

Inspire Every Mind

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Dear D11 Family,

April 13th, 2022

Spring greetings from your District 11 Board of Education. The past several weeks have been active and busy, and we want to keep you informed about recent happenings promptly.

Budget Talk – As we wait for the Colorado Legislature to approve the School Finance Act, which determines the majority of our annual funding, the Board has spent approximately 11 hours discussing budget allocation decisions for the 2022-2023 academic year. District 11 has seen significant enrollment declines (4,159 fewer students) in the past four years, which has serious budget implications and ramifications for the foreseeable future. The proposed budget, which will maintain current staffing ratios at all levels, calls for the elimination of 53 teaching staff positions for next year, cuts that will directly impact schools and programs. In addition, inflation has taken a toll on all our pocketbooks. As we proceed with challenging budget talks, we are dedicated to supporting our staff with competitive compensations while ensuring a rich and rigorous educational experience for ALL our students.

Student Enrollment – Future conversations about the overall health and financial stability of District 11 start with finding creative ways to reverse the declining student enrollment trendlines. The Board continues to explore various options to retain and attract new families to D11 including:

- Offering free after-school enrichment programs at several of our elementary schools, beginning in the 2022-23 academic year;
- Extending the elementary school day (with staff compensation) by up to 30 minutes to address learning loss and the social/emotional impacts due to COVID; collaborative conversations with our employee groups currently taking place;
- Recommending smaller class sizes in kindergarten to third grade, so our teachers can better meet the individual needs of students;
- Providing supportive environments and excellence in education for every student regardless of zip code through Quality Neighborhood Schools; details can be found at <https://www.d11.org/amp>
- Increasing academic offerings through distinctive pathway schools and expanded college and career options;
- Supporting our students with engaging educational opportunities at this year's Summer Bridge Program; details can be found at <https://www.d11.org/summerbridge>
- Hiring a dedicated marketing coordinator who can promote our schools and inform the Colorado Springs community of the programs available to bolster student enrollment.

We fully understand that word-of-mouth advertising, especially from our staff members, is still the most reliable way to promote D11 schools, programs, and educational opportunities. Please drop us a note if you have other creative and innovative ideas to help turnaround student enrollment to ensure job stability and competitive wages for ALL our staff.

Equity Matters – The Board is fully committed to equitable practices in our classrooms, schools, and day-to-day operations of the district. We are determined to ensure there are no barriers to D11 programming by fostering a welcoming and inclusive culture in which every student, parent, and staff member feels valued and respected. We promise to meet ALL students where they are in their K-12 educational journey, providing opportunities and

specific interventions to help every student grow, thrive, and reach their full academic potential. We are resolved to support all our staff members with quality professional development that will advance educational excellence in our classrooms.

During the recent budget discussions, the Board committed to responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, by spending as much of the D11's limited financial resources directly in our classrooms. Our SPED aides and custodial staff earn an average of \$14 per hour, resulting in numerous vacancies which directly impact student services. We must carefully balance critical staff and student needs, maximizing our resources at the school level, while ensuring central administration is lean, efficient, and nimble.

Considering these budget imperatives, and the ending of the \$800,000 grant funding for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Director position the past two years, the Board was cautious to commit any recurring general fund dollars when discussing the 2022-2023 school year budget. We also understand that budget decisions made now could further impact student-to-teacher classroom ratios or the ability to provide pay raises for our staff in future years if student enrollment continues to decline. As with any other Board policy, interim Superintendent Dr. Gledich assured the Board that the current equity policy will be implemented by district and building leadership. The equity conversation will continue with the new Superintendent, ensuring the unique and diverse needs of ALL our students are being met.

Townhall Meeting – As part of the Board's commitment to engage with our constituents, we invite you to join us for a town hall meeting at the Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus in the cafeteria from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on April 20th. This will enable the Board to listen to community feedback, provide clarity on recent happenings, and gather stakeholder input that will inform our future work. Please RSVP your intent to attend at the following link: <https://www.d11.org/TownHall>

Gratitude – We want to close this letter with gratitude. Gratitude for the renewed engagement of our parents and volunteers as our school buildings once again became vibrant community hubs. Gratitude to the entire D11 community for your grace, kindness, and understanding. Gratitude for the tireless work of our staff in addressing challenges – from the ordinary to the extraordinary - and inspiring our students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally in a safe learning environment. We understand that over the next few weeks our staff and students will be challenged by the rigors of state testing. We appreciate each of your efforts in preparing our students to address challenges with grit, perseverance, a strong work ethic, and ample resourcefulness. We wish you the very best and hope to thank you in person as we continue to visit our schools over the next several weeks.

With sincere appreciation,

Colorado Springs District 11 Board of Education