RESOLUTION 2011/12-20

DEFINING SCHOOL SIZE

Board of Education
Frank Montaño, President
Linda M. Trujillo, Vice President
Barbara Gudwin, Secretary
Glenn Wikle, Member
Steven J. Carrillo, Member

1 **Expressing the Santa Fe Public School District Board of Education's ("Board") support**
2 **and commitment ensuring that all students in the District have the opportunity to learn**
3 **in small school settings and that extensive research overwhelmingly concludes that**
4 **smaller learning environments result in increased graduation rates and increased**
5 **student achievement, particularly for children of color and children from low-income**
6 **families.**
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8 **WHEREAS**, the Board is committed to ensuring that the district's campuses are appropriately designed and
9 sized to facilitate effective learning, increased student achievement, and improved relationships between
10 principals, teachers, parents, and students; and
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12 **WHEREAS**, a 1996 meta-analysis by Kathleen Cotton entitled "School Size, School Climate, and Student
13 Performance" reviewed 103 published studies on the effect of school size and concluded that smaller schools
14 have a positive effect on student achievement; graduation rates; student attitudes toward school; social
15 behavior among students and between students and teachers; and participation in extracurricular activities
16 (yielding both higher levels of involvement and participation in more varied activities); and
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18 **WHEREAS**, a 2000 study of 13,400 elementary and secondary schools in multiple states by Craig Howley
19 of Ohio University and Robert Bickel of Marshall University found that, in schools serving predominantly
20 low-income children, students in small schools scored higher than students in large schools on 80% of the
21 assessments given in Texas and over 90% of assessments given in Georgia; and
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23 **WHEREAS**, in 2006 the Albuquerque Public School District reviewed the relevant research on elementary
24 school size and concluded that the most effective size of an elementary school is 300-400 students; and
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26 **WHEREAS**, some of New Mexico's highest achieving elementary schools are some of its smallest,
27 including Griegos Elementary School in Albuquerque, which serves 366 students in a largely minority
28 neighborhood and was one of four schools nationally recognized by the Education Trust in 2011 for its
29 record of high student achievement, Tohatchi Elementary School, which serves 227 primarily economically
30 disadvantaged and English language learning students and has some of the highest proficiency levels in the
31 state, and Velarde Elementary School, which serves 158 predominantly low-income students of color and
32 has consistently been one of the best performing schools in New Mexico; and
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34 **WHEREAS,** Valerie Lee, Professor of Education at the University of Michigan School of Education, has
35 extensively studied the correlation between school size student achievement and has concluded, in peer-
36 reviewed research, that the optimal size of a high school to maximize student achievement (based on reading
37 and math scores) is 600-900 students; and
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39 **WHEREAS**, a 1998 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that while only 4% of high schools
40 with fewer than 300 students reported serious violent crimes on their campuses, 9% of schools with 300-
41 1000 students had such incidents, and 33% of high schools with over 1,000 students reported serious violent
42 crimes; and

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44 **WHEREAS**, in 2006, researchers funded by the Gates Foundation interviewed high school dropouts in 25
45 communities across the country about why they had dropped out of school and reported that two major
46 reasons were that the dropouts had felt alienated and unsafe at school, and over a third of them stated that
47 they felt that not a single teacher or staff member knew them personally or cared about their success; and

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49 **WHEREAS**, according to a 2010 report on New Mexico's graduation rates, the ten schools with the highest
50 graduation rates in the state were all small, with an average graduating class size of fewer than 50 students,
51 while the ten schools with the lowest graduation rates in the state were overwhelmingly large, with an
52 average graduating class size of over 450 students; and

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54 **WHEREAS**, repeated evaluations of small schools in New York City, including a study funded by the Gates
55 Foundation and released in January 2012, have found that students in smaller schools are more likely to
56 graduate than their peers in larger schools (67.9% versus 59.3% according to the 2012 data) and also found
57 that the smaller schools have dramatically reduced the city's graduation-rate gap between white students and
58 students of color; and

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60 **WHEREAS**, a 1992 analysis of more than 30 studies of schools in urban, rural, and suburban communities
61 across the country found that the operational costs of high schools follow a "U-shaped" curve with the most
62 cost-effective high schools serving student populations of 300-900 students and costs per student increasing
63 for high schools larger than 900 students due to diseconomies of scale; and

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65 **WHEREAS**, a 2000 study comparing the cost and performance of New York City's high schools found that
66 although schools with fewer than 600 students cost about $800 more per student per year than schools of
67 600-1,200 students, the larger schools cost $3,300 more *per graduate*, because the dropout rate was more
68 than twice as high at the larger schools; and

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70 **WHEREAS,** a 2005 evaluation of Albuquerque Public School District's small freshman academies found
71 that the students participating in them had higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, were happier and
72 more engaged in school, and were up to 17% more likely than their peers in the large freshman classes to
73 earn enough credits to advance to tenth grade; and

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75 **WHEREAS**, when the Santa Fe Public School District implemented a Smaller Learning Communities pilot
76 project for freshman students at Santa Fe High School in 2004-2005, the math and reading scores of the
77 students who participated in the project increased by more than a grade level and a half, while those of the
78 rest of the freshman class remained stagnant or declined, an outcome that was particularly noteworthy
79 considering that the students participating in the Smaller Learning Communities had started the year with
80 overall lower academic performance than their peers; and

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82 **WHEREAS**, the graduation rate in the Santa Fe Public School District is only 53%, ranking it 88th of New
83 Mexico's 89 school districts; and

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85 **WHEREAS**, 65.7% of Santa Fe Public School District students are eligible to receive free and reduced price
86 lunch and the research indicates that these students are the ones who will most benefit from smaller learning
87 environments; and

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89 **WHEREAS**, in 2010 Think New Mexico developed a plan for giving every elementary school student in the
90 Santa Fe Public School District the opportunity to learn in a small school environment by rezoning and
91 utilizing the District's existing physical capacity.

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93 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board that the comprehensive facilities master plan will:

94   1. Limit the size of the district's elementary schools to no more than 425;

95   2. Limit the size of the district's middle schools to no more than 225 per grade;
96   3. Limit the size of the district's high schools to no more than 900 students (225 per grade); and
97   4. Rezone the district with the goal of giving every student in the District the opportunity to learn in a
98   small school environment.

99   BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board acknowledges the superior academic achievement,
100   increased parental involvement, and overall success of the District's elementary schools with student
101   populations below 250, and that nothing in this resolution shall be considered evidence supporting
102   closing District elementary schools with populations of less than 250 students.

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105   **ADOPTED this 20th day of March, 2012**
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107   Attested by:
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109   _____   _____
110   Frank Montano   Barbara Gudwin
111   Board of Education President   Board of Education Secretary
112   Santa Fe Public Schools   Santa Fe Public Schools