classroom management practices, to ensure that teachers, counselors, and other school personnel have the necessary training, skills, and motivation to build positive, trusting relationships with all their students.**

   Some educators may need more training and guided practice in such areas as how to effectively manage a classroom and methods of behavior modification. Discuss how the schools identify genuine areas of need and access the resources necessary to address them. Seek out ways the schools can share their staff development resources with one another.

3. **Cultivate a perspective of *rules as guidelines for personal interactions*.** Rules are meant to guide us humans, not ensnare us. Building administrators and classroom teachers need some flexibility in deciding whether to pursue a prescribed disciplinary sanction or to design a more effective follow-up to fit particular circumstances. Talk over the various options available for appropriately guiding youngsters' conduct and constructively correcting behavior when needed.

4. **Encourage school personnel to use outside help for supplementing their discipline programs so they can ensure more comprehensive services for students.** Many children are experiencing serious problems outside of school, but they don't leave those problems at home. For these children, school sometimes becomes another problem piled on those they already have. Sometimes the entire family needs help, not just the student. Schools must be resilient and willing to develop relationships with social, health, employment, and community agencies.

   Explore the various community resources available to direct services toward families in need; then identify the appropriate pathways and process for schools to connect families with service providers.

5. **Hold periodic summits of the schools in a particular area of the county or across school grade levels as a forum for exchanging ideas and successful practices for handling disciplinary problems.** The schools are blessed with many talented, effective professionals who can pool their experience, ideas, and energy to meet any discipline problems head-on to begin a genuine turnaround where needed. Harness the synergy potential in a gathering of school personnel to share successes, challenges, and solutions.

6. **Identify the factors that are helping some schools maintain better student behavior while dispensing sanctions proportionate to the racial and gender**

composition of the student body. Then share those principles for other schools to adopt or adapt to their own particular needs and circumstances.

Special Education

Special education services and supports are governed by federal law, which is the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, (IDEA, reauthorized in 2004) and by ADE Regulations.[1] Services and supports are provided to eligible students through an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which takes into consideration the unique strengths and needs of an individual student.

Decisions about student eligibility, accommodations, supports and services, and student placement are decided by the IEP team, made up of representatives from the student's school and the student's parents or guardians. Services and supports provided under an IEP vary widely and range from simple accommodations and modifications to the child's instruction or beyond to intensive supports such as one-to-one instruction.

ADE's Special Education Unit is responsible for ensuring that Arkansas students eligible for special education services receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE)[2] in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and to the "maximum extent appropriate" alongside their peers without disabilities.[3] ADE monitors public school special education services, provides dispute resolution services when members of an IEP team disagree, and investigates complaints against schools for failing to comply with regulations.

Funding for special education services and supports flows through the Special Education Unit to all Arkansas public schools. The amount of funding provided to a school is determined by the total number of students receiving special education services in the school. Schools may also request additional "catastrophic" funds in "individual cases where special education and related services required by the individualized education program (IEP) of a particular child with a disability are unduly expensive, extraordinary and/or beyond the routine and normal costs associated with special education and related services provided by the local education agency."[4]

Unlike some issues discussed in this report, **no waivers are available to traditional public schools or public charter schools for provision of special education services. Public charter schools are required to provide special education services to eligible students in exactly the same manner as traditional public schools.**[5]

At our December 5, 2016 Stakeholders meeting, Dr. Sarah McKenzie, from OEP, provided a report summarizing demographic enrollment trends in the Pulaski County public schools. A

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[1] ADE special education regulations are at *https://arksped.k12.ar.us/PolicyAndRegulations.*

[2] About Us. *https://arksped.k12.ar.us/index.html.*

[3] Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit. ADE Special Education and Related Services 13.00 Least Restrictive Environment, July 2008 (p. 1); *http://arksped.k12.ar.us.*

[4] *https://arksped.k12.ar.us/documents/fundingFinance/1617CatastrophicOccurrenceFundingGuide.pdf.*

[5] *https://arksped.k12.ar.us/Monitoring/CharterSchools.html.*

brief section of the report addressed the percentage of students enrolled in the public schools who received special education services, comparing only 2008-09 school year figures to those of 2014-15.

The data revealed that, overall, the county's traditional public schools served a disproportionately high number of students receiving special education services in 2014-15 (11%) compared to the county's charters (6.5%). While the charter school percentages were higher in 2014-15 than they had been in 2008-09, the report didn't name what the proportions had been in the base year for any schools. A bar chart, which lacked definitive detail, appeared to show that charters' 2008-09 percentages had been very low, while in that same year the traditional schools appeared almost as high as in 2014-15.[6]

When asked, Dr. McKenzie indicated that the existing data weren't adequate to show whether the special education populations differed in terms of needing intensive services/supports. But she said the data suggested that additional data, that is, the percentages of students receiving community-based instruction or those participating in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Program (students unable to participate in state-wide and district-wide assessments), could serve as an indicator of the proportion of students needing intensive special education services.

Prior to the December 5, 2016 meeting when Dr. McKenzie presented the OEP report, representatives of the charter schools in south Pulaski County attended our July 25, 2016 meeting. During our conversations with them, we asked for information about students receiving special education services in each of their schools, specifically asking about students receiving community-based instruction (CBI). One charter leader said that some of that school's students participated in community-based instruction, but the remainder of the charter cohorts said they didn't currently have any students in CBI.

The data we saw on students receiving special education in the charter schools raised two questions that remain unanswered:

- What factors contribute to the disproportionately low percentage of students receiving special education services in the charter schools compared to traditional schools?

- Are charter schools also serving a disproportionately low number of students receiving special education services with *significant* service/support needs compared to traditional schools?

Without answers to both these questions, it isn't possible to determine the reasons for the schools' disproportionate representation of students in the special education arena.

Considering the data we've seen, we recommend the following:

1. **Parent's need for assistance in considering schools and programming argues for a centralized information and enrollment process so parents can get help**

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[6] Office of Education Policy, University of Arkansas. "Integration in the Little Rock Area: Part 1, Demographics Trends in Enrollment" (pg. 4).

navigating school registration processes. See our vision for an *Information and Registration Center, page 24.*

2. **Provide a printed special education guide about education options for students**, **including the following:**

   a. General information for parents about area public charters and traditional schools. A directory that lists all enrollment options serves as an invitation to parents to enroll their child in any of the available choices, as all schools must adequately meet the needs of every individual student.

   b. General information about special education services, including how to refer a student for consideration for those services and whom to contact at each school.

   c. General information about students' rights to receive special education services in all public schools.

3**. Collect data from the schools about the *specific* special education services their students require and how each school is meeting individual needs**. Information at this detailed level will show a more accurate picture of the special education services spectrum that students' need and the extent to which those services are provided across all charters and traditional schools in southern Pulaski County.

   Currently, schools only report information about their students' categorical eligibility (diagnosis), placement (percentage of time in general education classrooms, special education classrooms, etc.), and assessment. But additional information is needed to determine the percentage of students requiring intensive services and supports along with the type and amount provided, such as community-based instruction; one-to-one instruction; one-to-one paraprofessional support; nursing care; and so on.

4. **After determining the number and percentage of students receiving special education services and the specific range of services provided in all the local public schools, use the data to assess the extent to which an imbalance exists** between the proportions of students receiving special education services in traditional schools versus those served in charters.

5. **Identify the causes of any significant imbalance in special education services among the schools,** whether due to funding shortfalls, lack of specialized staffing or material resources, inexperience, or other inhibiting factors. **Then focus on removing the obstacles** that deter a school from recruiting and enrolling children for whom laws and regulations require an equitable education.

6. **For charters that need help establishing or expanding special education programming, consider brokering a mentoring relationship** between the charters and those traditional classroom practitioners and supervisors who have a solid history of successfully serving students needing special education services. Sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences among public school personnel will ultimately

enable all the schools, district and charter alike, to more equitably share the responsibility for providing the free and appropriate education to which the children are entitled.

English Language Learners

All children who are newcomers to an area experience the difficulties of adapting to a new town and a new school. But children and families who are new to a country, a culture, and a language face tremendous challenges and adjustments.

Arkansas has a long history of attracting immigrants from the earliest days of the state's settlement. In more recent memory, many Arkansans recall the influx of non-English speakers in the mid-1970s after the Vietnam War ended. Then, waves of refugees from Southeast Asia arrived in Arkansas, which served as an entry point into the U.S. Most of the immigrants soon left for other states, but many remained. Those of us who were students or workers in Pulaski County schools in those days remember the tremendous mobilization the districts undertook to teach English to their Indochinese students while also reaching out to their families.

Thus, the local traditional schools have a background in helping non-English speakers transition into the school systems and the community. In recent years, Pulaski County schools have again been enrolling increasingly higher numbers of non-English speaking students, particularly Hispanics. So, our schools continue with a process that began long ago, but now with the impetus of more targeted laws and broader obligations that call for comprehensive programs, improved tools, and substantial support for non-English speaking students and their parents.

In discussing those who are learning English, a range of abbreviations might be used. In this report, we use ELL, which is the commonly heard local acronym for English Language Learner/s. But many other terms and abbreviations will be found in other regions, as well as in state and federal documents. They include EL: English Learner/s; ESL: English as a Second Language; ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages; LEP: Limited English Proficient; and perhaps others.

All schools are obligated by federal law to enroll and teach immigrant or non-English speaking children without regard to their citizenship or immigration status or that of their parents. Information about federal laws and state mandates governing ELL are available on the ADE website, along with information about the numerous services, guides, and tools available from ADE and other sources: *http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/english-learners.*

One particularly comprehensive U.S. publication is the English Learner Tool Kit, parts of which have been updated in relation to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Aimed at education agencies and schools but informative for interested others, the kit is divided into chapters. Each covers a specific legal obligation schools must follow, such as staffing and supporting an English Learner Program; creating an inclusive environment; and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of a district's ELL Program. A printable copy of the Tool Kit is found at *https://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html.*

Presently, Pulaski County is home to many immigrant children and families. According to data from OEP, cited earlier, which compares figures from the 2008-09 school year to that of 2014-15, the percentage of ELL children in the total public school enrollment has grown over the entire Little Rock area within the given time span.

In 2008-09, less than 1% of students in public charters were identified as ELL compared to about 6% in the LRSD. By 2014-15, ELL enrollment was nearly 3% of the charter population and almost 11% of LRSD rolls.

Those data don't indicate the language, ethnicity, or national origin of the ELL students, but other statistics show the county's Hispanic population has continued to grow steadily. The most recent U.S. Census Bureau figures (2010) record the proportion of Hispanics in Pulaski Co as 6% of the population. That percentage may be somewhat higher today in mid-2017. The most common language spoken in the county, other than English, is Spanish by a very substantial margin over any other language.

In Pulaski County public schools overall, OEP figures show that the share of Hispanic students in both charters and traditional public schools has grown over time. In 2008-09, Hispanic students represented 5% of charter enrollment but were 10.2% by 2014-15. In the LRSD, the proportions of Hispanic students rose from 7.8% in 2008-09 to 12.6% in 2014-15.

Meeting the needs of ELL children includes intensive support in learning to speak, read, and write English. The students also need help in gaining the understandings and skills necessary to live successfully in a country and community that may differ substantially from their native culture, customs, and norms. Some of the families have lived through very difficult circumstances and are seeking to escape poverty, hunger, crime, or other adversities. Even here, they may continue to live with uncertainty in unstable situations. Some of the newcomers (including adults and even older students) aren't able to read or write their native language.

Schools that host ELL students must not only be prepared to teach the children but also to reach out to the children's families. Welcoming them, explaining all aspects of the school and education process, guiding them when needed, and regularly communicating with them in their own language are important factors that will greatly influence how well the ELL children settle into school and steadily make progress.

A member of the Stakeholders Group is Hispanic, speaks fluent Spanish and English, and is the mother of children who attend the public schools. As an immigrant and long-time resident of the county, she has been very active in working to facilitate the transition of ELL children and families into the schools and broader community. She is forthright about the many challenges non-English speakers encounter, offering insightful suggestions for ways the schools can improve their effectiveness for ELL students and LEP parents, especially in a collaborative manner among the public schools. Enlightened by our colleague's knowledge and experiences, and reflecting our own research as well, we offer the following recommendations:

1. **Determine the reasons local charter schools, overall, have a disproportionately low enrollment of ELL students compared to the local traditional schools. The percentages may indicate that ELL children and families face enrollment impediments, which must be identified and overcome.**

OEP data show that the traditional schools have enrolled greater percentages of both ELL students and Hispanic students than have charters. The gap isn't as high in the proportions of Hispanic enrollment, but the ELL disparity between the schools is significant: in the most recent data we saw, traditional schools enrolled almost four times as many ELL students as did charters.

2. **The challenges of identifying the ways to best support ELL teaching and learning both in and out of the classroom present a prime impetus for public traditional and charter schools to work together to explore a range of opportunities and options.** Schools with robust ELL programming can serve as models and mentors for schools with less experience.

   To heighten awareness of ELL challenges, barriers, and needs, educators might consider convening an awareness session with a focus group of ELL students and another of ELL parents. One or both of the groups might be invited to continue as a volunteer advisory group and sounding board.

3. **Beyond the particulars of any in-school ELL programming, a cooperative charter-traditional initiative can support schools in creating and enacting school-specific written plans for starting and sustaining outreach to ELL students and families.** Plans must clearly define goals along with specified actions, timing, and those responsible for each aspect of the plan. Regularly update each plan as its level of success is monitored.

   ELL families want to feel welcome and connected to their schools, but they're unsure about how to create that connection. In some cultures, both children and adults show politeness and deference to school officials and teachers by not speaking up or asking questions. Some parents may be very hesitant to attend school events and uncomfortable after they arrive. So, it's incumbent on the schools to begin building the link between school and home.

4. **Ensure that all spoken and written communication between a school and ELL families is in the language of the home. By federal law, each school system must have readily available trained translators and interpreters to assist the schools. Federal law also prevents students from *assuming the responsibility* for serving as translators or interpreters; that responsibility falls on the school system.**

   Clear and consistent communication between school and parents is vital, particularly in ELL homes. All parents are challenged to know how to support their children's education, but no Mom or Dad can possibly fulfill a school's expectations unless they know what's expected of them. Without information in a language they understand, LEP parents can't fully participate as the school's partners in supporting their children's progress.

5. **Consider reviving the hospitable custom of teachers or other school staff visiting the home of new students for a brief "We welcome you" chat.** Bring an interpreter and introductory materials in the parents' native language. Reaching out with a welcoming hand is an effective way to begin courting parents as colleagues in education.

6. **Schools must recognize that communication to ELL students' homes, including homework activities, can't be limited to electronic means alone**. **Many students and families, especially ELL and LEP, don't have computer skills, don't have a computer in the home, or don't have ready access to computer connectivity.** The lack can present a serious barrier to the home-school connection and students' growth.

   Any number of factors can isolate a family from technological inclusion. Budgetary restraints are a common obstacle. Or the home may have a computer but such a slow or undependable Internet connection that extended time lapses or repeatedly dropped connections stymie any electronic task. Some parents hold down two or even three jobs, meaning the time or financial resources aren't available for accessing public Wi Fi via repeated drives to a library or other location with restricted hours. Further, when a school or program password is lost or forgotten, an ELL family can struggle to know how to recoup the password, fearing reprisal or shame.

7. **Identify and make available, to parents and others, up-to-date process and outcome information demonstrating that schools are fulfilling all ELL requirements, adequately preparing and supporting ELL teachers, and achieving ELL goals and objectives as required by applicable laws and mandates.**

   Some parents and educators have expressed concerns about the extent to which officials are monitoring and evaluating how effectively schools are implementing ELL programs and fulfilling all mandates. Some concerns center on the extent to which all teachers, especially first-year teachers and those otherwise new to ELL, are receiving adequate pre-service training and orientation along with consistent support throughout the year.

   Others are concerned whether monitoring and evaluation is adequate to confirm compliance with all federal requirements, including those that restrict schools from segregating students on the basis of national origin or ELL status. Although certain programs can pull ELL students together for a portion of a school day, the schools must carry out programs in the least segregative manner.

Fostering a Climate for Collaboration

When the State Board of Education commissioned the Stakeholders Group to find ways to help traditional schools and charters turn their swords into plowshares, the Board's forward-looking action signaled a turn toward a new day in Pulaski County. Collaboration among schools is a synergistic means for mobilizing collective resources and concentrating shared plans and actions toward goals that benefit everyone, especially the children.

Working together is also a pathway toward healing the hurts and bridging the divides that have so deeply troubled our schools and our city. Combining talents, intellect, expertise, and experience amounts to the highest and best use of our human abilities. As an old saying goes, none of us is as smart as all of us.

But what attitudes, approaches, and mechanisms does it take for a turnaround? What does it "look like" when schools are working as teammates for their collective good?

In earlier parts of this section, we've considered a number of ways to rethink and retool concepts of schooling and relationships within a partnership paradigm. In the remainder of this part of the report, we offer more ideas, tools, and proven approaches for bringing the schools together for positive pay offs all around. In this section, we continue with the three broad points below and follow them with substantive concepts and examples in the subsequent sections.

1. **Encouraging traditional and charter schools to *move toward* one another so they can learn to *move forward with* one another requires timing decisions and actions with sensitivity to prevailing circumstances.**

   Timing is said to be everything, because untimeliness can thwart almost anything. As Arkansas farmers say after spring floods, the crops "won't plant" until the fields are dry. The same timing importance applies to the schools and their potential pathway toward teamwork.

   The traditional Pulaski County school districts are currently struggling to cope with weighty challenges, including legal, procedural, and financial obstacles. LRSD morale has been dimmed by its recent millage failure, and its patrons plea for a return to local control. PCSSD is still under court supervision in several areas and is unsure about whether it faces consolidation with its neighboring district.

   Charter schools face challenges as well, including those that are routine for all schools, such as hiring and retaining staffing for hard-to-recruit academic areas or specialty offerings. But public charters must deal with issues that differ in significant respects from the traditional public schools. These concerns include the financial footing to undergird a school's stability in the present and into the future; obtaining facilities that are adequate for the school's programming and aspirations; and the complexity and expense of arranging transportation services for a student body that may be spread throughout a wide area.

   As a result, all the public schools are focused on a long list of pressing needs that are both time and resource intensive. Under such circumstances, the schools may not see sufficient benefits in adding collaboration to their lengthy "To Do List."

   This situation is why we stress the importance of paving the way toward partnership possibilities by cultivating a non-competitive environment and a culture of cooperation. With tensions abated and arms uncrossed, both traditional and charters can begin to investigate the mutual benefits of teamwork on their own timetable and their own shared terms.

2. **Promoting the success of all public schools with open and evenhanded decisions, plans, and actions will go far to garner public support for collaborative efforts.**

   Changes that come as a surprise or are counter to the expectations or the desires of the community—and their need to be involved in the changes that affect them—are destabilizing and divisive. The public is hungry for stability and a sense of fair play in Pulaski County. The open strategic planning we encourage in this report, which is to include balanced attention to all the public schools, can steady and restore public equilibrium and confidence.

3. **Symmetry, transparency, and public awareness and involvement in policy development and actions will promote public confidence in equitable education opportunities and help ease tensions that can inhibit collaboration between charters and traditional schools.**

   The CRPE website and report we've previously referenced acknowledges a perception in many communities that the schools are dividing along the lines of enrolling the "easier-to-teach" versus those for whom learning is more challenging. For some people, the intensifying division between the charters and traditional schools is frighteningly akin to the racial schism that for so long separated our public schools, both by custom and by law. **When we acknowledge our history and our obligation to learn its lessons, then we're responsible for refusing to repeat the divisive and destructive aspects of that history.**

   The ideas and recommendations we offer in this report are focused on promoting a transition from division toward coalition while also recognizing conditions that have created barriers to cooperation. No quick fixes are available, but here we offer substantive concepts, supple tools, and sure ways for the schools to create mutually beneficial partnerships of shared design.

   Propelled and sustained by the planning and research we advocate and explore in Part II of this report, constructive change is possible. Progress will be greatly advanced and expedited in an environment of transparency, evenhandedness, and inclusiveness that promotes public awareness and participation in the plans and policies that affect us.

A Place to Come Together

The underpinning of any mutually beneficial relationship is trust. Collaborations require a sturdy foundation of trust, that is, the confidence to rely upon others to act in good faith and hold up their end of whatever bargain is struck.

Trust grows when people have the opportunity to get to know one another, find common ground, and work together on shared interests and goals. Staff from Pulaski County schools, both traditional and charters, need a non-threatening, hospitable place of their own where they can regularly come together to learn and work together. But where do they find such a neutral and nurturing gathering place?

We urge the state to establish an Education Service Cooperative for the Pulaski County public schools in parity with the other Co-ops that have long served public schools throughout all other areas of Arkansas.

The professionally staffed and managed Co-ops deliver schools a wide range of services tailored to help educators fulfill regulatory mandates along with the particular needs of educators and students in their service area. The Co-ops' widely acknowledged role in enabling school staffs to successfully work together in meeting education goals and objectives forcefully argues for such a powerful resource in Pulaski County.

A Pulaski County Cooperative (or one on each side of the river to be tailored to the needs of each area's schools) can serve as a resource center and a gathering hub for all the public schools—and for helping launch and sustain their collaborations. Such relationships start

with an introduction, grow by discovering and exploring common interests and experiences, and are sustained by meaningful reciprocity and shared successes, which are the basic elements of an education partnership. All of these elements, and the process of putting them together, require careful cultivation and consistent support, which is what a catalytic Co-op is equipped to do.

In promoting school collaboration, a Co-op facility can host get-acquainted activities, wide-ranging discussion groups, and side-by-side learning opportunities, all under the guidance of skilled professionals. Shared experiences fostered within the shelter of the Co-op environment can eventually blossom into trusting relationships which, in turn, become springboards for exploring further reciprocal endeavors.

Establishing and maintaining a Co-op is expensive, but not impossible. Community leaders will muster momentum when they approach creating an Education Co-op for Pulaski County with a *how we can* rather than a *why we can't* attitude.

We suggest tapping into the power of shared creative thinking and our state's great volunteer spirit by asking for ideas about how to finance and locate at least one Co-op for the county. Create a diverse brainstorming and advisory group made up of representatives from leadership organizations; businesses; philanthropic organizations; colleges and universities; churches; professional, civic, and social groups; and the like. Include those who lead the local school districts' well-established Partners in Education programs, along with their legion of community partners.

A Process for Coming Together

Collaboration between traditional and charter school is wisely approached as a partnership development process, recognizing that it requires a well-defined, sequential structure that will take stable leadership, commitment, time, and patience.

As cited previously, the potential for collaboration among the charters and traditional schools in Pulaski County is on shaky ground, because the schools have been conditioned to see themselves as competitors, not collaborators. A competition paradigm encourages an "either-or" rather than a "both-and" perspective that is the hallmark of collaborative undertakings. Participants must be guided toward a connection that's clearly aligned with their shared values and goals, as well as fitting squarely with their perceptions of their school's best interests. No payoff, no partnership.

Our discussion of a Pulaski County Co-op, above, observes that school personnel need a place of shared ownership and involvement. There staffs can come together on neutral ground to begin experiencing one another not as opponents, but as education colleagues with common interests. Below are some steps Co-op or ADE staff can take to begin the process:

1. Assess the extent to which the schools currently collaborate among themselves, that is, traditional among traditional and charters with charters. The findings will indicate how comfortably school personnel are conditioned to some level of collaborative thinking, sharing, and action with their cohort schools. Examples of such existing collaborative interchanges will encourage broader cooperative interaction.

2. **Use the suggested *school profiles* (*page 25*) as part of the early steps in creating connections between traditional and charter schools. These profiles, which are comprehensive and detailed overviews of each school's features, can function as introductions from one school to another.** The profiles offer an opportunity for potential partners to "size up" each other at arm's length and begin to get a sense of their similarities and differences.

   The participants will need sufficient time to explore the profiles and deliberate the possible matches among the talents, experiences, interests, and areas of expertise within the school communities. Scrutinizing the school profiles will reveal areas of common concern, challenge, and success. For school personnel, those intersections of shared interest can serve as starting points for conversations that foster awareness and appreciation of commonalities.

3. As possible partnerships are explored, keep in mind that relationships have a greater potential for growth when the schools are fairly near each other and serve similar grade levels. Proximity and curriculum kinship help potential partners connect more easily.

4. As relationships begin to take root and grow, they become the foundation for exploring further cooperative opportunities based on identified needs and potentially complementary resources. **This shared development process ultimately leads to understanding, agreements, plans, and prototypes for collaboration customized for and by the participants. Because the partners themselves *own* both the process and the product, they're invested in their partnership's durability and success.**

Information Access

For both ease and equity of information for parents who are making decisions about their children's education pathway, streamline and enrich access to comprehensive information about available school options by ensuring that complete, accurate information about both traditional and charter schools is readily available to all parents. A central information location for both charter and traditional schools will enable parents to assess the education opportunities within a single, collaborating public school district. Ideas include:

1. **Establish and staff a location—perhaps known as an *Information and Registration Center*—to serve as a one-stop resource where all parents can learn about the scope of public school opportunities**; obtain current, detailed information about options and services at individual schools; and find guidance through the decision making and registration process. Bi-lingual personnel and interpretation resources are to be readily available. Staffing can be both professional employees and trained volunteers.

2. Locate the Center in an easily accessed area, such as within a school, a district's central office, or other suitable facility, such as a Pulaski County Education Service Cooperative, recommended earlier in this section on *page 22*.

3. In addition to a bricks-and-mortar site, an online "virtual" Center can be launched, offering the same range of information as the walk-in Center. The virtual resource

should extend but not replace the physical location, which offers the benefits of wide-ranging information, personalized attention, and supportive guidance. Moreover, not all households have access to online services, and a virtual exposure may be not as appealing or informative for many parents.

4. Equip the Center to offer virtual school tours or to arrange for on-site visits so parents and students can get a firsthand experience of a school's facility, resources, and climate.

5. Consider adding a Human Resources component to the Center, enabling prospective school employees to access not only school information, but a data base showing current employment opportunities, including job descriptions, qualifications, and compensation range; access to job applications; and procedures for scheduling interviews. The range of volunteer jobs and parent involvement opportunities throughout the schools could likewise be made available.

6. Add satellite Centers in other geographic areas as the need warrants and resources permit. Equip the satellites with high-speed Internet to access all the virtual resources and appropriate display facilities of the main Center.

7. **In all inquiries about schools, whether online, at a Center, or in an individual school, require candor and thoroughness about what is—and isn't—available in each school so parents base their decisions on solid knowledge.** Nothing disappoints or shakes trust like insufficient, misleading, or tardy information.

   a. **Furnish *school profiles* that are comprehensive overviews of each school's programming, operations, achievements, and resources.** For example, include:

      -school vision and mission statements;
      -staffing level, including advanced and specialty credentialing;
      -average years of staff experience in the classroom or other school positions;
      -student achievement data;
      -an outline of the academic curriculum for each grade level, including art, music, science, physical education, and any special programs;
      -learning accommodations, including remedial and advanced placement;
      -enrollment and class sizes;
      -the routine daily schedule;
      -library and laboratories (science, computer, etc.);
      -meal preparation, menu options, and dining facilities;
      -health, nursing, and counseling services;
      -the building's facilities and layout, equipment, gym, and playgrounds;
      -extracurricular activities;
      -before- and after-school programs, field trips, and special events;
      -transportation to and from school;
      -parent involvement, volunteer opportunities, school-community partnerships;
      -distinctive features and options.

   b. For schools that have been granted waivers or are in any sort of academic or fiscal distress, readily identify and define the meaning of such exceptions or conditions.

Explain the extent to which they could alter the availability of certain programs and services or affect the school's longevity.

    c. For each grade-level category of schools (that is, early childhood, elementary, middle, and so on), develop a written side-by-side comparison of each categorical school's offerings and features—or lack of them—as an at-a-glance checklist overview for parents, as well as for potential school employees and volunteers.

Collaboration Models

Many successful collaboration-building models are available to study and adopt or adapt to local circumstances. Examples of cooperative ventures between schools, best practices, and lessons learned offer inspiration, tools, and resources for helping schools create their own customized partnerships according to their own needs and resources.

Bringing traditional and charter schools together as teammates is a tall order. As noted earlier, schools that see themselves as at odds with one another are unlikely to envision themselves as colleagues. But with meaningful incentives and goals (such as enhancing both the teaching experience and students' achievement) coupled with potent catalysts (professional guidance and appropriate resources, which might include funding special activities or programs), potential partners can discover the worth of a mutually beneficial relationship. **They can also enjoy the growth and pride-of-ownership experience of designing and managing their own partnerships.**

1. **Recognize and respect the potential power that lies in the difference between a mandate and an invitation.** Attempting to demand collaboration between schools that have too long been cast as adversaries is likely doomed from the start. Few shotgun weddings endure. Relationships are most successful when they grow in a direction and at a pace the participants set for themselves within a supportive atmosphere.

2. **People need to see the "WIIFM's" (What's in it for me?) in any collaborative venture**. **No one's eager to invest in an effort without the prospect of a payoff that's professionally and personally meaningful and useful.** Improving the teaching-and-learning continuum in everyone's home school is the ultimate win-win payoff that's worth working toward in tandem. But school personnel themselves have to define what the prize looks like and determine how to make it work to their advantage in their home school.

3. **Experience in crafting education partnerships recommends starting small and beginning with the basics:** a convenor, an invitation, a meeting place, a skilled facilitator, and a procedural process as a roadmap. Prospective partners need an opportunity to get acquainted, share interests and experiences, and begin to discover common ground on their own terms and at their own pace.

   They'll also need guidance and support in finding a process for exploring potentially complementary needs and resources, with the freedom to explore, experiment, and learn what works**.** (See *page 23* for process suggestions, as well as *Appendix B,* discussed further below in item *g.*)

4. **Eventually, as shared experiences strengthen understanding, commitment, and trust, the schools can manage their own relationships with one another.** As initial projects mature and new needs and opportunities materialize; the schools can modify their partnership to address circumstances that change over time.

5. **Resources for guiding collaboration abound. Consider tapping into the potential of the following:**

   a. See our recommendation for a Pulaski County Education Service Cooperative, at *page 22.* Among its many education support roles, the Co-op can serve as a common-ground setting where convenors and process facilitators can guide and support fledgling traditional-charter teamwork toward eventual full-fledged collaborations.

   b. Within the state's existing Co-ops, some staff specialists are seasoned in group facilitation and planning processes. Their experience can be rallied to assist in creating an overall plan for helping Pulaski County schools learn to lean in toward one another.

   c. Highly proficient collaborative-planning experts and facilitators are available through organizations such as the International Association of Facilitators (*www.iaf-usa.org*) and the Institute of Cultural Affairs (*www.ica-usa.org*), as well as other organizations. The broad scope of these professionals' vast skills includes facilitating all manner of collaborative engagement, including consensus building, decision making, and strategic planning.

   d. Local expertise in building successful education partnerships is resident in the LRSD Partners in Education office, part of the Volunteers in Public Schools program, among the oldest and most respected such programs in the nation. Administrative personnel in the PCSSD and NLRSD are also knowledgeable about promoting schools' relationships with other partners.

   e. The Arkansas Leadership Academy is well grounded in collaborative transformation, having served as an energetic liaison and change agent throughout the state since the early 1990s. Its partners and academy graduates can be found throughout the state, representing all types of education, civic, and business entities.

   f. Earlier in this document, we extensively cited the January 2017 *Bridging the District-Charter Divide to Help More Students Succeed* report from the Center for Reinventing Public Education. The research is eye-opening and recommended reading for everyone interested in promoting a traditional-charter school rapprochement.

   The authors are forthright about the significant challenges inherent in pursuing collaboration. They're also candid that failures are frequent, with collaborations between charters and traditional schools hard to start and harder to maintain. Nevertheless, the narrative cites examples of significant successes and lessons learned.

But the report is short on process specifics, that is, a flow of sequential "how to" steps that propel and undergird progress toward cross-school teamwork. So, we've supplemented this report, described in the next point below, with a well-established framework for developing partnerships in education.

g. An addendum (*Appendix B*) to this report outlines **sequential steps for building education partnerships**, a process developed by the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) in Washington D.C. Decades of NAPE's experience in education collaborations have shown that successful matches are characterized by certain complementary themes, for example:

- **Active, visible support of top leaders** on both sides of a partnership equation is essential.

- **The geographic proximity of potential partners can enhance their likelihood of successfully starting and sustaining a working relationship.** "Nearby" more readily engenders "neighborly," because the cohorts can get together easier and thus more often. Trust and productivity grow when people are regularly involved with one another and feel free to explore possibilities, test them, and learn what works.

- **Start small to learn how to succeed big.** Partnerships of manageable size are one of the keys to their success. Beginning with one or two realistically achievable goals keeps partners from feeling overwhelmed. Small successes sustain enthusiasm and can be built upon to open doors to broader collaboration and grander goals.

Part II
Strategic Planning and Research

> *Where there is no vision, the people perish….* ***Proverbs 29:8***
>
> *Where the vision is not shared, the people war against each other.* ***Modern Corollary***

Introduction and Background

The initial charge the State Board of Education gave the Stakeholders Group included providing the research necessary for data-driven decisions that would underpin a comprehensive strategic plan for public education in south Pulaski County. Due to lack of financing for research and a subsequent change in SBE focus, the original scope of our inquiry was narrowed.

We strongly believe the original charge is a lost opportunity and a need that remains very much present, as evidenced by voters' resounding defeat of LRSD's May 2017 proposed millage extension and subsequent comments from all sides. The prospects of effective collaboration in Little Rock hinge on deliberate, intentional planning and policies that promote collaboration and also recognize and respond to the effects that charters and traditional public schools have on one another. Ultimately, any proposed plan must not only *recognize* and *respond*, but also *prevent* adverse effects on public schools and their students.

In this part of the report, which is based on our early research, we offer the Board and ADE our observations and suggestions about several of the topics in the broader charge we were initially given.

During the SBE's March 31, 2016 hearing about eSTEM, LISA, and other charter schools' applications for expansion, several citizens and officials commented on the need for broad strategic planning. They included Representative Clarke Tucker, Representative Charles Blake, Senator Joyce Elliott, and LRSD Superintendent Baker Kurrus. All of them called for a delay in approving the charter applications while the community developed a strategic plan for all public education in Little Rock. During that meeting, Representative Tucker remarked:

> And I am going to respectfully submit that there is a third choice, and that is that we do something that has never been done before in the history of the state – that is for this organization (SBE), which is the leading policy making body for education in Arkansas, to create an opportunity for a city that has both charter schools and traditional public schools to come up with a plan and work together for the betterment of public education of the entire city.
>
> Because Mr. Kurrus cannot make a plan. It's impossible to make a plan for effective public education for the students in this school district if the only view that this Board takes when charter applications come before it are the

merits of the charter schools alone and without looking at the impact on the districts that the charter schools draw from.

No one ever had the opportunity to create a broad vision for public education in Little Rock and carry it out. We have that opportunity now for the first time in decades. …I have to believe you will not regret learning more about the issue and the process and creating the opportunity for dialogue in the community that up until now has not had a chance to exist.

So what I am asking you to do is create an opportunity for collaboration between open enrollment charter schools and traditional public schools. I am asking you for the opportunity to create a broad vision for the future of public education in Little Rock.

LRSD Superintendent Baker Kurrus remarked:

What scares me is that I have no way to plan to do what you have tasked me to do, which is to build an effective community-based school district that enrolls students from a broad cross-section of our community that begins to look like our community again.

My suggestion very strongly to you is that I can help you better if you will give me an idea what the future is going to look like.

Dr. Jay Barth, a member of the SBE, had moved on March 31, 2016:

Working with an outside consultant, the effected school districts and the charter schools in the area, the ADE shall provide a strategic plan for public education, traditional, and open enrollment charter schools south of the Arkansas River in Pulaski County in order to guide the evaluation of future charter proposals.

Research, the Planning Foundation

Given the ideological and political nature of the charters-versus-traditional schools debate, and the desire to bring the schools into a collaborative relationship, **we urge the State to ensure that all planning for the schools is based on current, comprehensive research**. **That research must produce data that are then thoroughly analyzed and rendered as readily understandable, usable information for decision making at all levels.**

Leaders and practitioners in any part of a system can't afford to create plans and craft mandates based on incomplete or stale data. Lack of real-life, on-time information amounts to taking on a job with obsolete tools. **Additionally, broad research and hard facts shine a light on unexamined assumptions and customs, biases and favoritism, hidden agendas and influences, and business-as-usual blindness.** Thus, pertinent data are the foundation for decision making, long-term planning, and subsequent execution, monitoring, and evaluation.

Meticulous research and planning are so vital because changes in one part of a system invariably affect other parts of the system. When the subject system involves schools in parts of Pulaski County, the reverberations will inevitably ripple countywide and far beyond. **We strongly suggest the State expand the human and financial resources sufficient to support both broad and finely focused topical research.** Research must be able to reach beyond the school technology interface and data processing that has been the routine of ADE's Research and Technology unit.

We realize that ongoing research requires both human and financial capital, and that ADE can't do it alone.

To supplement resources for topical research and input, as well as promote broad community buy-in, partner with colleges and universities, philanthropic foundations, business concerns, civic organizations, and statewide networks like Leadership Arkansas to lend their involvement and expertise in ways that dovetail with their mission, interests, and resources. Such win-win relationships strengthen the bonds of community connections and widen available resources.

Below in this part of the report, we'll describe other research endeavors we deem vital to expanding the information bank the State must draw upon for effective research, strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in an ever repeating cycle.

Actions and Consequences

One of the most significant reasons that research and broad, long-term strategic planning is so important to our entire state and its substrates, including counties and school districts, is that all actions have consequences, some expected and welcome, others unanticipated and adverse. Outcomes neither foreseen nor intended can have disruptive and damaging effects, potentially instigating a domino effect. Once momentum has gathered in a cascade of surprise consequences, the thrust can be very difficult to redirect or curtail—or almost impossible to reverse.

Failing to address the big picture and the long view can lead to unforeseen conditions that possibly could have been avoided or reshaped with circumspect forethought. Piecemeal planning is short-sighted and ultimately counterproductive, because tunnel vision's narrow focus leaves too much unanticipated and unattended. "What if" scenarios should always be factored into wide-angle, long-term planning. The dog catches the car; then what?

The tools and expertise for comprehensive research and far-sighted planning are available. An ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure, if we have the collective wisdom and will to move forward along such a prudent path.

Strategic Planning

The SBE's initial charge to the Stakeholders Group included providing the research necessary for data-driven decisions to serve as the foundation for a comprehensive strategic plan for public education in South Pulaski County. As noted earlier, the funding for such research wasn't available and our original scope of inquiry was truncated as a consequence. **But the**

continuing absence of a community strategy for public education that enjoys some level of consensus will make any meaningful intra-school collaboration far more difficult and lead to serious inefficiencies in expenditures of scarce public funds.

Ideally, leaders would place a moratorium on closing schools, building new schools, expanding existing schools, and consolidating or creating new school districts in the county for a period of time sufficient for thorough research and long-term, comprehensive planning for the public schools in the entire county. We recognize that those horses are already out of the barn, and indeed, some believe the barn has been set ablaze. The resulting dust and ashes make the task of developing a community vision more difficult, but not less important.

The State will be both wise and prudent to undertake an overarching strategic plan for Pulaski County's public schools and to begin the necessary wide-ranging research to support that effort. Shaping a preferred future requires careful consideration of current conditions along with the experiences and lessons of the past and goals for the future. *If hindsight can give us insight, then all the years our Pulaski County school districts have spent in litigation should give us ample foresight and a keen desire to find ways to move forward collectively as well as collaboratively.*

The previously cited CRPE report recognizes the need for a wide community vision:

> Broad community commitment and a legal framework for cooperation are important to long-term success. For example, recognizing their mutual interests, district and charter leaders worked together to secure state passage of the Cleveland Plan–which set a common vision of education in the city–and voter approval of a subsequent property tax levy that benefits both sectors.

The report goes on to advocate the need to build strong city-wide coalitions for education and to admonish the reader not to depend on only a few key leaders, but to bring to the table everyone who wants to see the city succeed.

Citizens have the need as well as the right to participate in planning the future of the public school systems. The public's confidence in governing officials, elected or appointed, is shaken when citizens perceive a lack of transparency, fairness, and their own meaningful involvement in the decisions that bind them. Little erodes public trust as quickly as the perceived inequity of decisions over which citizens have little control and into which they've had minimal or no input. The result can be a perfect storm of confusion, resistance, and ultimately turmoil and rebellion, as witnessed in the community conflict around the LRSD's defeated May 2017 millage extension.

Open planning fosters understanding and confidence in that process. More powerfully, an invitation to join in discussion and decisions promotes mutual understanding, broader thinking, and more creative ideas. **Ultimately, changes are more acceptable and supported when they're anticipated and make sense to a participating public that's fully aware of both the problems and the possibilities.**

Thus, we urge ADE to seek broad-based participation in the strategic planning process, keeping in mind that *people tend to support what they help create.* Using the guidance of professional planners and skilled facilitators, in conjunction with active input from civic leaders, educators, and citizen representatives from all parts of the county, bring the community together to plan the future of our public schools.

Tipping Points and the Zero Sum Game

A *tipping point* is the time at which a series of small changes become sufficiently significant to cause greater, more momentous changes. A *zero sum game* occurs when the gains or losses experienced by a certain participant in a given situation is exactly balanced by the losses or gains of other participants in the situation.

In Pulaski County, if the number of public charter school seats and private school seats continues to grow while enrollment in the traditional public school districts continues to decline, which is the current situation, the traditional schools will reach the tipping point that renders them unsustainable, first politically and then financially. The State doesn't control the number of private schools in the county, but it is the sole authorizer of public charter schools. With that weighty responsibility, the State must understand how and when a tipping point occurs and its relationship to a *zero sum game*, which in this community means that every new public charter school seat is one less traditional public school seat and the dollars that go with it.

Mr. Baker Kurrus, former LRSD superintendent, addressed the State Board and also this Group. In a very clear argument, he explained that the tipping point was passed with the approval of hundreds of new seats in two competing charter school systems within the very footprint of the LRSD. His presentation to both the SBE and Stakeholders was a strong one.

We haven't made an independent assessment of whether Mr. Kurrus is correct that the State pushed LRSD past the tipping point when the SBE approved the eSTEM and LISA school system expansions in March 2016. Nevertheless, **we believe such a tipping point exists and that ADE neither knows where it is nor has any strategy to avoid it.**

We recommend that ADE immediately undertake research to establish the number and expansion rate of charter school seats the Little Rock area can sustainably adsorb while allowing the traditional public school districts to remain viable.

Input and Feedback Loops

Another major research area we believe critical to the strategic planning substrate is identifying which factors lead parents to choose certain schools for their children and, conversely, what prompts them to reject other schools. **Anecdotal opinion abounds, but the fact is no one has a solid grip on why parents choose or reject a particular school. We believe it's time to find out.**

What parents want in their child's school is best learned by directly asking the parents themselves, whether in professionally structured and conducted focus groups, forums, interviews, surveys, or other means. Identifying the values, preferences, motivations, and reasoning behind parents' acceptance or rejection of education options helps to pinpoint attributes that schools can accentuate or target for modification, expansion, or start up.

Furthermore, the research can reveal an array of misconceptions, disinformation, assumptions, doubts, fears, or faulty reasoning that can be addressed with facts, figures, direct experience, and focused marketing.

A system for regular input and feedback also needs to include all school personnel, including school volunteers and students. Their experiences and insights, like that of parents, are an information gold mine. The views of those who are most familiar with the schools day in and day out are too often overlooked. Their on-the-ground knowledge represents an enormous reservoir of valuable information that can help shape plans and reinforce commitment to school improvement.

As a deep-dive inquiry, research could include not only the public schools in Pulaski County, but surrounding school districts and parents of children in private schools as well. The research effort lends itself to the home base of a Pulaski County Co-op, recommended earlier. The process could also be initiated in all the Co-ops as a statewide study.

Such school-based research can also serve as a gateway to intra-school collaboration. Coupled with information from the school profiles (explained on *page 25*), the data can play a catalytic role in inviting and empowering public charters and traditional schools to create their own collaborative network. When schools have identified their *weaknesses* and *strengths*, they have begun the process of identifying their *needs* and *resources*, which is a basis for beginning to seek a complementary school partner.

Assessing the views of parents, staff, and students not only reveals schools' strengths and needs, the process also sets a tone of respect, inclusion, and caring. That kind of motivating and energizing climate encourages students to excel, staff to stay, volunteers to sign up, and parents to keep their children enrolled.

But gaining research gold requires regularly mining it:

To have lasting effects as an essential driver of continuous school improvement, systematic data collection and formal input and feedback loops must be integral to an established research, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation cycle.

Efficiency in Education Services

Authorizing multiple overlapping schools or school systems in the same geographic area is by definition inefficient. Duplicate administrations, staff, and facilities waste scarce public funding. The only reasonable justification for such waste is a commensurate increase in effectively delivering education services.

Clearly transparent metrics, other than the length of student waiting lists, must be developed to establish whether an improvement in overall education outcomes is sufficient to justify resource inefficiency. To be meaningful, ADE must regularly track and clearly account for duplicative or any otherwise inefficient use of public resources.

While charter advocates chant the mantra of "choice" as though offering a free education buffet, they don't seem to recognize that **unlimited choice in publicly funded programs is extremely inefficient and exceedingly expensive**. To date, the additional resources for choice in public education are being subtracted from the traditional public schools. If the public schools are indeed all part of one public system, as ADE asserts, the system can't remain healthy when one part of it is feeding off the other.

School Facilities

CRPE's *Bridging the Divide* report, as well as testimony heard by our Group, drew attention to the inequities public charters face in financing facilities. **The financing mechanisms available to them differ from those of traditional school districts. Redressing this inequity will be easier in the presence of a community consensus on a comprehensive and complementary strategy for public education.** Approaches that can place the best interests of both the traditional schools and charters on the same footing will enhance the political viability of both.

However, any solution to facilities' inequity must address the issue of using public funds to acquire real estate and construct school facilities for any non-public entities used by independent non-profit and for-profit charter schools. ADE should be able to answer to the community's satisfaction how the public's equity in real estate and improvements will be protected and retained for the long-term benefit of the tax-paying public.

School District Boundaries

In June 2015, the State Board adopted the Pulaski County Boundaries Study Report, which as explained below, envisions dismembering the PCSSD to result in a total of four school districts north of the river and a single one below it. The document was issued by a Board subcommittee charged to study school district borderlines within the county and to consider potential changes in the districts' boundaries. The report raises issues we view with serious concern, each discussed in turn under the subheadings below. For the reasons to be explained, **we urge the Board to revisit the Boundaries Report, ideally in the context of a countywide strategic framework for public education developed in conjunction with the community.**

Stability for PCSSD

Dr. Jerry Guess, PCSSD Superintendent, is widely acknowledged as the state's leading expert on school district detachment. In his testimony to the Stakeholders, he observed:

> The last thirty years have created an atmosphere of chaos, litigation, and dissatisfaction. These districts need a time period of stable, consistent operation. I think that, given the opportunity to survive as they are and continue as they are, there is every reason to believe they will recover the success and the luster they had before.

Additionally, Dr. Guess pointed out that the financial cost of forming new districts by detachment would likely be exorbitant. **The Boundaries Report stresses as *crucial* that any district must have the necessary tax base to appropriately serve its student population. However, the report stops short of determining the financial feasibility of creating new districts by dismembering PCSSD, leaving a cloud of uncertainty hanging over the district.**

If Maumelle or Sherwood were eventually detached into their own independent school districts, as recommended in the boundaries report, PCSSD would no longer be viable; the remainder of its territory would logically be merged with LRSD south of the Arkansas River.

If such a separation seems financially feasible and doesn't damage desegregation efforts, that likelihood should be made public as soon as possible, as it would lend a degree of certainty about the district's future.

If, on the other hand, research clearly shows that detachment is prohibitive, then PCSSD should be accorded the stability of continued existence, enabling the district to plan for its long-term future and position itself to effectively collaborate with other districts.

PCSSD deserves the opportunity to move forward with some confidence about its future. For both the PCSSD and LRSD, a stable environment is a key prerequisite to successfully planning and collaborating with others.

Given recent news of upcoming court proceedings that include the matter of changing district boundaries, we strongly recommend the State immediately undertake a full financial analysis to determine if the potential separations envisioned in the Boundaries Report are financially feasible and under what terms, including costs to any new districts and their supporting communities.

Sharing a Regional Tax Base

One challenge of carving a new school district out of an existing district centers on each involved community's tax base, which funds its schools. The local tax base usually differs from one place to another, thus complicating the financial details of separating school districts. A related issue is the potential for future tax-generating development in one area or the other that could be an advantage to one school district but a disadvantage to the other.

A model for a *shared regional tax base* is that of the Metropolitan Council in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region, explained in *Appendix C*. A shared tax base in an economically integrated local area could go a long way to minimize the segregative effects of "balkanized" districts, discussed next.

In any case, as decisions are contemplated, a move to divide or merge large school districts—which have a long history, respected traditions, distinct legacies, and legions of supporters—is an unsettling experience for the affected communities. **Leaders must handle any transitions with careful attention to the broad community's awareness, understanding, and preparation for the change.**

Related Research

As an additional point of information in considering boundary changes, the SBE should also be aware of the research of Mr. David Rusk, former mayor of Albuquerque, in his seminal 1993 book *Cities Without Suburbs*, published when he was a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Institute. Mr. Rusk studied the 137 largest metropolitan areas in the United States using census data from 1950 through 1990. He has since updated his book, *Cities Without Suburbs 2010,* through the 2010 census.

His findings clearly show that cities which have annexed their suburban growth—and are thus *elastic*—are more racially and economically integrated and more prosperous. On the other hand, cities that haven't annexed suburban growth—and are thereby *inelastic*—have

become surrounded by incorporated suburbs and are more racially and economically segregated and less prosperous.

Likewise, the author found the same phenomenon applied to school districts: Those areas with balkanized school districts were more segregated than those where borders incorporated their natural suburban growth. Whereas the potential consolidation of PCSSD and LRSD south of the Arkansas River would have an elastic and, therefore, potentially desegregative effect, the balkanization of school districts north of the river can be expected to have a segregative effect, based on Mr. Rusk's research.

This compelling research doesn't appear to have been considered by the Boundary Committee. It most certainly should be taken into account before any action is contemplated on redrawing school district boundaries in Pulaski County.

Incongruent Rationales

The Boundaries Committee used, and the SBE accepted, a different boundary rationale for districts north of the Arkansas River versus those south of the river.

The Committee proposed splitting the PCSSD in the north, to better represent what were termed *communities of interest*, by creating new Maumelle and Sherwood districts alongside the expanded NLRSD and Jacksonville North Pulaski School District, for a total of four school districts north of the river. But southward, the proposal was to merge PCSSD and LRSD into a single large district to achieve *economies of scale*. In a separate statement accompanying the committee report, former SBE chairman Sam Ledbetter, himself a member of the Boundary Committee, pointed out the incongruity of the logic used to arrive at the recommendations.

As stressed in the Strategic Planning and Research section of this report, even the best of intended actions can have unanticipated consequences that produce unwanted results, even results that run counter to the aim of the original action. **One such unintended consequence is that the boundary reconfigurations recommended by the Committee will result in five public school districts in Pulaski County which, due to the racial composition and distribution of the county's population, would all likely be controlled by majority-white school boards.**

The predominance of one race on a school board can reflect on how geographic voting zones have been drawn or whether at-large positions have been created. But if a school district's population is predominantly non-African-American, the school board is likely to be as well. Inequitable representation would likely be an intensely contentious issue in communities that have become increasingly divided over education issues.

Redrawn district boundaries could be viewed as an attempt to unlawfully strip African-American communities of political power by diluting their votes. Should that happen, given the different boundary rationales used north of the river as opposed to south of the river, one could reasonably conclude that such was the SBE's intent. At the very least, such a development would present the potential for litigation. **Using a single countywide rationale would be more reasonable, equitable, and defensible. However, the State should also consider other systemic options.**

PART III
POLICY ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Introduction

In this final section of our report, we address what we see as a major omission in the charter authorization process and conclude with a section listing unanswered policy questions that have arisen during the year of our work.

ADE's Charter Authorizing Panel is responsible for recommending to the SBE whether to accept, decline, or modify a petition to authorize new charter schools, a charter's expansion, or other charter modification.

When the Board votes to permit a new charter or to expand one in southern Pulaski County, that change will invariably have a domino effect on the area's entire public school system. All the public schools within the bounded area—both charter and traditional—will be affected, because all of them go to the same public well to draw their financial resources and they recruit their enrollment from the same pool of resident children. **But neither the impact of the charter changes on the public system nor the wisdom of authorizing those changes has been analyzed or measured in advance within the particulars of an all-inclusive public education plan for Pulaski County, because such a plan doesn't yet exist.**

Rethinking Charter Authorization

In his March 31, 2016 testimony to the SBE about charter school expansion, Representative Clarke Tucker pointed out that, while the responsibility of the Charter Panel Review Board is to view the merits of each individual application and determine its compliance with state law and regulations, the mission of the Board is much broader.

He explained that the Board has a constitutional responsibility to all of the children receiving public education in the state including, of course, the thousands of children educated in the Little Rock School District. Representative Tucker stressed that the Board should consider charter applications broadly to determine whether an individual application meets the greater good. Otherwise, a conflict could exist between the narrow ministerial function of an *individual* charter application approval and the broader constitutional stewardship of equity and adequacy clarified by the *Lake View* decision.

Such a conflict is almost impossible to resolve absent a community consensus around a strategic plan that's a roadmap for public education in any given scenario. **As a caring community, working our way onward and upward requires a comprehensive, tightly coordinated state-and-local strategy that systematically takes into account all manner of variables, such as facility siting, land use, transportation systems, population and socio-economic trends, along with comparative school performance data.**

At one Stakeholders meeting, ADE staff informed us that Pulaski County doesn't have two parallel public school districts: "…[T]he State is charged with educating students. We don't have parallel systems; we have one public education system." The Group was encouraged to think of this single system as a puzzle, with the traditional public schools and the public charter schools as pieces the State was trying to fit together to find the best fit for students.

But observers see strong indicators that the State is, indeed, running parallel school systems in Pulaski County. Charter schools aren't authorized according to an overarching placement or programming plan. Such a plan would be based on criteria for how each new school will complement or extend the efficacy of established schools or fill a need in an otherwise underserved geographic or programmatic area, which CRPE calls "quality school deserts." Instead, charters have been consistently promoted as competitors of traditional schools and apparently allowed to move into buildings that are vacant and available rather than a targeted spot on a "this type of school needed here" map.

The following exchange between eSTEM's CEO John Bacon and SBE member Jay Barth at the March 31, 2016 SBE hearing illustrates the problem of counterproductive ***ready, fire, aim*** decision making. After Mr. Bacon's presentation to the Board, Dr. Barth asked him about eSTEM's intention to expand into an area of declining population that was within a one-mile or, at most, two-mile radius of nine LRSD schools, all of which were under-enrolled and had thousands of seats available. Mr. Bacon's reply included:

> You may not understand this, but to be totally honest we didn't think about the Little Rock School District when we were developing this plan to serve families who have expressed an interest in our school. That wasn't the priority to say, 'What school is there or has extra space?' That wasn't part of the thought process. We were looking at the opportunity to continue to flourish in downtown Little Rock close to our current campus.

Dr. Barth remarked, "That highlights the real problem here. It all should have been a part of a comprehensive plan in which charter education and traditional school education are working together. It is so important that this planning happen before we move forward."

Mr. Bacon replied, "We want to be part of a plan, but these families cannot wait. . . . Yes, planning is great, but I don't think we can stop and delay everything and come back to this."

Mr. Bacon responded as a corporate CEO reacting to market demand would be expected to respond, except he's using public money to run his business. It isn't Mr. Bacon's responsibility to develop and implement a complementary education plan, but to follow the one the State obligates him and all other public schools to honor. Such a plan is long overdue.

As noted earlier, at this meeting the Board subsequently approved eSTEM's bid for expansion into a decidedly under-enrolled area of the LRSD. **Absent a comprehensive plan that ensures forethought and careful attention to the potentially far-reaching consequences of decisions and actions, the ready-fire-aim sequence is no surprise.**

Clearly, the State of Arkansas is legally responsible for providing equitable and adequate education to all students in the state. That responsibility also requires the State--through its Board of Education and Department of Education—to ensure judicious oversight of the schools, which must directly deliver state-mandated education within the bounds of financial prudence.

In Pulaski County, it's equally clear that the State isn't exercising management oversight of charters *in tandem with* traditional schools, such that all the public schools are working as "one public education system." The State has demonstrated no apparent effort to identify the missing pieces of the "puzzle" and then proactively place them into a *complementary* fit with established education providers without being wastefully duplicative or diminishing the financial or educational stability of established schools.

Whether by law, policy, or resource constraints, ADE and SBE have been far more reactive than proactive in Pulaski County, taking action in the absence of a strategic plan while retaining all of the legal liability. Creating a complementary network of both traditional and charter schools, located according to identified needs of local communities, will promote funding, facility, and staffing efficiencies. More importantly, schools designed to fill the gaps and counterbalance one another will enhance children's achievement potential and lift the entire community.

We urge the Board, ADE, and the General Assembly to revisit the charter authorizing process in Pulaski County by developing, ideally with the community, an overarching plan and specific blueprint for locating public schools where they're needed, especially within underserved parts of town.

Policy Questions

Several policy questions have been raised by members of the Stakeholders Group. Whether matters of regulation, practice, or law, they fall under the responsibility of the State of Arkansas and warrant consideration. We understand that answering these questions will require appropriate research, data, planning, and perhaps new or revised regulations.

At the outset of our service, the Stakeholders had understood we would assist in the strategic planning process for both charters and traditional schools. But that role was thwarted when we weren't afforded the expertise of a researcher to conduct the necessary research. Such inquiry would have included the effects new charters and expanding existing charters have on Little Rock students, why parents choose a charter while others choose a traditional school, and the financial impact of those choices. Notwithstanding, **we believe the following policy questions should be addressed immediately to accelerate the formation of a concrete strategic plan for public education in Little Rock.**

1. How often do the State's agencies precisely count the number of charter seats and analyze the impact of that seating on student enrollment and state funding in the PCSSD, LRSD, and any other affected school districts? How are the findings of such assessments factored into subsequent decisions about approving new charter schools or permitting existing charters to expand their seating or campuses? And how does the state agency inform the public of its decision-making data and process in order to promote transparency, understanding, and public confidence in fairness?

   We have pointedly addressed this concern in the Strategic Planning and Research portion of our report. Here we include this issue among our policy questions to emphasize its great importance to all aspects of our charge from the State Board. **A system of any kind can fulfill its mission only when its component parts work in complementary relationship to one another.** Collaboration or even minimal cooperation can't be

instituted, much less expected to thrive, if authorizers of new schools ignore the necessary fit and balance among all the schools that make up the overall education system.

2. What would prevent the State from requiring a weighted lottery for admission to open-enrollment charters to ensure their student enrollments more closely reflect (a) the overall makeup of the County's general population and (b) the student populations of the LRSD and PCSSD?

   As examples pointed out in the Special Education and ELL sections of our report (*pages 14* and *17*), the data we saw show that, compared to traditional schools, charters enroll a disproportionately low percentage of students who receive special education services and students enrolled in ELL programs.

3. What steps will the State take to establish criteria to grant charters according to a prioritized and weighted schedule based on research that identifies the types of curriculum, programming, and support needed in identified areas of a school district?

   For example, research reveals that seven out of ten Central Arkansas fourth graders are reading below grade level. If their reading level doesn't improve, some 65% of these students will drop out of high school and wind up on welfare or in prison. Thus, a charter school proposing intensive K-3 literacy programming would be given preference for approval (as opposed to a charter school without a pointedly identified education aim) with the children matriculating into other curriculum-complementary public schools.

   As another example, preference could be given to a charter with an early childhood education emphasis in an area in which access to such programs is deficient.

4. How soon can the State decree that new charter schools or expansion of existing charters will be granted according to a weighted schedule? The weighting would be based on "location priority" for charter schools in relation to the needs of underserved neighborhoods, the academic performance of existing traditional schools, and other pertinent criteria that could relieve the "quality school deserts" described in CRPE's *Bridging the Divide* report and noted earlier in this document.

   A proposed charter in an area of the county that meets the characteristics described above would receive approval preference over a charter proposed for a neighborhood that is adequately served by other schools.

5. How does the State enforce ADE Regulation 6.01.6.5.2 of the ADE Education Rules Governing Public Charter Schools and Ark Code Ann 6-23-301, 6-23-302, 6-23-506, which require all open-enrollment public charter schools to list their charter management organizations and their leadership, as well as to identify any financial relationships to any donors of these schools? How does the public access such information?

   The public's interest in such information is reasonable. Transparency helps break down the mistrust that plagues our community and significantly hinders collaborative relationships between the schools.

6. For school districts in academic or fiscal distress, what inquiry process will ADE use to require any charter school applicant to fully demonstrate that it will not adversely affect the academic or fiscal recovery status of the district in which the charter proposes to locate?

   Our concern stems from ADE's assertion that there is one school system made up of both public charters and traditional schools within the footprint of the LRSD. Clearly, the schools do not consider themselves members of a unified public school system.

   If all the public schools within the LRSD's borders are to learn to work together within a single system, we expect any charter applicant to be required to base its application on factors that include considerations of not only their (a) proposed location within the district, but also (b) the charter's potential complementary education role within the district, and (c) the financial and academic effects of their potential membership on the broader school district.

7. Under ADE Regulation 6.01.7, the school district in which a proposed charter would be located has the right to review the charter application. But who has that right of review when the district is under State control?

   An apparent conflict of interest arises when the State both controls the district *and* reviews the charters schools applying for approval within that district. To promote transparency and confidence in the charter approval process, we believe ADE needs to avoid a potential conflict of interest by clarifying (a) who has the right, under the described circumstances, to speak for the interests of the traditional school district, and (b) how the right to review can be invoked. We suggest (c) making records of how this regulation and process have been implemented readily available for interested persons to review. The public should have access to information that shows how the Charter Authorizing Panel and ultimately the SBE vote in relation to the vote of the local school board.

CONCLUSION

Our public schools are an integral part of the community; they belong not to a certain authority or population, but to all the people. One way or another, all of us have a stake in the schools: they're supported by public tax dollars, and the children they educate grow up to be our fellow citizens and taxpayers.

During a year of inquiry, listening, and study, we Stakeholders explored many areas and ideas directly and tangentially related to how teamwork among our public schools can be workable and rewarding, for the schools *and* the overall community. The sum of the lessons we've learned is that helping schools fulfill their potential requires all of us—leaders, educators, parents, and citizens from all parts of town and walks of life—to put our heads together as co-workers instead of butting our heads together in conflict.

Collaboration can't be a mandate but rather an affirmative choice to seek win-win solutions instead of settling for winners-and-losers schisms. Collaboration is also a process and a skill that takes commitment, patience, structure, and tools: broad research, up-to-date information, far-sighted inclusive planning; a climate of openness, optimism, and equity; and energetic, visionary leadership to set the process in motion and sustain its momentum.

But collaboration at any level will never work if it's forced or perceived as a capitulation of one group to another. Instead, it must be a genuine, good-faith move toward reconciling ideas and objectives that are squarely focused on ensuring every child succeeds in every school.

In Pulaski County, we're weary of conflict, suspicion, and flairs of anger. Continuing along the worn pathways of doing what we've done will only ensure that we get more of the same. It's time for a new direction.

In commissioning our Stakeholder Group and in outreach to the ideas and input of others, the Board of Education signaled its openness to changes that tap the positive power of collaboration and the synergy of accord. Unfortunately, when our charge was narrowed and research curtailed, we believe an opportunity was missed to further grow the community consensus necessary for meaningful collaboration between public charters and traditional schools. That opportunity still exists.

Heading in a new direction requires courage—and a compass. Our hope is that the discussions, examples, ideas, cautions, and recommendations in this report will help point the way through old barriers into rewarding new territory.

APPENDIX A

Below are the names and affiliations of the presenters and speakers who addressed the Stakeholders Group, listed in the order in which they appeared.

Mr. Johnny Key, Commissioner, Arkansas Department of Education

Dr. Denise Airola, Director, Office of Innovation in Education, University of Arkansas

Ms. Annette Barnes, Assistant Commissioner of Public School Accountability

Dr. Jay Barth, Vice-Chair, State Board of Education

Mr. Baker Kurrus, Superintendent, Little Rock School District

Mr. Michael Poore, future Superintendent, Little Rock School District

Dr. Jerry Guess, Superintendent, Pulaski County Special School District

Ms. Alexandra Boyd, Public School Program Coordinator

Leaders of Little Rock area charter schools: Ms. Luanne Baroni, Mr. John Bacon, Ms. Katie Tatum, Ms. Valerie Tatum, Dr. Mary Ann Duncan, Mr. Curtis Shack, Ms. Tina Long, Ms. Shannon Nuckols, Mr. Atnan Ekin

Mr. Scott Smith, Director, Arkansas Public School Resource Center

Ms. Dana Dossett, Director, City of Little Rock Community Programs

Dr. Gary Ritter, Faculty Director, Office for Education Policy, University of Arkansas

Dr. Richard Emmel, Teacher, Little Rock School District

Ms. Susan Harriman, Executive Director, ForwARd Arkansas

Mr. Cory Biggs, Associate Director, ForwARd

Dr. Jordan Posamentier, Deputy Policy Dtr., Center on Reinventing Public Education

Dr. Sean Gill, Research Analyst, Center for Reinventing Public Education

Ms. Mireya Reith, Chair, State Board of Education

Dr. Sarah McKenzie, Executive Dtr., Office for Education Policy, University of Arkansas

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APPENDIX B

A Process for Developing School-to-School Partnerships

An Overview and Summary based on the model of the National Association of Partners in Education

The sequential process described below will help to ensure the thorough planning, organization, and management that is basic to the success of all kinds of partnerships and collaborations within the education arena. Those relationships can be between a single school and one or more community partners, such as a business, a civic or social organization, another school, or any number of other entities.

Collaborations between schools are very workable and rewarding when the relationship is based on a shared focus on improving teaching and learning to promote success for all students. Partnerships between schools require the same solid foundation as any relationship, so the groundwork must be carefully laid. Following the steps below will guide potential partners toward a cooperative venture that's mutually beneficial to all participants.

1. **Develop awareness**

This step is actually twofold. First, become aware of the possibility that a partnership with another school can relate to what exists and what *needs* to exist within your own school. So, examine the philosophy and goals of your school and district or cohort schools, exploring conditions, problems, possibilities, opportunities, and options. Secondly, make those who will be affected by a partnership aware of its possibilities or the intention to create it: administrators, the school board, principals or directors, teachers and other school staff, parents, students, and community members. Be aware that the strength of any program developed will depend upon a high level of commitment and involvement by these same people.

Setting up an **advisory or steering committee** early on is wise. Such a group can serve as a liaison between the school and a potential partner in organizing, implementing, and maintaining the voluntary relationship. Make sure the group is representative of both the internal (school-based) and external communities, including such groups as any teachers' association, parent organizations, such as the PTA or PTSA, and student councils. Reach out to a broad base of the community, inviting diverse experience, expertise, and interest in helping to broker and support your partnership.

2. **Conduct needs assessments**

To be successful, a partnership program must fill genuine needs that are meaningfully directed toward students' success. Obtain a current, accurate, written assessment of your school's needs by actively seeking information through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, searching through attendance, achievement, and discipline data, and by direct observations. Ask all school staff members—not just teachers—to identify their needs in helping them serve children. A broad assessment will help determine the focus your partnership will have and provide the information needed to recruit partners.

3. **Identify potential resources**

At the same time needs are being determined, assess the resources, human and otherwise, within your school community. What skills, expertise, and experience are resident in your school personnel? What

programs, staff development, special activities, facilities, space, equipment, or other features or attributes distinguish your school?

4. **Develop the partnership's goals and objectives**

Goals are a board statements of purpose from which specific objectives will flow. A goal statement should reflect the needs identified through the needs assessment process, but it should also reflect the philosophy and values of the school/school district as well as the values of the community.

Example of a goal statement: The purpose of our partnership is to help maximize the effectiveness of our education programs and strengthen the relationship between the school and our partner. *Another example*: Our partnership will improve academic skills and increase student motivation to succeed in school.

An *objective* is a statement of *specific* intent—what it is the partnership will accomplish. It's measurable and determines the focus of evaluation. Objectives should identify "who, what, when, where, and how." The results of the needs assessment shape the content of specific objectives. Create as many objectives as needed to ensure that everyone understands all the specifics of each program or project to be undertaken.

Example of an objective: By the end of the spring semester, our Partnership Steering Committee will have polled the staff to complete the Professional Development Needs Assessment to share with our partner so we can mutually plan and participate in at least one cooperative professional development event during the coming fall.

5. **Develop the program design** The architecture of the program itself consists of the following steps:

a. **Examine and analyze key elements** of model programs or program components that are operating successfully in other organizations, such as the school volunteer program (structure, policies, procedures, job descriptions, recruitment strategies, and the like). Adopt or adapt what promises to work well for your situation.

b. **Identify** the administrative procedures and structural organization necessary to implement the partnership design. Where will your collaboration fit in your school's organization, schedule, and calendar? When and where will you work together with your partner? Identify decision-making chains of command and channels of communication.

c. **Write role descriptions** for those involved in the partnership, including individual staff members, ancillary personnel, parents, and the steering committee or coordinator, indicating areas of responsibility. The active members of the collaboration need to know what will be expected of them. Each individual involved in the partnership must have specific responsibilities spelled out in writing as in any job description.

Plan to implement the program

Skillful coordination of the partnership will depend upon the systematic planning that's already taken place. Implementation is the phase, described below, that transforms the relationships and understandings developed among diverse planners into hands-on realities. Create an implementation plan that includes specific time frames and identifies the individuals who are responsible for each aspect of the partnership. Most collaborative programs are implemented in the steps outlined in numbers 6-12, below.

6. **Recruitment** is the process of engaging colleagues for participation in partnership activities. Recruiting works best when tasks can be described in writing and in terms of specific projects or events and the necessary time commitment. Consider the role parents, volunteers, and students can play in your partnership.

7. **Orientation** helps partners get acquainted with one another. Include introductions to partners' facilities, history, routines, norms, and all aspects of the school and its personnel, which help develop a sense of familiarity and ease.

8. **Training**, if needed, is the specialized preparation of a partner to fulfil a certain role or perform a certain task. Most school staff have been trained in working with children, but they may need help in the most effective ways to work with their adult peers.

9. **Assignment** is assuring that each individual participant has a significant and suitable role to play in the partnership. It requires a conversation about interests, skills, preferences, concerns, and available time with a partnership coordinator or member of the Steering Committee designated for the role of helping identify the most agreeable and beneficial placement.

10. **Retention** A major strength of any partnership is a core group of participants who are invested in the collaborative endeavors because they recognize the benefits are mutually rewarding. Design a plan for maintaining morale, and include an effective communication system that encourages meaningful input and feedback for everyone who's involved in the program.

11. **Recognition** Partners commit to work with other educators beyond their own school for many reasons, which might include curiosity, a desire to learn from an "outside" educator or a willingness to share one's own experiences and expertise; a break from the routine; a desire for new friends; or seeking recognition, respect, or enhanced self-esteem. Regardless of what motivates individuals to participate in a partnership program, each one has a right to public recognition, as well as expressions of appreciation from colleagues. School partnerships usually spawn comradery while also requiring teamwork, and those *team* efforts and the shared *work* must be recognized and celebrated at various points in the calendar, not only at the close of the school year.

12. **Evaluation** is the process of collecting all sorts of data and interpreting them to determine the extent to which the initial objectives of your partnership have been reached, along with the accomplishments of your partnership and where improvements are needed. Evaluations assess effectiveness, identify weaknesses and strengths, and point to needed changes. They also help gain additional support and determine future planning. Be sure to solicit feedback from everyone who's been involved in or affected by the partnership, including administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and volunteers. Don't wait until the end of the year to check on progress; keep a finger on the partnership's pulse. If it's lagging or uneven, uncover the causes and work cooperatively to make speedy and decisive corrections.

APPENDIX C

Metropolitan Council Tax Base Sharing

The Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis-St. Paul has been practicing property tax sharing in the ten-county metro area under color of state law since 1975. More information on the program can be found at the Met Council's website at the following address: *https://metrocouncil.org/About-Us/Facts/CommunitiesF/Fiscal-Disparities.aspx*

Fiscal Disparities Facts can be viewed at that web address or ***on the following two pages***.

Fiscal Disparities Facts

Twin Cities metro area has unique tax-base sharing program

The Twin Cities attracts national and international interest because of a unique tax-base sharing program. The Fiscal Disparities Program shares tax base from commercial-industrial development in the seven-county metro area. Tax-base sharing spreads the benefits of commercial-industrial growth no matter where the property exists within the metro area.

Tax-base sharing supports the Metropolitan Council's goals of orderly and efficient economic growth, equity, and economic competitiveness. The Fiscal Disparities Program:

- Improves equity by reducing large differences in property tax wealth among communities. Commercial-industrial development tends to concentrate near regional infrastructure and services, such as highways, wastewater treatment, and transit.

- Supports cost-effective regional wastewater treatment and transportation services. Tax-base sharing reduces incentives for local communities to compete against each other and develop in less efficient ways.

- Reinforces how we compete as a metro area in the global economy.

- Encourages land uses that raise little or no tax revenue, such as regional parks and low-income housing, because participating communities share the benefits of commercial-industrial development. Likewise, it supports preserving open space and wetlands.

Tax-base sharing designed to achieve six goals

The Minnesota Legislature created the metro area program in 1971, and tax-base sharing began in 1975. State law defines six goals of the program:

- Sharing resources produced by growth of the metro area.

- Making orderly development more likely by reducing competition for tax base.

- Working within the existing system of local governments and local decision making.

- Giving incentives for all to work for growth of the seven-county metro area as a whole.

- Helping communities in different stages of development and redevelopment.

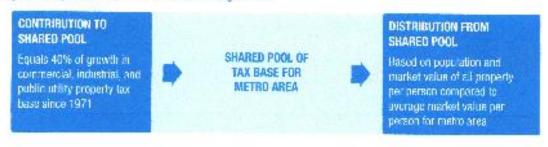- Encouraging environmental protection.

How tax-base sharing works

Local taxing jurisdictions contribute part of growth in commercial, industrial, and public utility property tax base to a shared pool of tax base. Local property tax administrators then distribute tax base from the shared pool.

Taxing jurisdictions include cities, townships, counties, school districts, and special taxing districts. Property tax base (net tax capacity) equals the taxable value of property multiplied by its class rate. Each class of property, such as commercial/industrial/public utility, has one or more class rates. The net change from tax-base sharing is the distribution from the shared pool minus the contribution to the shared pool.

Figure 1. Explanation of how tax-base sharing works

Figure 1. Explanation of how tax base sharing works

CONTRIBUTION TO SHARED POOL
Equals 40% of growth in commercial, industrial, and public utility property tax base since 1971

SHARED POOL OF TAX BASE FOR METRO AREA

DISTRIBUTION FROM SHARED POOL
Based on population and market value of all property per person compared to average market value per person for metro area

A community with below-average property value per person receives a somewhat larger share of the area-wide pool of tax base. A community with above-average property tax value per person receives a somewhat smaller share.

Results

How much tax base the program shares

The Fiscal Disparities Program shared $373 million in tax base for taxes payable in 2016. This represents 33% of total commercial, industrial, and public utility property tax base and 10% of total tax base in the seven-county metro area.

How much revenue the area-wide pool shares

The program shared $561 million in tax revenue for taxes payable in 2016.

How tax-base sharing impacts communities

More communities gain tax base (99 net recipients) than lose tax base (80 net contributors). Top net contributors concentrate near major highways and job centers.

Tax-base sharing narrows the gap between communities with the highest and the lowest commercial, industrial, and public utility property tax base per person. For communities with over 10,000 people, the ratio of the highest to lowest is 5 to 1 with sharing and 12 to 1 without it.

How tax-base sharing affects commercial-industrial property

Part of a commercial, industrial, or public utility property is taxed at an area-wide rate, and the rest is taxed at the local rate. The area-wide tax rate reduces differences in tax rates across the metro area.

More information

For more information, visit the Metropolitan Council's website at Fiscal Disparities: Tax-Base Sharing in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

HTTPS://METROCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT-US/FACTS/COMMUNITIESF/FISCAL-DISPARITIES.ASPX