

TO: The State Board of Education

FROM: The Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee

DATE: February 11, 2016

RE: Statement on Expansion of Charter Schools within LRSD Boundary

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

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

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

- concerns about how the expansion would not allow for equitable educational opportunities for all students in the city of Little Rock;
- concerns regarding the fiscal effects of the expansion on the district;
- how charter schools are not living up to the original intent in the state of Arkansas to provide innovative education to boost the achievement of low achieving students; and
- concerns about the how charter schools are leading to the segregation of student populations in the LRSD, particularly as it relates to students with disabilities, students in poverty, and limited English proficient students.

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

Facts:

1. The State Board of Education has been the sole governing body for all public schools south of the Arkansas River in Pulaski County since 2014.
  - a. The State Board took over Pulaski County Special School District based on finances
  - b. The State Board took over Little Rock School District based on academics, with additional concern over future finances.
2. Between the 2011 and 2015 there have only been five occasions in which a district, to include charter schools, has achieved annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in math, literacy, and graduation on the ESEA Report Cards.
  - a. 2014-15- Little Rock School District and Little Rock Preparatory Academy
  - b. 2013-14 ESTEM Charter
  - c. 2011-12 ESTEM High and Elementary
  - d. Only Little Rock Prep (2014-15) and ESTEM (2013-14, 2011-12) were actually considered achieving schools. Little Rock, as district, met all AMOs in math, literacy, and graduation but is still considered “needs improvement” based on distressed schools.
3. The proposed expansion of Quest, ESTEM, and Lisa totals 3000 students that would come largely from the Little Rock School District boundaries. Based on the 2015-16 Arkansas School Finance Manual this equates to the following funds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Race and status spreadsheets:

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

District and School ESEA Reports:

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

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

1. Knowing the State Board of Education is the sole governing body for public education in Pulaski County, minus the North Little Rock School District, and that there are only three instances of a charter schools in the Little Rock metro achieving all the standards on the ESEA reports since 2011, how will such an expansion improve education for students in the Little Rock School, the Little Rock School District, and Pulaski County as a whole?
2. Currently Lisa Academy and Estem are larger than 179 of the districts in the State of Arkansas and tend to enroll the most balanced racial mixture, the smallest ratio of LEP, SPED, foster, students in poverty, and students experiencing homelessness to general population students in Little Rock. Knowing that the most successful schools tend to have balanced diversity, how will the Board mitigate the increased ratio of SPED, LEP, and students of poverty in the LRSD that will likely occur should the expansion take place? (NOTE: This question assumes that the charter schools will continue to maintain their comparatively low SPED, LEP, poverty, homeless rates as compared to the LRSD.)
3. Knowing that the district is planning to build new, and improve existing, facilities how do you anticipate the expansion of new charter schools will affect the district's fiscal situation?
4. As the sole governing body of public education in Pulaski County, minus the North Little Rock School District, what are the Board's short term and long term plans for improving public education in Pulaski County?
5. What are the Board's plans for the Little Rock School District?

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

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

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

process you realize that these expansions are detrimental to the current work of the district and to the district's future, we then respectfully ask that you stop the expansions from occurring.