

**Minutes
State Board Meeting
August 13, 2026**

Present: Randy Henderson, Chair; Dr. Gary Arnold, Vice-Chair; Dr. Aaron Abbott; Ken Bragg; Leigh Keener; David Peacock; Dr. Gary Starks; Stephanie Williams, 2026 Arkansas Teacher of the Year; Jacob Oliva, ADE Secretary.

Absent: Jeff Wood; Lisa Hunter

Call to Order

The Arkansas State Board of Education (State Board) met Thursday, August 13, 2026. Randy Henderson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM, followed by a moment of silence. Arkansas School for the Deaf students Allison Howard, Grade 11, sung the Pledge of Allegiance, which was signed by Brayden Radtka, Grade 9.

Recognition

IV.1. President of Boys Nation — Sawyer Ray

Item IV.1. was presented by Secretary Oliva. Also present was Sawyer Ray, Grade 12, Fayetteville High School.

Boys Nation is a national civics program where 100 young men from Boys State programs across the U.S. and D.C. simulate U.S. Senate operations, debate legislation, and elect national officers. Participants visit government landmarks, meet with state senators, and engage with peers from Girls Nation.

Sawyer Ray, a senior at Fayetteville High School, was elected President of the 80th annual American Legion Boys Nation in July 2026, becoming the first Arkansan to hold the position in the program's history.

At Boys State, he was one of two delegates selected to represent Arkansas at Boys Nation. He earned the Nationalist Party's nomination and went on to defeat the Federalist candidate in the presidential election.

His election is historic for Arkansas, following past Boys Nation alumni such as President William Jefferson Clinton and Senator Tom Cotton.

IV.2. 2026 Arkansas' Civics Bee State Finalists

Item IV.2. was presented by Secretary Jacob Oliva. Present was Trish Villines, Executive Director, Industry Engagement – Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce. Also present were Ava Kate Fields - Russellville Junior High School, Russellville; Jai Durvasula - Barton Junior High School, El Dorado.

The National Civics Bee encourages young Americans in Grades 6, 7, and 8 to engage in civics and contribute to their communities. The competition, modeled on traditional spelling and geography bees, gives students the chance to win recognition and earn cash prizes by sharing ideas for improving their communities and showing their enthusiasm for civics.

The Arkansas State Chamber/AIA has partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and local chambers of commerce across Arkansas to host a statewide civics competition.

2026 Arkansas State Finalists:

1st place | Jai Durvasula — Barton Junior High School, El Dorado

2nd place | Ava Kate Fields — Russellville Junior High School, Russellville

Jai will go on to compete at the National Competition on October 13-14.

Changes to Agenda

None

Action Agenda

VII.1. Education Service Cooperative Annual Reports

Item VI.1. was presented by Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner. Also present were Dr. Mark Taylor, Director, Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative and Karen McMahan, Director, South Central Service Cooperative.

Ark. Code Ann. § 6-13-1020(a) requires education service cooperatives to submit an annual report to the State Board of Education for approval and outlines the content that must be included in each report. All 15 education service cooperative reports are attached to the agenda.

Following the reports is a copy of Ark. Code Ann. § 6-13-1020(a).

Pulled: Ozarks Unlimited Resources Education Service Cooperative Annual Report

A motion to accept 14 education service cooperative annual reports was made by Dr. Aaron Abbott, seconded by Leigh Keener. The motion unanimously passed.

New Business

None

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes
2. 2026-2027 Embedded

A motion to approve the Consent Agenda was made by Dr. Gary Arnold, seconded by Leigh Keener. The motion unanimously passed.

Public Comments

The State Board heard public comments from:

- Alisha Stacy

During the public comment period, Hannah Fenley deferred her time to Alisha Stacy. Later in the meeting, a motion to hear public comments from Hannah Fenley was made by Dr. Gary Arnold, seconded by Leigh Keener. The motion passed 5 Yes to 1 No (David Peacock).

- Hannah Fenley
- Julius Wright
- Charline Wright

Adjournment

Randy Henderson, Chair, adjourned the State Board meeting at 11:41 AM.

Minutes recorded by Angela Scaife.

Jacob Oliva, Secretary
Arkansas Department of Education

Randy Henderson, Chair
State Board of Education