

REPORT REGARDING ANIMAS HIGH SCHOOL

October 25, 2007

First, I would like to commend the board of education for being, to a person, open-minded and appropriately thoughtful in their handling of the Animas High School application. Though the responsibility for actually making a decision and taking a vote no longer rests in front of you, I am certain that had you been asked to do so, your thinking and votes would have been informed, responsible, and responsive to what you all believed would have been in the best interests of the students and families in this district and region.

In addition to praising the school board for their open and fair minded approach to this application, Tami Graham and I also would commend Gisele Pansze and her colleagues on the Animas High School steering committee for their willingness to respond quickly and as in-depth as possible to any questions we directed their way, whether those questions dealt with procedure, pedagogy or the politics of public relations. They have done their homework, so to speak, with diligence, commitment, and passion. That same level of personal and professional energy must now continue for and by them as they deal with the issues, concerns, and challenges that emerged from and characterized the myriad conversations and documents which served as the information sources the past two months for Tami and myself.

Throughout all of these presentations, deliberations, and analyses, several themes and motifs became constant and consistent:

- 1) Given the pedagogical validity and visibility of High Tech High as a model for an alternative academy in a large urban setting, will it work in LaPlata County? Obviously, the AHS advocates (and their consultant-advisors from HTH) believe it will. The concern about location pertains to issues ranging from simply the population base and numbers of potential students, to the available businesses and corporations for both programmatic and financial support.
- 2) That belief by AHS advocates, I suspect, explains why they have not spent much time addressing one of the other emergent concerns - - an exit strategy should AHS start to falter. They simply want to launch this ship successfully before worrying about how to drydock it. Correlatively, given the district's financial history with charter schools, one can understand the concern about an exit strategy.
- 3) Another persistent question addressed the issue of finding and funding qualified teachers and the professional development thereof - - especially given the relatively short time period between authorization and start-up. The AHS advocates (a couple of whom have already participated in HTH

workshops and training sessions) believe that between the “draw” of this region and training to be made available by HTH, this staffing need can be met.

- 4) The whole issue of “at-risk” students - - whether defined by socio-economics, special education, or “minority” standards – runs through most of the conversations and documents, be those from the 9-R administration or from the Charter School Institute itself. I think the AHS committee sees this as a singularly pressing challenge, one which rests high on their priority list, as they seek to develop workable strategies for both the recruitment and retention of these students.

Finally, though this summary only skims the surface of what we have heard and read, I think one can take comfort in the fact that with the modified CSI template as your base, conjoined with the in-depth reflection you and the administration have experienced, you have established a more sophisticated bedrock foundation for any future conversations and decisions about alternative education and school choice.

Tami and I will be presenting a much more detailed analysis to the board in writing on Tuesday.

Joel Jones
October 25, 2007