

**Aurora Public Schools
VISTA 2010 Town Meeting
Hinkley High School**

April 11, 2007, 6:30 p.m.

In attendance:

APS Board of Education members: Board President Matthew Cook, Jeanette Carmany, Susan Tabacheck and Judy Edberg

APS Leadership Team members: Superintendent John L. Barry, Assistant Superintendent Tony Van Gytenbeek, Chief Operating Officer Anthony Sturges, Chief Financial Officer Rodney Weeks, Chief Personnel Officer Kari Allen, Chief Academic Officer William Stuart, Chief Communication Officer Georgia Duran, Director of Assessment and Research Lisa Escarcega, Director of Security and Risk Management Christine Hoppe and Director of School Services Barbara Cooper

Question 1:

I understand the district is looking at a "closed" campus for high school. The larger enrollment at Rangeview and the limited lunchroom size would seem to cause significant problems for a "closed" campus. Will a closed campus solve problems or create them?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: A letter was sent to the home of each APS student stating issues and challenges that need to be met, including that the number of trancies in the district is a concern. Compliance of staying in school is necessary. The law says children between seven and 16 must be in school. That law will change to age 17 in July. We have initiated a policy that when a student misses more than ten classes, a letter will be sent to the parent; more than ten classes missed, a phone call to meet with the parent; and after that, CARB (Community Attendance Review Board) will be initiated. The board will also work with parents. After that, a case file will be sent to the Arapahoe or Adams County court services to work with the student. If that fails, the student could be sent to juvenile detention or the parent could be sent to jail. A new program has been started where fifteen students with truancy problems will be assigned to specific teachers (case managers) who will check in with the students daily. Closed campuses are being considered because a lot of kids do not come back to school after lunch, which causes problems in the area and with police. Another consideration is to have restricted campuses, where all freshmen will be kept on campus and sophomores, juniors and seniors must earn the right to leave during lunch, and will be given a principal's pass to do so. Some districts, such as Douglas County, have closed campuses for all their schools. In one school in Denver, there is an 80 percent attendance rate with closed

campuses. The responsibility is on the student to be there to do the best they can. The district will also work with students. I welcome e-mails if you have ideas to keep students in school.

Mr. Cook: The board also wants your input.

Question 2:

I recently noticed a very large number of "F" grades among core math students at Gateway High School. What is the plan for helping all high school students to be successful in math?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: There are a lot of concerns; however, our math scores are showing growth.

Mr. Stuart: Leadership teams are providing extra help with assignments. APS has added extra classes for students, and we have a partnership with corporations to provide math tutors. We are nowhere near where we want it to be. Next year our teachers will get regular nine week interim assessments on their students so they can plan for intervention to help them. Help will be provided at district and building level.

Question 3:

[1] Why are teacher leaders not counted below the line for TE if essentially required for each building?

[2] What are we trying to do to retain teachers, especially given the amount spent on professional development?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: A new director has been hired for professional development, Susan Olezene, and she is in line with our efforts regarding curriculum. There is strategic training for the board and superintendent for understanding where to go in the next few years. There will be more meetings with teams of teachers. We have coaching models with district coaches going to multiple schools helping teachers improve. Each school has teacher leaders who spend half of the day coaching and half of the day teaching. They are also sharing good ideas on classroom instruction. Working groups were developed last year comprised of representatives from the community, and elementary, middle, and high school levels. A survey from teachers gave the district a 60 percent approval rate for what we were accomplishing. We are not satisfied with 60 percent, and we know we need to improve. A .5 TE in coaching is a good commodity for our district. It is a good model for a great school district.

Question 4:

Are they going to cut unifieds (specials) at Aurora Hills like shop and choir to accommodate the International Baccalaureate curriculum? Would that not counteract the "whole person" approach that IB promotes?

Answer:

Mr. Cook: My child will start at Aurora Hills in the Middle Years IB Program next year and all classes including unifieds are there. The board approved additional money for the arts last fall. I have not heard that they will be cut. The arts are important to the board.

Mr. Barry: The strategic plan is reviewed every week and we want to continue to promote art, music, and drama. Aurora Hills will become a "whole school middle year program" (IB) with advance placement courses for the students. We gauge by looking at the metrics every single week.

Question 5:

My student failed several academic classes in middle school; there were no consequences. His teacher said it was okay because his CSAP scores were fine. Is this acceptable?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: If a student cannot pass the standard basic test, the student may not be moved forward. We are using the Infinite Campus program that allows parents to look at homework and grades for their child, so you will know immediately if your child is failing a class. Also RTI, Response to Intervention, is used to see where there are problems. A fifth block will be initiated in 2008, giving 23 more days of instruction for students who need extra help at their school with their teachers. Buses and lunches will be provided. This will help them be ready for the next year. This program is not for all students, only around 3,500 who need extra help. We will work as a team to get them to the highest level.

Question 6:

Why are we still allocating so many resources to professional development when the results have not been as high as expected? This has also been at the expense of small class sizes and support staff for the students, such as counselors, specialists, etc.

Answer:

Mr. Barry: The average ratio between teacher and student is now 23-1. Is this desirable? No. The cost would be \$6,000,000 to hire 100 more teachers, giving two new teachers per school. We have made changes by hiring a deputy superintendent, providing better security, selecting a new logo, changed technology in the classrooms, upgraded the leadership team and new programs for K-5. Not one thing is going to make APS the best district in Colorado; we need an integrated enterprise approach to be broader by concentrating on discipline and truancy. Infinite Campus is helping with this. We need strategic solutions to accelerate student achievement.

Mr. Cook: Culture is the hardest to change. VISTA is not written in stone. We will get rid of an idea if it does not work because we are always evaluating. APS is always about the students - how to do what is best for our kids.

Mrs. Carmany: The board wants to work with you. We are taking steps to see what will work for us - looking at new ways to meet the needs of our students.

Question 7:

Will there be more specific guidelines governing parent committees - how do they operate within school structure, how they are allowed to spend fundraising monies, etc.?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: Parents are the most important help to us. We cannot do it alone. We are in the process of an audit now. We are conducting family literacy in small groups. Parents are using school computers to learn English. District accountability is working with principals to be sure they are accountable. A booklet goes out each year to inform the community what has been happening in the district. We check what other districts are doing. One district has a computer login for parents to report their 20 hours of volunteer work. This log has a drop-down list for the school to check to see where the parent can be useful to the school, such as classroom help, book fair help, etc. We are exploring many options.

Mr. Cook: Letters were sent home to every student regarding this meeting. If you attend PTA or PTO meetings, bring someone with you to them or to our Town Meetings.

Ms. Tabacheck: If you don't want to join a PTO group, speak with your child's principal if you want to help out in other ways. You are a stakeholder and important to the staff.

Mrs. Edberg: Parent involvement is a high priority. Schools try to get more parents involved in their child's education. Communicate ideas to your school or the board.

Question 8:

Could we have better school lunches?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: With restricted campuses, we are looking at other alternatives. Linda Dallman, director of Nutrition Services, works hard to see what the kids like. She makes healthy, nutritional meal decisions to make sure they have quality lunches. We can't have pizza every day, even though the students would like that.

Mr. Cook: We are working on a process to make tasty meals by having salad bars, and even vegetarian meals. If your student just can't stand a meal on the menu, let the board know.

Question 9:

I understand the district wants to improve their academics, but what about the communication between staff and students?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: Rigor, relevance and relationships are important. The book Freedom Riders is about a teacher who has a great relationship with her students. We would like to have that positive behavior system adopted for our district. A new program has begun here at Frontier K-8 school where every teacher gets five blue slips each week to give to students for doing well. The slips are posted, and a name will be drawn for the student to receive a prize.

Ms. Tabacheck: Communication is necessary between staff and student but also between student and staff. Respect both ways - how you speak to your teacher is important.

Question 10:

Why are kids not obligated to learn their times table / multiplications before going to middle school? A lot of students in high school do not know them and if they did, it would help them out to get better grades in their scores and school.

Answer:

Mr. Barry: Multiplications and spelling need to be improved before middle school. We need to encourage critical thinking by dealing with how to look at approximation. Kids need to have that ability.

Mrs. Carmany: The pendulum seems to swing from left to right, and we forget there is a middle ground when it comes to teaching mathematics. The board is looking at both ends.

Mr. Stuart: In the past 5-10 years, the pendulum has swung too far to students having to explain their thinking and understand mathematical concepts. We also need to address concrete procedures in math. Last week there was training for all levels on procedural closing in math. Automatic thinking is just as critical to learning math as analytical thinking.

Question 11:

Will we ever get back to a shared decision making philosophy? This means not just listening to the parents, community and staff, but actually using what is shared to make decisions. Basically, getting the buy-in from all parties involved and no longer being told this is the way it will be whether you like it or not.

Answer:

Mr. Barry: We offer every single chance to talk and listen to what you have to say. We will do everything possible to do what is best for the district. We do listen, but might not follow through on your suggestion. We need to give our students opportunities and choices for them to succeed. Hard decisions will be made, maybe not yours, but what is best for our students.

Mr. Cook: Our board meets the first and third Tuesday of each month. Come have your say then. We look forward to hearing from you.

Question 12:

We have a 3rd grader with 30 plus kids in his class. What is the maximum number of kids in a classroom and how does the APS vision deal with overcrowded classrooms?

Answer:

Mr. Barry: With the growing population, mobiles have been added at almost every school. A new K-8 magnet school for gifted students will be built near William Smith and Pickens. A new school will be built to meet the needs of our handicapped students. Also, there will be an addition added to Rangeview. The board approved funding for a new high school. Some of our schools are underutilized. Just resizing one classroom won't help.

Questions that were not answered due to time restraints

APS will be working to answer these questions over the next few weeks and added to this list in bold print. All questions will be answered by May 1.

1. Please consider offering childcare at future town meetings so parents can bring kids and the kids can be kept in a separate area.
Aurora Public Schools recognizes the need that parents may have for daycare services during the Town Hall Meetings. As we plan our upcoming events, we will look to partner with a daycare provider so that this service may be available to our parents.
2. Are there any plans to try and reduce class sizes within APS? Class sizes of 29 in kindergarten and 1st grade, plus 36 in high school classes are too large.
The size of our classes is an issue that receives a tremendous amount of attention each year. Principals make decisions at the building level about the best use of their resources – always with the intention of structuring the best learning environment for students. When we do have classes that are larger than we would like, we try to support them with additional help from educational assistants, or paraprofessionals. Overall, the average class size in Aurora is approximately 23 students. We will continue to work with individual buildings to bring all classes as close as possible to this figure.
3. Do you think that the current school discipline policies are too lenient?
APS has discipline policies which are firm, fair, persistent, and consistent. Safety is our primary concern, and our discipline policies have been written to support safe schools. There are a number of offenses for which expulsion is mandatory, such as weapons, drugs, robbery and serious assault. We are constantly reviewing our policies to ensure that they reflect changes in law.

Schools review discipline policies annually and review these policies with students.

4. On many of the high school campuses, there are picnic tables and places for students to go outside. To stop these students from leaving at lunch, will APS increase hall monitors or restrict students to inside the school during lunch?
Should the district move to a model in which students earn the privilege to leave campus, we will make certain accommodations at sites. These modifications will include upgrades to lunchroom facilities and changes in the way staff members supervise the campuses.

5. If a leadership student is missing class time for getting an assembly ready and has been excused, but the teacher marked it as un-excused, how do we solve this so it does not look like the parent is making excuses for their child? When a child is missing class for college trips, sports or tests and is supposed to be excused and then it is coming to parents' attention weeks later that the child was marked unexcused, how can this be corrected?
When students miss class for a school sponsored event, the absence is always "excused." Parents should be notified when such events are scheduled. We are very careful to monitor the number of absences a student has for school sponsored events.

Schools should work to minimize phone calls to parents in these instances. The teacher who is the coordinator for the activity should provide the excuse for the missed period. Ideally the excuse would be provided prior to the student missing the class to alleviate unnecessary phone calls to the parent as well as determining if the student can afford to miss the class for an extracurricular activity. We will work on this issue during the 2007-2008 school year.

6. In order to close the achievement gap and leave no child behind, improvements need to be made in two programs: English as a Second Language and Special Education. Do you have specific plans to improve accountability in these areas?
We have made significant changes to both ELA and Special Education. At the beginning of the year, we split the department in order to provide more direct support to both. We have hired a new Special Education Director, and will soon hire a new Director of ELA. The VISTA 2010 plan contains actions that address both groups. Specifically, we are developing a Response to Intervention plan that will support students with special needs. We are also investing significant funds to allow more APS teachers to receive training to more effectively meet the needs of our language learners.

7. If APS is aspiring to be the best district in the state, how can we convince the parents of this when teachers and administrators in APS send their own children to Cherry Creek, Littleton and Douglas County?

Recent enrollment data indicates that we are comparable with other districts in regards to this concern. We are proud of the diversity represented in APS. District administrators live in many different cities and counties and have the opportunity to exercise choice for their own children. APS administrators are absolutely committed to public education and put forth effort daily to ensure excellence in our school district.

8. How can the district improve the grades that are currently taking place here?
Grades range on student performance across the district. Our goal is to ensure that every child learns every day. To achieve this goal, we assess where students are currently, tailor instruction to individual student needs, and then reassess to make sure students are making progress in their learning related to the academic standards.

Students' skill level in APS varies greatly. Some students come to APS 2-3 years behind grade level, while others excel in their classes, such as the three recent APS graduates who received Boettcher scholarships to attend any university in Colorado. Our goal is to individually tailor instruction for every student so that they can accelerate and maximize their learning.

9. As far as professional development, is this going on during the school day (taking principals, vice-principals out of their daily jobs), and if so, how is that helping schools in the short-term to take care of day-to-day issues?
For professional development purposes, all principals meet one day per month. Additionally, we have a cohort of principals that are receiving training through the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). It is widely held that the development of principals as instructional leaders is critical to improving student achievement. We recognize the need to minimize the amount of time principals spend away from their buildings. In some cases, when a school does not have an assistant principal, we provide coverage for the building while principal is in training.
10. I heard of the idea of turning elementary schools into "magnet schools." Would that be beneficial to the students and the district?
In an effort to ensure we have a breadth of academic and programmatic choice for our students and parents, the district is in the process of expanding our magnet school options. In August of 08, for example, the district will open brand new magnet k-8 school to provide academically advanced motivated and gifted and talented students with academic challenges commensurate with their abilities. At the same time Aurora Hills Middle school will move to a school wide Middle Years International Baccalaureate program. William Smith High School, within the Expeditionary Learning Model, has recently completed the move to a defined offering for students across the district focused on Academic Arts and Technology for the 21st Century. In addition, we are actively engaged in conversations with schools and communities, exploring possible

implementation of additional magnet schools and programs. Across the country, such programs have proven to provide a school district like ours with viable, sustainable and creative options for school choice.

11. Why are teacher leaders included in our TE calculation at the expense of smaller class size? Other "required" positions are not included in TE calculations (principal/asst principal, etc.).

Schools are allocated TE based on total enrollment, at-risk populations. Principals gather input on staffing needs and make decisions that will support the various programs in the school. One consideration is Teacher Leader staffing. See previous answers.

12. Why is school funding based on the CSAP cores? Shouldn't the school receive more funding if the school's average isn't meeting standards?

School funding is not based on CSAP scores at this time. The public school finance act of 1994, from which Colorado public school districts receive funding from the state, has a base dollar amount that every school district receives as a minimum. This base is then adjusted by three factors: 1) the district size, 2) the district cost of living, and 3) the district at-risk student population.

13. There has been a trend in the freshman year of high school where many of these students fail one or more classes. What is being done at the middle school level to ensure that students are prepared to meet the expectations of high school?

In order to better prepare 8th graders for high school, middle school principals and teachers are provided professional development that addresses the needs of students. Interventions for low performing students are also structured at buildings; some occur during the day, some after school, and some during the summer months. We are confident that if our students can leave middle school proficient in reading, writing, math, and science, they will be successful in high school.

14. Why are the scores in "poor" areas of Aurora so academically low compared to the "rich" areas of Aurora? Why isn't it the same across the board?

Student scores vary throughout APS regardless of geographic location. They also vary from school to school and from classroom to classroom.

Students' skill level in APS varies greatly. Some students come to APS 2-3 years behind grade level, while others excel in their classes, such as the three recent APS graduates who received Boettcher scholarships to attend any university in Colorado.

Certainly, students who come to us from poverty may face additional learning challenges and may not have received the same level of early

childhood education.

Our goal is to individually tailor instruction for every student so that they can accelerate and maximize their learning. To achieve this goal, we assess where students are currently, tailor instruction to individual student needs, and then reassess to make sure students are making progress in their learning related to the academic standards. We want every student to learn every day.

15. How do we keep people involved when their options are not valued? Many of our active volunteers are taking their students to private schools or to other districts - what are you planning on doing to keep the active volunteers and recruit new volunteers?

We actively seek additional activities that our community can participate in our schools. The most recent addition to our program is our “leaders are readers” program where community members are requested to read in our schools. We are also looking at a tracking software program so that we can recognize our volunteers by the hours they contribute to our school sites.

16. Will traditional math continue to be offered at the high school level - i.e.: geometry, algebra II, calculus, etc.?

Currently, we require 3 years of math to graduate from high school. All of the credits must be at, or above grade level. Students in these grade level courses access the Core Plus textbook as their main resource. If students are enrolled in honors level courses, they use the resources that were adopted prior to the adoption of the Core Plus resources.

17. You say parents are welcome in buildings and respected as the initial teachers of their own child - what happens if that is not the case in a specific school?

It is our goal to ensure a warm and welcoming environment in all Aurora Public Schools and we acknowledge that parents are the child’s first teachers. If parents are not feeling welcomed, there are channels to address these concerns. You may first contact the building principal to have your concerns addressed and provide feedback about your experience. If your concern is not resolved at this level, you may contact the Director of School Services to work with you and the principal to resolve the issue.

18. As a student, I have noticed that many of my fellows are more interested in chatting than learning. How do you plan to approach this issue?

Above all, we are interested in providing a classroom environment where students are actively engaged in learning. Often, this involves conversations between students, and between students and teachers. Teachers monitor classroom conversations to assure that student engagement is occurring.

19. How will you increase the size of the lunch area at Rangeview? Won't closing the campus at lunch encourage the child to ditch the entire day?

Our Construction Department is currently working with the Rangeview Administration and our Nutrition Services Department to expand the Rangeview cafeteria to accommodate larger crowds as a result of a restricted campus.

Research has shown that attendance rates as a whole increase as a result of some form of restricted campus.

20. How come the number of credits required to graduate from APS are not the same requirements necessary to attend state universities?

In 2006, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education established entry requirements for four year colleges in Colorado. For the past year, school districts have debated whether to align their graduation requirements with the entry requirements. In Aurora, we assure that all students are aware of the entry requirements and plan for the appropriate course work to satisfy them.

21. Our district is one of great diversity and different cultures. How will we be able to improve our respect of these cultures and prevent violence?

We are committed to addressing the needs of the diverse cultures we serve in Aurora Public Schools. We will pilot a program next year called Positive Behavior Support. This program will allow us to work together in APS to promote positive learning environments in which all students can learn. Encouraging respect and safety are key components of this program. Please contact School Services, Barbara Cooper, if you have additional questions.

22. My son has a 1st grade reading level going into 3rd grade. How will Mondo address this discrepancy? My son is at a 1st grade level in math going into the 4th grade. How will you close this gap?

Mondo, by itself, will not eliminate learning gaps. We believe that it will, through effective initial instruction, help prevent learning gaps. When there is a gap, we must provide additional support to students to accelerate their learning. This can be accomplished through effective interventions and monitoring of learning.

Written comments for the APS Board of Education or Superintendent Barry:

1. For me it is very important for schools to use uniforms in middle schools just like they do in elementary schools. This would decrease "gang dress groups," and inappropriate pictures and foul language on clothing. Thank you.

Thank you for your observation. You may participate on the School Accountability Committee and suggest instituting a school wide dress code.

2. My child has been severely ill due to allergies that became out of control due to the construction at Hinkley High. All her absences are medical excused; documentation is on file at the school. She was homebound for a time during the 1st semester and she returned during finals week and took her finals. The homebound program did not furnish tutors for all her core classes and her electives were not included at all. Every day that she walks into Hinkley she risks her life, and sending her to another high school will not solve the problem. But as a parent who is very involved in the district, I would greatly appreciate it if your truancy policy did not include children that are absent due to medical reasons.
Our attendance policy allows parents to excuse students for medical reasons. Principals have the final discretion about who will or will not be excused. The school is willing to work on a medical plan with the parent for students who have been identified as chronically ill. A member of the administration team at Hinkley High School will follow up with you on this concern. Please contact School Services if you have additional questions or concerns regarding truancy.

3. I would like to know why you don't have a scientifically-based reading researched program that isn't whole language based such as Linda-Moodbell, SRA which, when they gave a bid, was turned down. According to the Florida Center of Reading Research, Mondo isn't in this model. Why aren't you getting programs that you know work. I am the mother of a child who was reading on 1st grade reading level entering the 3rd grade. He will be entering 4th on a 1st grade math level. When your math and reading programs fail, what do you have to replace these failing programs?
Mondo was selected as a reading resource to pilot after much research. There are data to support its effectiveness in school districts similar to ours. We are conducting an evaluation of its effectiveness this spring and will make a decision in May whether to expand its use to all elementary buildings.

4. I want to know if there will ever be a penalty for families who withdraw their students and leave the state, to, for example, Mexico, Africa, or for longer than 10 days. Could they reenroll in the same class and grade when they return?
At this time the law does not make provisions for us to institute penalties for parents who withdraw their students and leave the state. When/If students return, they may enroll in their home school and will be placed in the appropriate grade. Students do not receive a guarantee that they will be placed into the same classroom.

5. A thought - How will you determine who will be in the 5th quarter block? ILP – CSAP –SpEd?
After careful study and thought, Aurora Public Schools is offering a fifth block to increase student achievement. The voluntary fifth block of uninterrupted instruction is for students who have demonstrated growth but

need more time to become proficient. This supports the belief that all students can learn, but some students need more time. The classes will focus on math and literacy (reading and writing) with science and social studies integrated.

Fifth block does not replace summer programs. It is a complement to our ongoing interventions and our summer programs. It can provide a solid impact by extending the year for 4,000 students. Studies indicate that adding a significant amount of time will impact student achievement. Research also shows that it is not time alone that yields the greatest results. Time must be coupled with high-quality instruction.

Keys to success in the fifth block are well-trained, experienced teachers, good curriculum and adequate physical facilities. That is why fifth block is 23 days long, and students will be taught in their own schools using district curriculum. Fifth block also shortens the long summer break that can cause a loss of learning for students.

Using available data, each school will identify those students they believe will benefit most from the additional time and quality instruction.

Class size has been set at a 25-1 ratio. The ratio was chosen based on knowing the characteristics of identified students and the quality of teachers selected. APS can make significant strides for thousands of students and for the district as a whole.

Translated from Spanish

6. In regards to the dress code, I've observed that the rules are not always followed or taken seriously. What is being done to enforce these dress code policies?
Each school has a responsibility to enforce dress code procedures.
7. My thinking is that teachers must collaborate with parents. We must be told what to do in order to be held more accountable. This would help education for our youth.
We believe parent involvement is critical to improving student achievement. The VISTA 2010 strategic plan, as well as school improvement plans, outlines goals for involving our parent community. We are committed to implementing and monitoring these plans.