

VII. A New Westside School District (WSD) is in the Best Interests of the Westside, APS, & the State

TWO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL DISTRICTS INSTEAD OF ONE THAT'S FAILING

It is time for us to have two school districts that work well rather than one large school district that doesn't function well at all. In this report we are demonstrating through evidence that smaller districts work better for our children; that APS has not been a successful district over the past decade; that the WSD and APS will benefit from the new arrangement as they can devote more resources to individual attention; and that the WSD deserves a chance to give our children a better education. A division of the school district should not be looked upon with fear; as it is, APS is the 30th largest school district in the nation. New Mexico has never done well by putting its ultimate success in the realm of the oversized. Frankly, there is no reason for such a large school district in the heart of New Mexico. Our roots are not in the mega-large, as in New York or Los Angeles. Our roots are in the small and individual, and our success comes from those origins. If the WSD is approved, it will immediately become the 3rd largest school district in the state, behind APS and Las Cruces. It is clear that the WSD at that size can be successful and should be considered for a new district.

“It is our belief that with independence will come the ability to meet the AYP standards, increase student test scores, decrease dropout rates, and increase graduation rates.”

Thus, for all the reasons stated above, it is time to have two school districts that work rather than one that doesn't.

THE WSD HAS THE FINANCIAL ABILITY TO BE VIABLE

It is critical that all school districts in New Mexico are financially viable, and the WSD will assuredly be capable of having the capital funding to run the school district in a successful manner. The WSD also anticipates continuation of the current facility fee program, which will bring about additional revenue.

- The potential Westside School District (WSD) would have significant resources available to fund capital projects in the district without raising tax rates.
- In the 2008 Property Tax Year, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) has a residential Public School Buildings Act (HB-33) levy of \$3.812 (all tax rates are expressed as \$'s per \$1,000 of Net Taxable Value of a property), and a bonded debt levy of \$4.304, for a combined total of \$8.116.
- Scenario A of this study indicates that with a residential HB-33 levy of \$3.80 and a bonded debt levy of \$4.304, the WSD would have \$127,435,052 available in the first four-year election cycle (2011 and 2014) and a total of \$449,424,072 through three election cycles.
- Scenario B of this study increased the tax rate for bonds to \$6.10 and reduced the HB-33 levy to \$2.00. Under Scenario B, the WSD could produce \$166,886,869 in the first four-year election cycle and a total of \$492,617,933 through three election cycles.
- Scenario C eliminates the HB-33 levy and maximizes bond debt of WSD using a bonded debt levy of only \$7.50. Under Scenario C, the WSD could generate

\$202,000,000 in the first four-year election cycle and a total of \$517,000,000 through three election cycles.

- The final Scenario D is an extension of the “C” scenario but raises the bonded debt levy from \$7.50 to \$8.10, equal to the combined total APS levies for major capital improvements. Under Scenario D, the WSD could expect \$210,700,000 in the first four-year election cycle and a total of \$550,700,000 through three election cycles.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE NEW DISTRICT WILL MEET ALL REQUIREMENTS

Serious attention has been paid to maintaining the demographic requirements that make up a school district with proper diversity. In this case we have determined that the district will have proper demographics, particularly in the areas of race and ethnicity.

As the table above demonstrates, the WSD will have a demographic makeup very much like the current APS breakdown. This shows that the boundary lines have been created in such a way to maintain the current APS diversity. In the proposed new district, all geographic sub-groups and minority groups will have access to a superior education.

Table 13
SchoolMatters.com

	African-American	Asian-Pacific	Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American
WSD	3.8%	1.9%	31.9%	56.9%	5.5%
APS	4.0%	2.5%	33.0%	55.4%	5.1%
RRPS	4.4%	2.1%	50.0%	39.4%	4.1%

TWO SMALLER DISTRICTS WOULD INCUR FEWER EXPENSES

According to an article written by J. W. Guthrie in “Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,” smaller districts incur few expenses. He and others have researched large and smaller school districts to determine expense ratios. Their findings reached a strong conclusion: smaller districts are more efficient. When a school district exceeds its optimal size, it has ‘diseconomies of scale’ which create the inefficiencies. As the district size increases, the district spending increases but not in the classroom. The percentage of the budget spent on teachers, books, and materials actually declines rather than increases as the district size increases. In both cases, for APS and WSD, expenses on a per-student basis should decline and classroom expenditures should rise as a percentage of the budget.

GRADUATION RATES ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN APS AND WSD CAN DO BETTER – ALLOWING APS TO CONCENTRATE ON ITS OWN DROPOUT PROBLEM

According to “Closing the Gap: Educational and Economic Conditions in America’s Largest Cities,” a report released by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (EPERC) in alliance with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the graduation rate for APS fell from 55.6% in 1995 to 49% in 2005. (Note: APS statistics show 52.6% in 2005 and 44% in

2006.) These numbers are not sustainable for a well-run school district and under the WSD the graduation rate can be maintained at a high level. Lower graduation rates means fewer college-bound students, and more dropouts that are not prepared for today's workforce. WSD can do better – in its dropout rate and is graduation rate.

TRUANCY RATES IN APS ARE UNACCEPTABLE AND WSD CAN CONCENTRATE ON ITS MARGINAL STUDENTS AND KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL

The truancy rate for APS in 2006 was 27.6%, whereas the truancy rate for the Rio Rancho School District was 2.0%. It is clear that the smaller district has a better handle on truancy. If Rio Rancho is the model that the WSD school district would like to follow, then WSD can do a significantly better job than APS at retaining students in school. (These numbers were provided by the Habitually Truant School Type Report, published by the PED.)

The WSD will use PED partners (NGA, Achieve and Jobs For The Future) and other innovative associations' research and methods in addressing truancy and graduation rates, while at the same time addressing career and college readiness.

The data is clear: APS has below average numbers, but the Westside is underperforming at a dangerous level for student achievement. However, Rio Rancho, especially in the AYP designation, has far surpassed the Westside students and APS. This is reflective of all grade levels, as AYP measures all grade levels and SATs/ACTs measures high school performance. Since APS is clearly failing the Westside students, a new smaller district more attentive to student needs would have a much better chance at improving test scores.

Table 14

SchoolMatters.com,
Albuquerque Public
Schools

	AYP Rating	ACT Scores	SAT Scores
WSD	16%	20	500/491/483
APS	37%	21.3	563/564/545
RRPS	47%	21.5	N/A

TEST SCORES IN THE WSD WILL DO BETTER, JUST AS THEY HAVE DONE AT RIO RANCHO

Currently, test scores on the Westside are far below national average and well below the other parts of APS. In the areas of SATs, ACTs, and AYP, the Westside schools lag well behind APS. On the other hand, Rio Rancho has better test scores than APS and the Westside school. By dividing the district, there will be more individual attention for Westside students, translating to comparable scores to APS and eventually Rio Rancho.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WILL INCREASE AT WSD AND SHOULD INCREASE IN APS DISTRICT AS WELL

Supersized districts alienate residents from their communities and limit community involvement, according to a study published by the Manhattan Institute entitled, “The Effect of Residential School Choice on Public High School Graduation Rates.” In another study, the “Deconsolidation of the Albuquerque Public School: An Analysis of the Data,” published by BDM Education Technologies, the reports says:

Greater Community Control and Influence Over Education: Parents in large systems are regularly frustrated by their inability to gain the attention of the district’s leadership and exercise control over their schools. They believe their children’s unique requirements are lost in the need to have a unified strategy for the entire district. Large districts are often seen as sacrificing the good of the individual for the good of the whole to assure they cannot be accused of favoritism.

In addition, the report states: “Smaller districts are more effective in integrating with their communities than larger districts.” The literature suggests that smaller scale is an important component of educational success. The achievement of advantages of small scale operates through small class size, good student affect, strong financial support relative to the community’s socio-economic status, productive use of available financial resources relative to SES, and productive cooperation of students, staff and the community.”

A SEPARATE DISTRICT FOR APS AND WSD WILL MEAN MORE LOCAL CONTROL FOR BOTH

Clearly, two districts with autonomous leadership will have the ability to shape the school districts without undue pressures. Local control is the hallmark of successful districts, and in this case the local control has lost its meaning under the weight of 88,000 students and a school district that takes up the entire city. In this case, local control will significantly affect the WSD with 21,000 students, which is still a large district but small enough to have sufficient local control. In a large district, local control becomes impossible and neighborhoods are denied any control due to the needs of the entire district.

The California School Boards Association, a group that clearly has some experience with larger districts, states that smaller districts provide greater encouragement of innovation and more input from the community to establish curricula that’s in the best interests of the students.

The argument is often made that a large district can provide better and more comprehensive course offerings to the entire district. However, that diversity of courses does not reach into the many schools. The large course offerings are not guaranteed to meet the



needs of the community in any case. The WSD can create sufficient offerings to keep student interests and key the course offerings to meet the desires and needs of the Westside community.

COMPETITION BETWEEN DISTRICTS WILL CREATE BETTER SCHOOLS AND STOP FLIGHT TO RIO RANCHO

When districts have to compete for students and resources, schools get better. There is empirical evidence that competitive districts will improve both school districts and stop students from leaving to move to other districts entirely, if schools fail them. When you have two districts competing with each other, each district must provide superior education in order to maintain the current student body. This provides a better education in each district. According to the Manhattan Institute's report entitled, "The effect of residential school choice on public high school graduation rates," two districts side-by-side competing for students creates a beneficial effect for both communities.

APS HAS FAILED TO SATISFY THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2005 APS TOWN HALL REPORT

In September 2005, the Legislative Education Study Committee released a memo outlining the steps APS should take to meet the requirements for active involvement in the Westside community. These recommendations were outlined in detail in the memo, and included requirements for community involvement, strengthened communications, closing the achievement gap, and more. (The exact recommendations with PASS/FAIL can be found in "Failing Grades for APS") Clearly, APS was given a directive from a New Mexico First, an objective body with only the best interests of the students in mind. In almost all cases, APS has failed miserably in achieving the recommendations. If the WSD is created, each of these recommendations can be implemented in short order, giving the Westside a better school district almost immediately.

RIO RANCHO HAS DONE WELL AS A NEW DISTRICT AND WSD SHOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO SUCCEED AS WELL

In a report from the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee in 2008, it was stated:

Overall, the Rio Rancho public school district is well run and appropriately focuses efforts and resources on the classroom, which has helped produce positive student outcomes. RRPS provides an enriched learning environment to students, including an impressive array of technology, facilities, and capable educators working with a common vision, while relying almost entirely on state equalization guarantee funding for operations. RRPS exhibits many of the best practice qualities for successful districts.

The RRPS district has demonstrated since 1994 that a school district can separate from APS with very good results. It is the intention of the WSD to create the same kind of suc-

successful district as Rio Rancho. (A side-by-side comparison of APS and RRPS can be found in Section “Failing Grade for APS.”)

“A Town Hall Report conducted by New Mexico First cited several community recommendations for APS to follow. Unfortunately, none have been successfully achieved. Much of this is due to the size of APS, which cannot cater to its many communities without damaging the whole.”

STUDENT PERFORMANCE WILL IMPROVE IN BOTH DISTRICTS

The APS report card is not good. In the areas of graduation rates, dropout rates, test scores, and security, the record has been shown to be substandard. If a WSD were formed, there would then be two districts with 66,000 students in APS and 21,000 students in the WSD. Based on the Rio Rancho model, there is good evidence that the WSD would perform significantly better. APS would also have fewer students and would be able to give those students more individual attention. Thus, both districts would improve. This concept of better student performance as a product of smaller districts is supported in an article by David Cox, entitled, “Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Re-thinking Supersized Schools and Districts.” He reports that in smaller school districts students have higher SATs and ACTs. He also goes on to say that smaller districts bring problems and opportunities back to the local level, which allows them to better solve the problems. Those problems, moreover, are coupled in larger districts with violence, security issues and drug abuse.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL PARTIES

In a smaller school district, there is what’s known as “organizational intimacy,” which offers good communication, regular interaction, and common values among all educational stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, and administration. This provides a platform of improved accountability for all parties and stakeholders. This comes from an article, “Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital,” by Annette Lareau.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION CAN PROCEED IN A STABLE ATMOSPHERE

The most important long-range planning for a school district is the orderly construction of new schools in line with population growth for the district. In the past, school construction for the Westside has been conducted only when the community has created immense public pressure, and not with careful planning based on growth. In fact, new school construction for the Westside is currently done at the whim of APS and not with proper research. With very little representation on the APS school board, the Westside will never know if the needs of the students will be met. Delays can be extremely damaging to a district and the Westside needs to have control of its own purse and its own destiny. Only then can the students in the district be assured a proper education.

CURRENTLY, TAXATION WITH VERY LITTLE REPRESENTATION

As we are all well aware, the Westside has only one true representative on the seven-member APS board. Two other members have small parts of the Westside, but their districts have been gerrymandered to give the Westside very little representation overall. The West-

side thus has 11% of the representation but 23% of the population. This was to be remedied in the recent vote, but the Supreme Court overturned the vote after APS challenged it. Currently, the decisions for Westside schools are made by representatives whose districts' interests may not coincide with the interests of Westside students and parents. The fact that APS challenged the vote demonstrates that it has no desire to give the Westside the proper representation. If the Westside gets its own district, representation will be full and proper, eliminating the cry that there is now a lack of proper representation.



NO TAX HIKE NECESSARY

As the financial report clearly shows, there will be no need to have a tax hike on the Westside to pay for the new district. A new Westside district will be the third largest district in the state on day one, and so the size will clearly not be an impediment. The tax base and bonding capacity make the new district clearly viable without a tax increase. Our research and planning shows that the new district would be able to pay its own way without going to the taxpayers for more money.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

The state benefits when there is overall economic development for all parts of the state. In this case there is a danger of losing out to Rio Rancho, which has a school district performing at a much higher level, the level at which the WSD would like to perform in the future. APS and the WSD must perform better to stop the student drain over time into the Rio Rancho area. Two things will happen if WSD has its own district: one, APS can improve and tackle some of its problems; and two, the WSD can excel and match RRPS in performance. In this situation, APS, the WSD and RRPS will all have equally good school districts presumably and thus economic development can thrive in all three areas. Good schools lead to better economic development in those good school districts. We are in danger of a downward spiral if we do not create competition between school districts and better school districts overall. Poor economic development districts have a hard time attracting high-end employees, which negatively affects employers, often driving companies out of the district, and leading to a downward spiral of economic losses. Students who drop out do not realize their full potential; do not become high wage earners; and do not contribute to the professional workforce. According to *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis* prepared with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, costs associated with students who do not graduate from high school are significant. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was \$17,299 compared to \$26,933 for a high school graduate. Dropping out of high school is considered a million-dollar mistake: college graduates earn an average \$1 million more than a high school dropout over a lifetime.

The impacts on the dropout is also significant, which include increased unemployment, poor health, poverty, need for public assistance, single parenthood, and incarceration. With a proper school district, the business community recognizes the value of good schools and becomes a greater player in the overall success story of the school district.

Table 15
Albuquerque Public Schools

Four Year Impact of Non Graduating Students on Albuquerque's Economy	
High School Students	34,348
Non Graduating Students %	49%
Non Grad Students	16,831
Annual Income Difference	10,168
Economic Impact by Non Graduating Student	\$171,137,608

Table 16
Albuquerque Public Schools

Economic Impact on Albuquerque 2007 Median Annual Income by Educational Attainment		
	Income	% of Population
Less Than High School	12,201	35.40%
High School Graduate	22,369	50.20%
Graduate Income compared to less than high school = 183%		

Table 17
Albuquerque Public Schools

Economic Impact of Non Graduates on Albuquerque Economy by Base Annual Salary	
Albuquerque Population	504,949
Non Grad Population	35.40%
Non Grad Population	178,752
Annual Income Difference	\$10,168.00
Albuquerque Loss Income	\$1,817,550,336