

Minutes of the Work Session held November 12, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mayor Lopez Rogers and Council Members

Stephanie Karlin, Vice Mayor  
Jim McDonald  
Frank Scott  
Charles Vierhout  
Ken Weise

**ABSENCE EXCUSED**

Jim Buster

**ALSO PRESENT**

Charlie McClendon, City Manager  
Gina Montes, Neighborhood and Family Services Director

**1) ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK**

**2) TOLLESON UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESENTATION**

An update from Ms. Lexi Cunningham, Superintendent regarding the Tolleson Union High School District, its strengths successes and aspirations and how the City of Avondale can support the schools.

Gina Montes, Neighborhood and Family Services Director, introduced Lexi Cunningham who was named Superintendent of the Tolleson Union High School District (TUHSD) in September of 2011. Ms. Cunningham said the TUHSD is proud of what it has to offer the southwest Valley. This is the district's 98<sup>th</sup> year in existence. It is comprised of 102 square miles, currently has 10,061 students, 375 classified staff, and 502 certified teachers. Twenty-six administrators are spread throughout the district. Eighty-four new teachers were hired in the past year. The budget is \$52 million. TUHSD has five high schools in four communities and draws students from the Gila Indian Reservation.

Ms. Cunningham stated that the TUHSD mission is to ensure that all students are given opportunities to achieve high levels of learning. The purpose is to help all students exit the system as self-directed learners who will go on to some type of post-secondary education and are capable of meeting the challenges they may face. She explained the challenges facing the district, especially the decreased state funding. A plan has been put in place to maintain facilities despite the shortage. An insurance and wellness work group encourages employee wellness and explains how their rates are determined. Entitlement grants are pursued to their fullest extent to provide as many resources to students as possible.

The district strives to spend 60% of its funding in the classroom, with the remainder going to maintain the district. Student achievements have been somewhat stagnant in some areas. Measure What Matters is a classroom walkthrough protocol that collects data on teacher performance to use in planning professional development training. A new teacher and principal evaluation instrument will center around student growth on academic standards. TUHSD is confident that its teachers and students will successfully make the transition to the Common Core.

Ms. Cunningham said TUHSD provides students with multiple opportunities to become connected and engaged in their school and community. Last week, voters made it possible for the district to join West-MEC. Athletic and activity programs continue to grow. Tutoring

with transportation is available at all schools. The district is increasing dual enrollment and advanced placement opportunities. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a program that connects students to their school and turns negative behaviors into positive ones. Once staff has been trained, it is important that they are retained by offering competitive benefits and salaries. Teachers are asked to connect to the community, and are offered leadership opportunities on various committees and site activities. A Parent Engagement Coordinator works to bring parents into schools. The American Dream Academy works with parents and students to prepare them for post-secondary education. More parents are volunteering than ever before.

Council Member Weise inquired about the changes Ms. Cunningham has brought to TUHSD. Ms. Cunningham explained that the primary focus has been on moving towards using a systemwide approach to problems, rather than having different responses for each school. Council Member Weise inquired about teacher retention efforts. Ms. Cunningham said TUHSD connects new teachers to mentor teachers so they get the support they need. A strategic approach is taken to teacher recruitment and placement. Council Member Weise asked about dual credit offerings. Ms. Cunningham said dual enrollment opportunities have greatly expanded and some students have been able to get two semesters of college work done while still in high school.

Council Member McDonald asked about the types of policies that would best help students excel. Ms. Cunningham explained that schools today are faced with making tough budgetary questions about what programs they can and cannot keep. Real-life learning experiences are very valuable to student development and help them acquire the skills necessary to become leaders. Council Member McDonald suggested that money could be saved if the district joined with others to make group health insurance purchases.

Council Member Vierhout inquired about the tutoring bus. Ms. Cunningham explained that on average, about 30 to 35 students per school use the bus regularly. Council Member Vierhout inquired about the robotics competition. Ms. Cunningham explained that the district recently received a Science Center of Arizona grant to expand the STEM focus of the robotics program and to encourage more students to become involved in it.

### **3) FIRST THINGS FIRST PRESENTATION**

A presentation by Rhian Evans Allvin, Chief Executive Officer of First Things First regarding early childhood development and health programs and the voter-enacted initiative that established the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board.

Ms. Montes introduced Rhian Evans Allvin of First Things First (FTF), which provides education and health services for kids from birth to five years old. Ms. Allvin said voters created FTF in 2006 to ensure that every child in Arizona is ready for kindergarten when they start. What happens to children in their first five years sets them on a trajectory that impacts the rest of their life. About 90% of the human brain is developed before the age of five. Children who have access to quality early education develop better math, language and social skills, and are more likely to go to college. Kids who start out behind, rarely catch up. FTF works to improve the quality of child interactions.

Ms. Allvin identified that many factors can impact a family's ability to support their young children, including socioeconomic status, education levels, community connections, and familiarity with parenting resources. FTF gives parents the information and support they need to help their children. Programs are offered at a variety of levels of intensity based on particular need. The Care1st Family Resource Center is funded in partnership with the City of Avondale. Home visitation is available for challenging parenting situations. All programs emphasize the importance on interacting with preschoolers and toddlers.

Ms. Allvin noted that 60% of children in Arizona live in homes where all the adults work, which means they are not in the care of their parents for much of the day. With high expectations of a quality learning experience, children are 40% less likely to need special education, have better language, math and social skills and better relationships with classmates. They also have better cognitive and sensory skills and experience less anxiety and score higher on school readiness measures. FTF works to improve the quality of early learning by helping care givers provide high-quality learning environments focused on early literacy. A new five-star rating system for child care providers will help parents make informed decisions about their child's early education. Scholarships can help expand access to early education for families where the cost would otherwise be prohibitive.

Ms. Allvin said the community benefits from quality early education because children who arrive prepared for kindergarten are more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, and contribute to communities. They are less likely to become involved with crime and become dependent on social welfare programs. The money spent on early education reduces long-term costs in many other areas.

Council Member Vierhout said the program is valuable because it helps all kids get an even start. Council Member McDonald spoke about the importance of helping kids learn to read at an early age. He inquired about the parent kits provided by FTF. Ms. Allvin explained that the kits have proven particularly useful for fathers. The kits were based on a California model that was shown to produce a marked change in parental behavior and involvement. Council Member McDonald said parents who read to their children and participate in school often have children that excel.

Council Member Weise noted indications that parents are becoming more involved with the education of their children. Ms. Allvin responded that the Common Core standards for kindergarten have made huge strides in teaching critical thinking skills. Arizona must work hard to ensure that every child is ready to face education, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Council Member Weise said the school districts that succeed are the ones where the parents truly get involved.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said Care1st has made a phenomenal impact on the community. It is encouraging that the voters of Arizona opted to spend money on prevention instead of punishment.

**4) YOUTH COMMISSION PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES CONGRESSIONAL CITY CONFERENCE**

Information regarding the Avondale Youth Commission's participation in the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference scheduled to occur March 9-13, 2013 in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Montes recalled that it has been a long time since the Youth Commission has been able to travel to the National League of Cities (NLC) Congressional Cities Conference in Washington D.C. Staff would like to resume making trips to the conference for a contingent of the Commission, since it provides a leadership opportunity and enhances their networking and exposure to future career possibilities. The existing Youth Services budget has some funds available. The rest of the money would have to come through fundraising and grants. She asked Council if they felt this idea was feasible.

Vice Mayor Karlin noted that the estimated cost was \$1,190 per participant, and \$9,520 for the eight-member delegation. She inquired about the percentage that would likely come from fundraising. Ms. Montes explained that about half of the cost can be covered by the youth services budget and about 10% of the remainder has been fundraised. Vice Mayor Karlin said the trip would be a great opportunity and a valuable experience.

Council Member McDonald expressed support for the trip, but felt that a fundraising component would help separate the youth who are serious about the experience from those who just want to go on a trip. He inquired about the people they would be able to meet in Washington D.C. Ms. Montes advised that in the past, they had opportunities to meet with their elected officials from Arizona. Council Member Vierhout concurred about the value of the trip and felt that the fundraising aspect would help teach civic engagement.

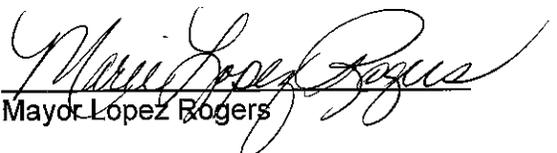
Council Member Weise asked about affordable accommodations for the trip. Ms. Montes said staff explored low-cost alternatives and the youth would use public transportation. Council Member Weise said he probably would not be going to NLC, and offered to contribute money from his discretionary funds to help pay for the youth trip.

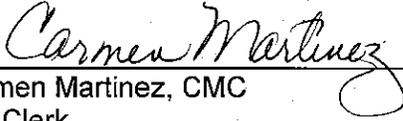
Council Member Scott said he supports using affordable alternatives and the trip in general. Mayor Lopez Rogers felt that the trip would be a wonderful leadership opportunity for the youth and a chance for them to see the capitol.

**5) ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business before the Council, Council Member Weise moved to adjourn the work session. Council Member Vierhout seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

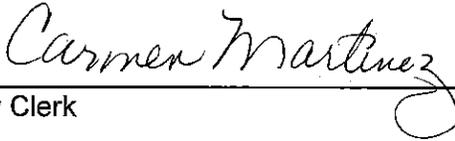
  
Mayor Lopez Rogers



Carmen Martinez, CMC  
City Clerk

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Work Session of the Council of the City of Avondale held on the 12th day of November 2012. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that the quorum was present.



City Clerk