

Observer Corps Report

March 15, 2023

APS Board of Education meetings, 18 January, 1 February, 15 February and 1 March 2023

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The Board of Education meetings all follow a similar structure: presentation of the agenda, a public forum and then the Board Members discuss Board internal business. I “attend” the YouTube live stream of the meetings; I don’t attend in person. I report on topics most relevant to LWVCNM policy positions.

The public forum section of all 4 recent meetings was dominated by statements (members of the public have a one to two minutes, timed, to make statements) expressing concerns about safety issues at West Mesa High School, reacting to a recent incident where a gun went off in a class.

<https://www.krqe.com/news/albuquerque-metro/student-arrested-after-gun-goes-off-at-west-mesa-high-school/> Specifically, a number of students and staff – including teachers reading statements by their students – are concerned about the presence of guns on campus and the potential for more on campus shootings, as well as other criminal activity. Many called for more and better-paid security personnel on campus. Other issues raised at the public forums were: 1- the need to improve services to immigrant and refugee newcomer students and parents in the APS system. In particular, more information in more languages is needed, along with better, more accessible statistics about refugee student population. 2- owners of private pre-schools are concerned that if APS starts providing pre-school classes, APS will run some of the private pre-schools out of business without really replacing the services they currently provide.

A new development at the 1 March meeting is the return of some of the same people who were attending the public forum in the fall to accuse APS schools of “grooming” students to assume LGBTQ+ identities and of not involving parents enough in counselling and curriculum decisions at schools. (These accusations are obviously not well-founded.) At the 1 March meeting, members of this group attempted to play a video made by Project Veritas, characterized by Wikipedia as a far-right activist group, which supposedly showed a teacher proposing not to share gender identity information with parents. The Rio Rancho Observer has reported on this video: <https://rrobsver.com/project-veritas-hits-metro-school/>

The Board internal business at all meetings involved extensive, detailed discussion of developing a strategic plan for APS in order to satisfy the settlement requirements of the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit, which addressed inequities faced by certain groups of students in the New Mexico public school system: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/yazzie-martinez-updates/> Specific issues discussed were: how to improve the curriculum to comply with the Yazzie-Martinez settlement; how to define and track interim goals that are intended to insure equity across the school districts (taking into account differences in the economic resources and ethnic makeup of different districts); formalization of a strategic plan defining desired student outcomes. It was emphasized that the community needs to be involved in defining goals and assessing outcomes, to insure community values are respected and that the Board of Education is held accountable by the affected communities. The discussion involves not only the Board but also APS Supervisor Scott Elder and members of his team, and an outside advisor. I have written the President of the Board of Education to ask if the drafts of the Strategic Goals document can be shared with the LWVCNM.