

Observer Corps Report, April 13, 2023
APS Board of Education meetings, 15 March and 5 April 2023
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The Board of Education meetings all follow a similar structure: a public forum and then the Board Members discuss Board internal business. I “attend” the YouTube live stream of the meetings, and I report on topics most relevant to LWVCNM policy positions.

A continuing development at the 15 March and the 5 April meetings is the presence of people accusing APS schools of manipulating students to assume LGBTQ+ identities and of not involving parents enough in counselling and curriculum decisions at schools. Some of the people presenting this point of view mention Project Veritas as a source for their accusations. Others – especially at the 15 March meeting – accused APS policies of violating NM State laws protecting the rights of parents. The people representing these points of view at the public forum sometimes give the impression of following a “parents’ rights” script: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/28/opinion/parents-rights-republicans-florida.html> Some parents and school staff at the public forum for other reasons, though, gave statements of support of the APS parental rights policy and policy towards LGBTQ+ students. Other issues raised at the public forum sessions on 15 March and 1 April were: a continued concern about safety from gun violence from students, parents and staff at West Mesa HS, and owners of pre-K schools and day care centers continue to express concern about APS involving itself in pre-K education. At the 1 April meeting, several parents and some teaching staff expressed concerns about the new calendar and schedule, which were to be discussed and approved at that meeting.

The 15 March Board meeting proper continued to involve 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 fact, the vast majority of students – in the New Mexico public school system: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/yazzie-martinez-updates/> The interim goals and guardrails that have been adopted and are now being planned for in the BoE budget are found at this link: <https://www.aps.edu/about-us/board/news/goals-and-guardrails>. The approach formalized in the APS document is aligned with Student Outcomes Focused Governance policies for public schools that are being adopted in Great Cities school systems across the US: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622543.pdf>

At the 5 April Board meeting, there was a lengthy presentation and detailed motivation of the 2023-2024 calendar. Even though concern was expressed about the increase in hours and days that students will be spending in the classroom, the increased instructional time requirement was passed into law by the 2023 NM State legislature and must be respected by APS starting with the coming school year. Another long discussion concerned a request for expansion by East Mountain HS (a charter school). The expansion was partially approved, with a strong request from the Board to address a lack of diversity at the school and a perceived lack of recruitment from local communities to address Yazzie-Martinez goals. There was an update on school safety, with an interim report sketching proposals around a pilot program to address gun violence in schools that will begin in the fall. The program will not only emphasize consequence for those caught in violation of the policies but also restorative practices that aim to prevent violence. Finally Superintendent Scott Elder gave a brief update about the new Student Outcomes Focused Governance policies. His office is still correlating APS guidelines with official NM State guidelines responding to the Yazzie-Martinez ruling.