

Observer Corps Report, September 11, 2023

APS Board of Education meetings, 19 July, 2 and 16 August, 6 September 2023

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I “attend” the YouTube live stream of the meetings, and I report on topics most relevant to LWVCNM policy positions.

Public Forum. The public forum was lightly attended over the summer. Important themes were: several parents expressed support for bilingual education and, specifically, the bilingual program at Washington Middle School which some feared was threatened by a proposed expansion of the Coronado magnet school. Concern was expressed for staffing shortages, such as a lack of special education teachers and teachers for the dual language programs. Members of so-called parents’ rights groups (<https://www.weareteachers.com/parents-rights-opinion/>) continue to attend regularly and falsely accuse APS teachers and counselors of promoting abortions, transgender care, gender identity to even young students, without the knowledge or consent of parents. As noted in previous reports, this is a national movement, and the local group seems to be well organized, since the public forum participants at each meeting seem to come with similar information and sources for their accusations (none of them seem to be referring to actual incidents at any APS school).

The Board meetings proper continued to be dominated by detailed discussions implementing the strategic five-year 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/>. One effect of the new Student Outcomes Focused Governance approach that informs the five-year plan is that the Board is monitoring things like attendance and testing results regularly, holding the Superintendent’s office to account to provide data in a much more systematic and transparent way. More information about reports and goals the Board is monitoring during the meetings is now included on the APS website where the Board meeting schedule is listed. Regular community listening sessions are now on the Board’s schedule so that the community should be playing more of a role in decision making.

Given the current staffing shortage for teachers and other school staff, it is important to note that two items came up for approval that might help to improve that situation: the teachers’ union’s new agreement with APS, which improves salaries and working conditions for teachers, and an updated health insurance proposal. These two proposals were passed nearly unanimously, except that one Board member did not approve the union’s proposal and presented a lengthy statement to motivate her decision.