

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
Arkansas Section 529 Plan Review Committee

Thursday, September 25, 2025, at 9:00 AM
Victory Building Conference Room, Suite 275, Little Rock, AR 72201

A meeting of the Arkansas Section 529 Plan Review Committee (“Committee”) was held on Thursday, September 25, 2025, at 9:00 AM in the Victory Building Conference Room, Suite 275 and via Microsoft Teams virtual meeting. Present at the meeting were Treasurer of State, John Thurston; Dr. Ken Warden, Commissioner, Arkansas Division of Higher Education; Mark White, Director of Arkansas Teacher Retirement System; Chris Scott, Acting Director, 529 Programs and Financial Education; Kim Shockley and Johnny Saldana, with Ascensus College Savings; John Peace with Wright, Lindsey & Jennings LLP; John Park with BlackRock; Ryan Matthews and Christy Miller with Vanguard; Lora Mosley and David Fahr with The Communications Group; and other staff from the Treasurer of State’s Office.

The press was notified in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Treasurer Thurston called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He then asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from June 17, 2025. Dr. Ken Warden moved for approval, Treasurer Thurston seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

Chris Scott presented for approval checks and invoices paid during Q1 FY 2026. Dr. Warden moved for approval, Director White seconded the motion, and the checks and invoices were approved.

Mr. Scott then proposed earmarking \$70,000 for the marketing budget of FY 27 for print media. Director White made a motion to approve the allocation, Dr. Warden seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

Mr. Scott gave the director’s report which summarized the plan’s strong media and outreach momentum this summer, including Treasurer John Thurston’s feature in *Arkansas Money & Politics* highlighting employer benefits of the Brighter Future 529 plan and a successful “529 Night” with the Arkansas Travelers that generated 400 landing-page views and more than 70 sweepstakes entries. Staff also exhibited at the Economics Arkansas REAL Conference, hosting a table, providing materials, and answering educator questions, while APERS received a presentation on the plan’s payroll deposit feature. September began with the launch of the GROW program at Murrell Taylor Elementary and continued with National College Savings Month outreach through an op-ed, multiple TV appearances, and community engagement. Upcoming efforts will focus on open enrollment and holiday messaging.

John Peace presented a budget report for quarter one of fiscal year 2026. Mr. Peace stated that expenses were within budget, and that the balance of the two bank accounts (Southern Bancorp & First Security Bank) was \$963,000 as of the end of August.

Mr. Peace then presented the revised Program Rules and Investment Policy Statement for approval, highlighting necessary changes to reflect laws passed during the most recent legislative session. Dr. Warden moved for approval, Director White seconded the motion, and the revised Program Rules and Investment Policy Statement was approved.

Lastly, Mr. Peace also presented a data sharing agreement regarding the GROW program between the committee and the Clinton School, serving in a research capacity for the GROW program. Director White moved for approval, Dr. Warden seconded the motion, and the data sharing agreement was approved.

Kim Shockley reported on the direct 529 plan, highlighting continued positive asset growth based on inflows and market performance, continual increase in account owners, and increased average account balance.

John Park with BlackRock reported on the Advisor 529 plan, summarizing that there were currently \$838 million in assets, and in Arkansas 68 firms are licensed to sell the plan that reflect 510 advisors and 4,470 accounts. Mr. Park also commented that Arkansas’s advisor sold plan shows a greater rate of growth than other states and has the third largest average account size.

Ryan Matthews presented Vanguard’s quarterly report and highlighted strong U.S. stocks performance over the past year with returns close to 10%, modest U.S. bonds performance, and Arkansas’s portfolios with higher allocation to equities has strong positive three month returns.

Mr. Scott then advised the committee that since the previous meeting's discussion on Act 937, there have been several follow-up conversations with Vanguard, BlackRock, and Ascensus regarding any potential pricing impact on the proposed changes. Mrs. Shockley discussed the change's impact on various portfolio options in the direct sold plan and advised there would be no participant cost impact. Mrs. Schockley advised that for the Advisor sold plan, the only participant cost impact would occur with those invested in Emerging Markets ETF, who would see a two-cent annual increase for every \$100. Dr. Warden moved to approve the finalization of the portfolio changes as presented, Director White seconded the motion, and the finalization of the portfolio changes was approved.

There being no further business, Treasurer Thurston adjourned the meeting at 9:24 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Scott, Acting Director of 529 Programs and Financial Education