

League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces
Education Study Committee

Interview with Las Cruces Public Schools – District Advisory Council

April 19, 2011, 4-6 p.m., Conference Room A
LCPS Administration Building, 505 S. Main Street

District Advisory Council Members: Carli Aquilera, Dr. Hiranya S. Rouchowdhury, Janel Ortiz, Gerri Tumblin, and Andrea Fletcher, Special Liaison to Superintendent Rounds.

LWV Education Study Committee: Sue Cain, Bonnie Burn, and Roberta Gran

Information about the District Advisory Council: The advisory council is made up of about 50 members representing parents from every school in the district. Each school within the Las Cruces Public School (LCPS) system is allocated seven representatives.

Established in 1994 at the direction of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools, its mission is to:

- Get parents involved in schools.
- Improve communication between the administration, schools, parents, and School Board.
- Provide an avenue for disseminating information about school issues.
- Discuss educational topics of importance to parents and community.
- Create awareness regarding school issues.
- Provide parents an opportunity to serve on district-level committees.

[Source: Las Cruces Public School web site, www.lcps.k12.nm.us]

Meetings are held on the first Monday of the month during the school year, except for January and May, in the Administration Building, Conference Room A, from 6-7 p.m. Community members are invited to attend. The District Advisory Council (DAC) was formed so the opinions of parents and the community at-large could be heard by LCPS administration. Parents also are encouraged to be aware of the policies and regulations of the school district. These are available on the LCPS web site.

The meetings afford opportunities to experience a diverse perspective and a wide variety of presentations, including videos about specific educational issues.

Interaction with Administration: DAC provides information from the grass roots level to administration; and vice-versa, the administration shares information with DAC. School Board members attend the DAC meetings. DAC raises questions or issues with administrators who, in turn, respond with answers or special presentations.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the present local school district: A core of dedicated teachers is the strength of the school district. There are also volunteers at the K-2 level and older children buddy with younger ones. The weakness of the system lies in the preparedness of the students for a school experience and their ability to move from one grade level to another. The attitude of giving up on the students occurs early in the education process. Compartmentalized learning rather than learning on a continuum where knowledge is carried forward from one grade level to another is problematic. Dividing the school system into three levels: high school, middle school and elementary is challenging. A plan for high school and middle school students to mentor younger students as they rise to these levels from the middle and elementary schools may be beneficial to students. The students do not make learning a

priority. This mind-set might be changed if there were more creativity added to the curriculum through projects or hands-on experiences.

Student Testing: Student testing doesn't reflect quality of general education. Performance of students over times is a better measurement. Because math and English are emphasized on the annual standards based testing to meet requirements for federal education funds, other subjects in the curriculum are not receiving enough attention, and the students are not aware of the importance of those other subjects. The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test is a better way of assessing student progress. These MAP tests are administered three times throughout the year to assess knowledge in a number of different subjects. Information on the results is timely and allows the teacher to adjust the subject matter and teaching methods to the ability of the student to learn. The MAP data could be used to reflect the teacher's ability to teach. In the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing, there is no data that connects the teachers' teaching ability to the student performance. There is a question about what it means to grade schools A-F.

Charter Schools: have not had a great impact on public schools. They do provide another school option for students. Charter schools have the flexibility to use some creativity and out of the box thinking in how they help students learn and achieve state standards for academic performance.

Other Thoughts: Many students in LCPS miss out on the college lottery because they do not achieve the academic grades in the required curriculum areas needed to participate. Parents need to be more involved by encouraging their students to adopt education as a priority and to develop plans for the future. For low income families the emphasis is on survival, and often the student's part-time job is required to help the families meet their economic needs.



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Questions for Las Cruces Public Schools District Advisory Council

Tuesday, April 19, 2011, 4-6 p.m.
LCPS Administrative Bldg, Conf. Room A
Loretto Plaza, 505 S. Main Street

1. What is the purpose of the District Advisory Council?
2. How does the Council interact with LCPS administration, the School Board, and the National Education Association?
3. What is your view of the education your children are receiving at the elementary, middle, and high school? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What improvements would you suggest?
4. What are your views on the following themes that have surfaced during our research and interviews?
 - Student testing and its impact on obtaining a good general education.
 - Teacher performance and tying teacher performance to testing results.
 - The school grading system, A-F, recently adopted during the 2011 Legislative Session.
5. What is your opinion about Charter Schools and what impact, in your view, do they have on public education?
6. If you could make changes in the LCPS that would help students and teachers be successful, what would they be?
7. In your opinion, are the academic needs of special education, special needs and gifted students being met at all levels of LCPS?
8. We live in a very racial and ethnically diverse community and country. In your opinion are students in LCPS being educated about living and respecting differences in an increasingly multicultural society?
9. Are our schools providing an “inclusive learning” environment where all students feel equally valued and welcomed.