



MINUTES

Las Cruces Public Schools Board of Education Special Meeting/Work Session

Thursday, May 9, 2013 • 4:00 p.m.

LCPS Administration Building Board Room • Televised by LCPS.TV

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Call to Order*

Señora Maria Flores called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

B. *Roll Call*

Roll call was taken by Mr. Chuck Davis. Those present:

- Dr. Connie Phillips was absent at the time of roll call but arrived later
- Señora Maria Flores, Vice President
- Mr. Chuck Davis, Secretary
- Mrs. Barbara Hall, Member
- Dr. Bonnie Votaw, Member

Superintendent Stan Rounds was also in attendance.

C. *Approval of Agenda*

A motion was made by Mr. Davis and seconded by Dr. Votaw to approve the agenda. The vote was approved unanimously.

The Superintendent suggested that until Dr. Phillips arrives, they move to the first item under the Superintendent's Report.

Student Presentation – La Academia Dolores Huerta Charter School

Superintendent Stan Rounds welcomed the middle school students from La Academia Dolores Huerta charter school along with their Principal, Octavio Casillas. Under the direction of José Lopez, the musical group Accordiones de Oro (Golden Accordions) performed "El Circo" and "El Columpio."

Dr. Phillips arrived at the meeting.

II. RECOGNITIONS

A. *LCPS Excellence for Student Achievement Award*

Dr. Phillips said the Board solicited nominations to recognize individuals exhibiting outstanding achievements or who are making an impact to improve student achievement. The Board presented awards to three educators: Cynthia Aragon, Desert Hills Elementary; Nancy Orta, East Picacho Elementary; and David Morales, Mayfield High.

Ms. Aragon of Desert Hills was nominated by a fellow teacher. She is a special education Educational Assistant and among her many accomplishments, she works after-hours, prepares the classroom, works independently; is known as a team player; and is a

long-time parent volunteer for other schools. She is also responsible for the school's computer literacy program.

Nancy Orta of East Picacho was nominated by a fellow teacher. Ms. Orta is the school's reading interventionist; explores different avenues for students to reach their goals; offers materials and research to other educators; has co-chaired the Student Assistance Team; and uses her own personal finances to recognize student readers and to give them kudos at school.

David Morales of Mayfield High was nominated by his Principal. As a social studies teacher, he excels in student engagement. He has good relationships with students and his classes are inspiring while still rigorous. Mr. Morales' students were involved at the New Mexico Legislature and he was a facilitator this year for the district's new Institute for Parental Engagement Program.

III. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. Student Presentation – La Academia Dolores Huerta Charter School – presented earlier

B. Discussion – Renewal of Las Montañas Charter High School's charter

Superintendent Rounds stated that last year, the Board of Education conditionally renewed Las Montañas Charter High School's (LMCHS) charter, based on several stipulated improvements. Although action will not take place today, he indicated that he wanted to publically state that the LCPS administration will recommend that the charter not be renewed. The primary reasons: 1) Financial management of the school in the last audit had significant audit findings which caused the LCPS to have a qualified audit; 2) Ricky Williams, director of secondary instruction, reviewed the educational requirements of the stipulations and there has been an overwhelming failure to meet those expectations. Terry Dean, associate superintendent for finance, also presented a rationale in the Board's meeting materials for not renewing the charter.

Mr. Rounds said before the Board's next meeting, Las Montañas Principal Richard Robinson can provide further information regarding the stipulations; however, the intent at the next regular meeting is to recommend that the charter school no longer be continued.

Mr. Robinson provided each Board member a notebook containing the school's responses to the instructional audit findings. He said that the notebook is not complete, lacking the technology plan, facility plan and financial information; although, he noted that the school has worked diligently to address the findings. Mr. Robinson said that changes do not take place overnight and that changes have begun. He also said LMCHS intends to pursue a charter through the state but the school first needs to be in compliance. He added that LMCHS wants to continue as a viable charter school to serve the local community.

Mr. Rounds thanked Mr. Robinson and asked that any new materials be provided seven days prior to the next regular Board meeting, which is May 21, 2013.

Sra. Flores inquired about the number of graduating seniors. Mr. Robinson said out of 41 seniors, 37 will graduate on May 17. Dr. Votaw asked for clarification as to whether there were 41 students at the beginning of this school year; and, she asked about the number of students in 9th grade who belong in this cohort. She asked that the information be provided in the report.

Mr. Robinson said he was under the impression that LMCHS was going to make an extended presentation today, which would have included more data. Mr. Rounds said that the cohort had 95 students and as of two weeks ago, was at 44. Mr. Robinson agreed that the population decreased this year.

Sra. Flores then asked whether students who leave LMCHS go back to their home school. Mr. Robinson said they have a high mobility rate and that some drop out, some return to the home school, some move away, and some return to Las Montañas. Sra. Flores also asked that answers to questions that were asked of LMCHS students and staff by the audit team be forwarded to the School Board. Mr. Rounds said it would be provided.

Dr. Phillips said that instructionally, Las Montañas has not reached the goals that were previously outlined and there is a great deal of concern about the financial audit issues, particularly because of the possibility of the audit findings hurting the district's bond rating. The Board's concerns all along have been about the students and she asked Mr. Rounds about a plan regarding where the students would go should the school close. He responded that the students are part of LCPS and certainly would be the district's responsibility. Absorbing the students back into LCPS classrooms would be part of the district's restructuring of alternative programs. Options would include placing them into non-traditional services and offering reintegration into traditional classrooms – whichever best meets their individual needs and choices.

Dr. Votaw said LCPS had some of the same problems as Las Montañas has with providing help to this targeted group of students. However, the ongoing audit findings are worrisome as is the impact to the district bond rating.

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Davis excused himself so that he could attend the Doña Ana Community College commencement.

C. *Budget Update*

Mr. Rounds said the 2013/14 budget will be tight and he outlined some of the issues to address in budget preparation: a) a fall in the Training and Experience index, a reduction of approximately \$1.9 million in resources; b) a lower level in the State Equalization Guarantee; c) a projected cash balance of \$10 million which is \$800,000 lower than last year's beginning point; d) increases in the district's and employees' ERB contributions; e) increased utility costs.

Mr. Rounds said the budget will also need to fund an additional 28 instructional employees – two educational assistants and 26 teachers; of the 26, 18 are due to redistribution of students to Centennial High School and to protect existing high school class sizes. Eight teachers are needed in kindergarten and first-grade to normalize those class sizes.

Employees' contributions to medical insurance will rise, therefore, offsetting the state-approved one percent average salary increase. Plus, principals' salary inequities will be addressed over a four-year period, and there is a need to increase substitute pay.

The Superintendent called it a “bare bones budget” with little embellishments and no excess materials. A Town Hall Meeting will be held on May 14 to provide the public with more information on the \$180 million operational budget.

Dr. Votaw said it should be made clear to employees that the small raise probably won't be seen in the average paycheck. Mr. Rounds agreed that it's likely many paychecks will fall slightly; some will stay level.

D. Field of Dreams Turf Update

Superintendent Rounds said a committee has been working on how to select, what to select, and under what timeline to put in turf at the LCPS Field of Dream. The three current proposals, which fall under Cooperative Education Services pricing, are less than \$800,000 each. With state funding of \$351,000, there is still a balance of approximately \$425,000. Mr. Rounds outlined a plan to use gate receipts funding to be able to make annual transfers back into the special projects line item to cover the balance. This would necessitate an adult ticket price increase of \$2.00 in order to generate the necessary revenue. There would also be revenue from renting of LCPS facilities. Dr. Phillips asked about how the facilities usage estimate was established. Mr. Rounds said past usage was used as a guide; the costs to the renter would be reasonable and would be much lower than NMSU's rental fees.

Dr. Phillips proceeded to comment on the need to acquire financial assistance from boosters — approximately half of the overall costs — which was a request that the Board made when funding was first discussed. Mr. Rounds said discussions have been held with potential donors; however, aside from golf tournaments, the major donations have not been solidified.

Sra. Flores voiced her concern of having turf after hearing that LCPS is operating on a bare bones budget. She also mentioned her ongoing concerns: excess heat; chemicals; students breathing in particulates; potential for injuries; lack of cooperation from the community to pay for the turf. She also referenced a YouTube video (made five years ago). Dr. Phillips was interested to know from the vendors how the issues raised in the video have since been improved; for example, chemicals that are no longer used. Sra. Flores concluded by saying she is not anti-sports but does not feel comfortable with turf.

Mr. Rounds said he is paying close attention to the Board's concerns and has received excellent reports about: lower costs; improved engineering with the particulates; and studies showing fewer injuries and increased performance. It was also mentioned that the turf used in El Paso is not watered down prior to play because the humidity makes the conditions worse.

Dr. Votaw raised concerns about the toxicity of the material and the temperatures of the turf during play. She asked about seeing comparative charts from the vendors on those issues. She would also like internal monitoring and an audit system in place to determine how much of the "soil" from the turf is carried off by the athletics and she wants to be able to compare the number of injuries, depending on whether past records are available.

Dr. Phillips asked whether an independent organization can be found that has studied turf and has confirmed that it is safe for students.

Physical Plant Director Bobby Stout said ASTM, the American Society of Testing Materials, has done that. ASTM has checked the chemical composition; the lead content of the rubber in the "soil;" and the level polyurethane in the grass blades. Sra. Flores wants to know whether the unwanted chemical in plastic bottles is in turf.

Mr. Rounds said tours to several fields where the manufacturers have examples in place would be visited, including El Paso. Dr. Phillips requested they ask at each location about heat, injuries, and whether they have concerns that the material is toxic and would eventually have to be pulled out.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Approval of Bid No. 12-13-13: LCHS Early Work Package

Mr. Kennon, associate superintendent for operations, thanked the Board for placing the Las Cruces High early work package on this agenda to meet deadlines for the school's partial demolition. He said abatement and demolition of the school's front administrative wing would take place this summer, in addition to constructing a parking lot and putting in utility connections. Plans are to complete the work by the end of the summer. The lowest bid from Wooten Construction totaled \$1,336,786.75, which Mr. Kennon recommended for approval. A motion was made by Mrs. Hall and seconded by Dr. Bonnie Votaw to approve the early work package. The motion was approved unanimously. Sra. Flores said the school should be opened to the public and alumni before the demolition begins. Mr. Kennon agreed. An event will be scheduled.

V. BOARD NEW/OLD BUSINESS

A. Resolution to Support Nutrition and Physical Education

Leslie Cervantes, chief of staff, reviewed the prior steps of attempting to draft a resolution regarding a healthy school zone near schools. She said a committee of many community, business and school individuals worked on the Resolution presented today. The resolution has been revamped to reflect support for physical activities and healthy lifestyles. It also incorporates an invitation to municipalities to join the school district in promoting healthy eating, good nutrition and physical activities. Ms. Cervantes said the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce has also committed to take an active role by supporting the Resolution and sharing it with its members.

Dr. Votaw said she was pleased with the holistic nature of the Resolution and Dr. Phillips thanked the committee for its time. She said the language is something that the Board can support and the adoption will come at the next meeting.

B. Calendar of Events

Dr. Phillips said the Board members have divvied up the various end-of-year ceremonies (graduations, senior awards, honors awards) in which to attend. She asked the Superintendent to check on whether San Andres will have an honors night this year.

Dr. Votaw mentioned she will be gone in August and will want to meet in a Board retreat soon for goal-setting purposes. Dr. Phillips said it is scheduled for June 4 and there will be no work session that same day.

VI. PUBLIC INPUT

Las Montañas parent Edna Chavez conveyed her support for the charter high school. She said Las Montañas provided her son with smaller class sizes, teachers who knew him by name, and knew about his special needs. She said the school is still in their infancy and deserves the chance to continue.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mrs. Hall and seconded by Dr. Votaw to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting ended at 6:01 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary

Minutes taken by Jo Galván.