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December 12, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Kathleen Forrer

RE: STAFF BRIEF: NEW MEXICO TOWN HALL: ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS/MATH AND SCIENCE EDUCATION TOWN HALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2005 Interim Workplan of the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) includes a presentation on the consensus recommendations regarding potential changes to the organization and structure of the Albuquerque Public School District reached by the participants in the *Albuquerque Public Schools Organization and Structure for Success Town Hall*.

Issues: *Albuquerque Public Schools Organization and Structure for Success*

- The 2005 Legislature appropriated \$50,000 (\$47,500 after "sanding") to the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) to study whether or not to divide Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) into two or more school districts.
- APS is the largest school district in the state. According to the 40th day Accountability Data System's report issued by the Public Education Department for school year 2004-2005, APS enrollment exceeded 87,000, not including charter school enrollment. The next largest district in the state is Las Cruces, whose 2004-2005 40th day enrollment was slightly more than 23,000.

- On September 22-24, New Mexico First convened a specialized Town Hall on behalf of the LESC to address the long-standing issue of whether the current organization of APS is optimal for meeting the educational needs of its students. To assist Town Hall participants in their discussions, New Mexico First commissioned a background report, *Albuquerque Public Schools' Organization and Structure for Success*. The Executive Summary of the report, which was prepared by professors from the University of New Mexico, can be found in the Attachment to this brief.
- Because the appropriated funding was insufficient to cover all of the costs associated with conducting the Town Hall, participants were charged a registration fee (\$200 if postmarked by September 2; \$220 thereafter); however, 37 full and partial scholarships were made available to students, teachers, parents, and community members in order to ensure that anyone wishing to participate could do so.
- A total of 125 participants and observers attended the Town Hall. The final report notes that “Town Hall participants included teachers and other educators, administrators, parents, students, and business and community members. ... 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.”
- Although the possibility was discussed, the participants in the APS Town Hall did not conclude that the district should be deconsolidated but did reach consensus on the following 15 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 toward 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.
- At the Town Hall Plenary Session, Representative Rick Miera, Chair of the House Education Committee and Vice Chair of the LESC, committed to the following actions in order to ensure that the participants' consensus recommendations would be considered and, if possible, implemented:
 - first, that the final Town Hall report would be presented to the LESC, so that the committee could consider any changes to law that might be necessary;
 - second, that he would personally present the report to the Albuquerque school board; and
 - third, that the report would be scheduled for a hearing in the House Education Committee during the 2006 legislative session.

Issues: *Math and Science Education*

- On November 17-19, the New Mexico Partnership for Mathematics and Science Education convened a Town Hall at the Glorieta Conference Center. At the forum, 85 participants from throughout the state received comprehensive data and were asked to develop recommendations on ways to improve mathematics and science education in New Mexico.

Background:

- Established in 1986 by New Mexico Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici, New Mexico First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established “to effect positive change in our state by addressing fundamental policy issues through the Town Hall process, creating a statewide network of informed and caring citizens, and leading New Mexicans to take action.”

- New Mexico First has five stated goals:
 1. to identify fundamental policy issues;
 2. to find positive solutions to the problems posed by those issues;
 3. to effect solutions through the dissemination of information;
 4. to identify, inform and motivate leaders for New Mexico; and
 5. to create a statewide network of informed and caring New Mexicans.

- New Mexico First conducts two types of Town Halls: customized Town Halls for clients on a variety of topics important to New Mexico and its own annual statewide Town Hall in the spring.

- According to New Mexico First, “the Town Hall model is a very specific consensus building process developed by Arizona Town Halls and modified by New Mexico First. Participants meet for two days in small groups, each led by a discussion leader and recorder trained by New Mexico First. As reports from the groups’ deliberations are collected during this period, they are synthesized by the master recorder” into a draft Consensus Report. At a final plenary session, Town Hall participants discuss, debate, and amend the draft document until consensus is reached. The Consensus Final Report is provided to the client, who determines how implementation will occur.

Presenter:

For this presentation, Ms. Barbara Brazil, President, New Mexico First, will provide a report on the *Albuquerque Public Schools Organization and Structure for Success Town Hall*, and on the consensus recommendations reached during the Town Hall process. If the final report from the *Mathematics and Science Education in New Mexico Town Hall* is available, Ms. Brazil will also provide those consensus recommendations to the committee.

Questions the committee may wish to consider:

1. Which of the 15 consensus recommendations from the APS Town Hall are applicable to all school districts in the state?

2. Which of the 15 consensus recommendations from the APS Town Hall would require legislative action to implement?

Albuquerque Public Schools' Organization and Structure for Success

Executive Summary

This background report presents information on Albuquerque Public Schools, including its structure, size, strengths, and challenges. The report was commissioned in preparation for a public, three-day town hall meeting being held September 22 – 24, 2005, during which attendees will discuss whether APS should be deconsolidated or otherwise restructured. The meeting will be convened by New Mexico First, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that specializes in town halls. The event is funded by the state Legislative Education Study Committee.

Successful School Districts

The report is guided by the assumption that student achievement is the most important measure for assessing the effectiveness of a school district's organizational structure. To that end, the report identifies several key factors that are common to successful school districts:

- Strong leadership at the district level and at each school
- A shared vision between the superintendent and the school board
- High academic standards for each child
- District-wide curricula that are aligned with instruction and assessment
- An accountability system that holds leaders and staff responsible for results
- Highly qualified teachers who receive ongoing professional development
- Family and community participation
- School reforms that begin in the elementary grades
- Reliance on empirical data – not instinct or anecdote – to gauge success

About APS

With 87,510 students, APS is considered a large school district (31st largest nationally), and it has a series of strategic goals addressing many of the above priorities. APS's strategic goals, developed in 2000, prioritize excellence in student achievement, quality learning environments, and effective systems. The district reports steady progress in these three areas.

APS's structure is comprised of:

- A seven-member board of education elected from geographic districts
- A superintendency team comprised of a superintendent, a deputy of district resources, and two associate superintendents
- A cluster system that subdivides the district into 12 clusters, each comprised of one high school and all its middle and elementary feeder schools
- Two Citizen Advisory Councils (CAC) that provide recommendations to the board and superintendent

Major issues facing APS include:

- **Achievement gaps** between students of different races and incomes, with poorer and Hispanic, Native American, and Black students having lower reading scores, math scores, and graduation rates

- Concerns about **equitable funding**, with some advocates arguing that schools in lower-income areas do not receive adequate resources, while other argue that the current funding formula provides a fair distribution of resources for these schools
- **School overcrowding** and underutilization, with three APS clusters over their capacity for students and the rest under-capacity

Should APS Be Restructured?

Nationally, there has been a series of shifts in perceptions about district size. From 1940 to 1990, the number of school districts decreased significantly through consolidation. Beginning about 1990, however, the idea that smaller-is-better began to become part of discussions about school reform.

- Those who favor large districts point to efficiencies of scale, the ability to offer a wider array of services, and the funding flexibility of a large tax base.
- Those who favor smaller districts argue that they provide stronger communication between district leaders, parents, and students, and that smaller districts are able to make policy changes more easily.

In the case of APS, decision-makers considered deconsolidation in 1993. Research (summarized in this report) was commissioned on potential benefits and drawbacks. Ultimately, policymakers decided not to deconsolidate the district. The issue has been revisited by the legislature more than once since then.

If lawmakers choose to re-open this question, they must assess whether student achievement would likely increase as a result of deconsolidation. APS deconsolidation might take two forms: division into two or more districts along geographic boundaries; or division by grade level, creating an elementary school district, a middle school district and a high school district.

Potential Ramifications of Deconsolidation

If APS were to deconsolidate along geographic lines, officials would have to address several issues: how to meet construction needs for new schools in the growing parts of town; how to meet the regulatory needs presented by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB); and how to handle charter schools.

Financially, the APS clusters with the greatest construction needs are on the west side of the city where the student population is projected to grow 7-10% a year for the next five years. Student populations in the other clusters are projected to decline or remain flat. If APS deconsolidated, it is unclear how the west side's construction needs would be met since it would be supported by a smaller tax base.

In summary, discussions about any restructuring of APS must take into account many issues including:

- Is APS currently meeting students' needs, including low-income students?
- Would new districts be financially viable?
- Could new districts meet federal NCLB requirements?