



GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10

DATE OF MEETING: November 17, 2020

TITLE: Review of Enrollment Projections and Actual Enrollment for Current (2020-2021) School Year

BACKGROUND: Each year, the District projects enrollment for the subsequent fiscal year as a key component for budget planning resource allocations. This agenda item provides the Governing Board an opportunity to review the enrollment projections used to determine the number of staff and funding for non-staffing needs at each school site and to provide guidance on those processes. In addition, it gives the Governing Board information about how current enrollment aligns with those projections so the Board can be prepared to address the state-mandated budget review required in December.

General Information about Processes Used for Enrollment Projections

The processes employed by school districts to project enrollment has varied throughout the years. In the past, Amphitheater Public Schools used growth studies to predict enrollment expectations, but that method became obsolete during the recession that began in 2009 when economic and demographic changes in the community made growth studies applicable to the Amphitheater District boundaries inconsistent with the actual trends.

Amphitheater currently projects student enrollment through studies of student cohort information, expected property development in neighborhoods served by individual schools, and anecdotal data from schools on population trends, etc. Until 2016, it was easier for school districts to plan in advance of the school year because the State of Arizona provided funding to school districts based on each school district's attendance on the 100th day of school for the prior year. Having the benefit of this information, school districts could easily anticipate the precise amount of funding that each would receive in advance of the school year.

Important Information about State Funding of Public Schools

Arizona changed to a "current year funding" model in 2016, which requires school districts to develop a budget without knowing the precise amount of funding that each will receive from the state for that year. Under the current year funding model, school districts receive funding based on each district's enrolled student's average daily attendance, a.k.a. Average Daily Membership ("ADM"), during the first 100 days of the current school year. Prior year attendance is no longer relevant; nor is the "snapshot" of student attendance on the 100th day of school that served to determine school funding prior to 2016. Now, the average number of days that each enrolled student attends school, during the first 100 days of school, determines that school district's current fiscal year ADM funding.

This new funding model requires school districts to estimate student enrollment based on *anticipated* attendance during the first 100 days rather than through previous methodology. Now each day of attendance counts toward the student's ADM allotment, and accurate daily attendance records from classroom teachers are key factors for current funding allotments from the State.

More importantly, school districts must *estimate* ADM for each student *at the beginning of the FY* to propose a FY 2020-2021 budget and tax rates by July 2020. ADM funding distributions must also account for student attendance in any online instruction programs funded by the State through June 30, 2021. Because the State allocates ADM proportionately between school districts and online programs for students who enroll in both

instructional programs during the same fiscal year, school districts will not know their final budget allocations for FY 2020-2021 until the end of the current fiscal year: June 30, 2021.

Despite not receiving *final* allocations until June 30, 2021, the Arizona Department of Education (“ADE”) provides school districts with periodic payments based upon each school district’s *projected* 100th day ADM, SpEd, and ELL numbers up to the 100th day of instruction. The projected ADM is calculated by reporting our schools’ student attendance to the State each day through the 40th day of school this year.

This is important because ADE’s projected ADM played a vital role in Amphitheater’s budget and resource allocations for this year. In addition to student cohort information, expected property development in neighborhoods served by individual schools, and anecdotal data from schools on population trends, etc., Amphitheater also considered the “projected” ADM from ADE from FY 2019-2020 to determine budget and resource allocations for FY 2020-2021.

Adjustments to the District’s Standard Planning Processes To Account for Changes Necessary Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The District began planning for FY 2020-2021 in January 2020. Administration started efforts to project student enrollment for FY 2020-2021 in January 2020 after the 100th day ADM information from FY 2019-2020 was known. Schools began registering students for School Year (“SY”) 2020-2021 in February 2020, and schools accepted open enrollment as early as February 2020 to determine anticipated enrollment as early as possible to be able to offer teacher contracts in April 2020 for SY 2020-2021.

When this planning process started, the news of the COVID-19 virus in Wuhan, China had just come out, and the virus was not yet known to be a threat in America. District administration followed its standard staffing and non-staffing allocation processes at that time. However, as the virus continued to spread across the world, District administration again reviewed staffing and non-staffing allocations in early April before employment contracts were issued for SY 2020-2021. At that point, schools were closed temporarily, but there was still not a national or statewide indicator that the virus would impact schools so drastically for SY 2020-2021.

When Arizona Governor Ducey initially shut down schools in mid-March 2020, he did so only for 2 weeks to slow the spread of the virus in Arizona. He extended those temporary school closures twice more before finally closing schools for the rest of SY 2019-2020. Throughout that time, there was no indication from national or Arizona state leaders that schools would remain closed as they did at the start of SY 2020-2021. During the spring semester, schools throughout Pima County continued to believe that graduations would ultimately be an option at the end of May, and hope remained that this COVID-19 pandemic would wane in the summer so that life could return to normal. As we now know, the pandemic has lasted well beyond what most initially predicted, with continuous spikes in positive cases following holidays and as a result of small gatherings that began to occur this fall due to obvious public fatigue from isolating at home for so long.

Amphitheater Public Schools reviewed staffing and non-staffing plans for SY 2020-2021 again over the summer as it worked to develop safe plans for re-opening the schools in August 2020. A Blue-Ribbon Committee comprised of employees, parents, students, community members, and public health officials worked throughout the month of June to develop plans for a safe reopening of schools. From the Blue-Ribbon Committee recommendations, the Governing Board approved on July 13, 2020, the District offered families two learning modalities for SY 2020-2021: (1) in-person instruction at the traditional brick and mortar school, and (2) fully online learning through the Amphi Academy Online.

The Superintendent explained at that Board meeting that the Pima County Health Department was not recommending that schools in Pima County open for in-person instruction in August due to concerns surrounding an increase in COVID-19 positive cases. He said, therefore, that families who select the

traditional brick and mortar in-person instruction option should plan to start school remotely and transition to in-person instruction when the public health departments believe it is safe to do so. The Superintendent also committed at that meeting to providing a two-week notice to families, staff and community members prior to students returning to schools for in-person instruction.

Once these options for learning during SY 2020-2021 were approved on July 13, 2020, families were given a chance to select the best option for their student. The majority of the families elected to remain in the traditional brick and mortar schools for in-person learning with knowledge that instruction would start remotely. Some staffing adjustments were made to transfer teachers to the Amphi Academy Online to provide for the families who elected to remain fully online for SY 2020-2021.

On July 23, 2020, Arizona Governor Ducey issued Executive Order 2020-51, which mandated the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) and local health departments to offer guidance to schools about when it is safe for students to return to school buildings for in-person learning. Consistent with this, Superintendent Jaeger has met, and continues to meet, with the Pima County Health Department weekly since July to review the local health metrics and evaluate the status of in-person learning.

In September 2020, the ADHS and Pima County Health Department announced metrics that permitted Pima County schools to return safely to in-person learning in a hybrid mode. On September 15, 2020, the Governing Board approved a plan for hybrid instruction to begin in the brick and mortar schools on October 12, 2020.

Families were again given the option to choose to remain with their initial selection of in-person learning in traditional schools or to transfer to the Amphi Academy Online for fully online instruction through the end of the calendar year. Selections were made in the last week of September 2020 immediately before Fall Break, which was the first week of October, with more families requesting this time to remain fully online. Staff was then transferred to the Amphi Academy Online as necessary to account for the additional online requests, with a goal of making as few teacher and schedule changes and to be as least disruptive for the students who remained at the traditional brick and mortar schools.

Important Information about How Remote Learning and The Hybrid Model Affect This Year's Budget

Arizona law expressly requires public school districts to count attendance for students who are physically present in a brick and mortar school. Prior to this pandemic, the sole exception to this rule was for students enrolled in an approved Arizona Online Instruction program like Amphi Academy Online. Yet, on July 23, 2020, the Arizona Governor Ducey issued Executive Order 2020-51 that authorized public school districts to submit plans for approval from ADE for taking attendance remotely during SY 2020-2021. The Executive Order did not waive the attendance requirement. Instead, ADE required that public school districts submit a distance learning plan for their traditional brick and mortar schools that specifically identifies how the school will accurately record each student's daily learning using school-supported instructional services during remote and hybrid instruction. These plans were not applicable to the approved Arizona Online Instruction programs since Arizona law already identifies how those schools must record attendance.

Consistent with this, Amphitheater Public Schools submitted a Distance Learning Plan ("DL Plan") to ADE, and obtained approval from ADE, before school started in August. The DL Plan permits attendance during remote instruction to be recorded by daily student access to the Google Classroom using the student's home internet and, for students unable to access to the Google Classroom due to a lack of internet or technology, by returning homework assignments to the teacher on a weekly basis. Under either scenario, student attendance required the student to actively engage by logging into the Zoom class or the Google Classroom and, for those

without access to the Google Classroom, by physically returning work provided by the teacher on a weekly basis.

When hybrid instruction began, the DL Plan was amended to account for attendance remotely as identified above only on the days that students were not physically present at school. Regular attendance was taken on in-person instruction days. ADE approved the amended DL Plan in October.

These are the minimal steps that ADE will permit for Amphitheater Public Schools to count a student present for purposes of determining ADM this year. As a result, District and school administration made a big push when school started to overcome technology barriers and to train students and parents on how to log in to access the Google Classroom. These efforts have continued throughout the year, with faculty and staff regularly communicating with students and families when students do not perform the work necessary to count them as present for school on remote days. Yet, despite these efforts, student attendance for traditional brick and mortar instruction is down significantly this year from prior years, largely due to students not logging in to the Google Classroom on their remote attendance days.

Important Information about How Changes to The District's Fully Online School Affect This Year's Budget

There are several significant issues relating to the online offerings at Amphi Academy Online. The first issue is that the state funds online programs based upon actual instructional time over the course of the fiscal year. This means that actual funding is not known until after June 30, 2021. In addition, the state only provides the potential of 95% funding if a student submits enough annual online time to reach the required amounts. Most students do not submit enough annual time and are funded at 85% of their prorated annual time.

The district currently has 1,539 students enrolled at Amphi Academy Online. The current projected ADM to be generated by these students is around 850, which will be lowered by up to 15% in the actual funding formula.

Projected vs. Actual Enrollment for SY 2020-2021

Because the District had experienced consistent decreases in student enrollment for the past several years, largely in part due to a decline in the birth cohort during the past decade, the District projected a student enrollment decrease for FY 2020-2021 of 200 students. Unfortunately, no one foresaw the substantial effect that the COVID-19 pandemic would have on schools across the state and even throughout the nation. Students who registered to attend schools last spring did not come to school in August when remote instruction began, and despite repeated efforts to locate them at their last known address, they have not been registered in any Arizona school to date.

This problem sadly is not limited to Amphitheater Public Schools. On October 30, 2020, the Arizona Republic reported that an *"estimated 50,000 students vanished from Arizona's public district and charter schools over the summer."*¹ The article entitled "50,000 Students are gone from Arizona public schools. Where did they go?" reports that Arizona has lost 5% of its students between the end of last school year and the beginning of this school year. Statewide, Kindergarten enrollment is down 14% because parents elected to keep students qualified to start Kindergarten home for an additional year due to uncertainties related to the pandemic. Most importantly, the article confirms the frustrations that administrators across the state have been voicing since August by explaining:

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/10/30/arizona-public-school-enrollment-down-50-k-where-did-students-go/6084062002/> (November 7, 2020).

“Because the figures are early, it’s unclear where students have gone. The state’s population has not shifted enough for enrollment to plummet so dramatically. The number of families filing for homeschool has increased, but not by 50,000.

Education advocates fear some school-age students are not in school at all, and that the lag in kindergarten enrollment means that children in Arizona are losing out on early lessons vital to a child’s learning experience.”

Attached is an “ADM Summary Report for Fiscal Year 2021”, which shows the projected ADM for the District for this year (FY 2020-2021) based on attendance through the 40th day of school. The data shows that the District is receiving projected ADM from the State this year for 1,631 less students than it was last year at this time.

In addition, the attached table provides the “snapshot” view of how the projected student enrollment for each school site last year for purposes of staffing and resource allocations (with consideration given to school specific student cohort information, open enrollment applications, etc.) compared to enrollment at each of those schools on November 6, 2020. The number of enrolled students included in this “snapshot” contain the students enrolled in Amphi Academy Online, which previously did not have a significant enough number of students enrolled full-time to warrant inclusion in this agenda item in prior years. It also includes the tuition students from other school districts, primarily from Oracle but also from other school districts, for whom the District does not receive ADM from the State. The District accounts for these students in the staffing and resource allocations, but it does not account for these students for budgeting of ADM.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented solely for the Board’s information. No action is requested at this time.

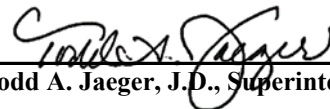
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Date: November 7, 2020



Todd A. Jaeger, J.D., Superintendent