# ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS TOWN HALL

CONVENED BY NEW MEXICO FIRST
ON BEHALF OF THE
NEW MEXICO LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
SENATOR CYNTHIA NAVA, CHAIR ~~ REPRESENTATIVE RICK MIERA, VICE CHAIR

On September 22-24, 2005, 125 participants and observers convened at the University of New Mexico to address whether Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) should be deconsolidated or otherwise restructured.

Town Hall participants included teachers and other educators, administrators, parents, students, and business and community members. A total of 37 scholarships were made available to students, teachers and parents. To ensure that District leadership did not dominate the forum, they were limited to no more than 25 percent of the registrations. Ultimately, 17 APS administrators participated.

The purpose of this report is to provide the <u>VISION</u> and <u>Recommendations</u> coming out of the extensive work done by the participants.

Using the New Mexico First process, the Town Hall participants:

Considered data about APS and other school systems, as contained in the APS Town Hall research report, prepared by UNM professors Dr. Nancy Lopez and Dr. Donald Zancanella, and presented by speakers: Kathy Christie, vice president for Knowledge Management at the Education Commission of the States in Denver; Dr. Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools in Washington, D.C.; and Dr. Jerry Wartgow, former superintendent of Denver Public Schools;

#### Developed a vision for APS;

#### Developed 15 recommendations using a consensus process, and

**Discussed APS' strengths and its weaknesses** (Appendix A to this document contains a summary of participant statements of APS' strengths and weaknesses);

#### VISION STATEMENT

The Town Hall envisions APS as a unifying force in the greater Albuquerque area. It is a school district that realizes and supports the potential of every student and prepares them for life after high school. All students graduate with basic life skills and academic proficiencies that give them the ability to achieve personal goals for success in a changing global economy. It is an efficient and accountable organization built on active stakeholder involvement. High-quality, dedicated educators and administrators are well trained and supported with equitable access to the resources they need to create a safe and engaging learning environment that facilitates student success.

#### **TOWN HALL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. APS remains a single school district and emphasizes its role as the unifying force by improving its core relationships with government, businesses, families and community, using research-based practices.
- 2. APS leads a comprehensive communitywide system of education from pre-K to postsecondary that involves business, community, family, and all education partners in preparing students for life and career.
- 3. Each school develops an effective program that increases parent involvement in all school and district-level decision making, including the development of the strategic plan and work with the legislature on incentives, such as tax breaks, that would facilitate parent involvement.
- 4. APS identifies opportunities for more collaboration on efficient, innovative, and effective operations.
- 5. APS leads a communitywide partnership that places a high value on, and generates passion about, education by collaborating with city and county agencies and the private sector to advance the community school concept.
- 6. Policy makers recognize that the needs of Albuquerque are different than the needs of other districts. Flexibility should be allowed at the state level for meeting the needs of large urban districts, as well as for meeting the needs of other districts.
- 7. APS strengthens communication practices and relationships within the district.
- 8. APS provides flexibility (within state mandates) through site-based management.
- 9. A system is implemented whereby APS policies, organizational structures and

- directives are periodically reviewed; data are collected and analyzed to determine if the implemented policies, organizational structures and directives have impeded or enhanced student performance.
- 10. APS moves towards a pure feeder cluster structure to increase the ability of the clusters to innovate in order to meet community needs, including: 1) flexible use of all funds (including special education), 2) alternative structures within clusters, such as K-8, year- round and vocational schools, and 3) more opportunities for students to move across clusters to meet their needs.
- 11. APS implements a responsive, efficient and effective research-based process for the recruitment and retention of high-quality personnel.
- 12. APS is provided with options (e.g. magnet career prep high schools) similar to those that Charter Schools have without loss of negotiated agreements for school employees.
- 13. The APS Board is responsible for:
- \* Setting policy;
- \* Entrusting the superintendent to make administrative and instructional decisions and maintain the stability of the district:
- \* Recognizing and rewarding outstanding educators and administrators.
- 14. A significantly lower pupil-teacher ratio is funded and national standards for pupil-to-support staff ratios are met.
- 15. APS closes achievement gaps by adopting high academic standards and attending to socio-economic needs and emotional and physical wellness in a safe learning environment to ensure students have the maximum opportunity to increase learning and be successful.

#### APPENDIX A

The Town Hall participants were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of APS that would affect the District's ability to implement the Vision.

### The following includes consensus 'strengths' statements by the participants.

- The district's size allows for diverse programs and a variety of charter schools.
- APS's outstanding, dedicated, creative, concerned, and increasingly culturally diverse teachers, administrators and staff are highly qualified when compared to other districts.
- APS employs a standards-based educational system that enables APS to focus on core content, thereby achieving its mission preparing students to succeed in a changing world.
- Community organizations, businesses, teachers, and parents give time, funds, and emotional support.
- APS's large size creates significant funding capacity for financial and political leveraging, and model programs such as master planning process.
- APS benefits from a community that supports educators and cultural richness with extremely longstanding community roots that are unique and valuable.

## The participants identified obstacles that could prevent APS from implementing the vision, including but not limited to:

- The lack of resources and the allocation of existing resources present a significant problem in meeting the educational needs of a diverse ethnic, socio-economic student population.
- APS assumes greater liabilities than other districts in providing high-cost services expected by the community that are not reimbursed, such as social workers, counselors and librarians.
- Some communication links between teachers, students, administrators, parents, community members, taxpayers, and elected officials are broken, leading to a lack of discussion on complex issues such as resource allocation and academic rigor.
- Unfunded, external mandates (No Child Left Behind, funding providers, NM Public Education Department, etc.) overload the current system and prevent it from functioning well.
- It is difficult to focus due to so many expectations.
- There are prejudice and discrimination among different groups in the community and problematic "class" systems among the employees within the school system.