

Artifact 20

Attend either a school board meeting or a teacher union meeting. Include a copy of the agenda in your portfolio along with a one-page narrative of your perceptions and reflection about the meeting.

The school/governing board meeting I attended took place on a Tuesday evening, January 16, 2007, at Tucson Unified School District headquarters from 6:30 to nearly 9:30pm. The meeting was witnessed by an audience of roughly 100 people. Approximately six spoke at the podium and another twenty came in their support. Five school board members were present as well as the district superintendent and one student representative.

Fortuitous timing delivered me to a meeting that featured the superintendent's state of the district report. His PowerPoint presentation included an update on six goals that should interest prospective district employees. The goals related to student achievement; school and department climate; recruitment, hiring, and retention; intercultural proficiency; communications; and strategic and financial planning. I learned that teachers currently earn a starting salary of \$32,000/year in the district, that it provides instructional coaches to new hires, and that there is an induction period of three years. Eighteen teachers in the district received inadequate ratings last year. A new regulation requires that at least the six most senior teachers be interviewed for positions. In this way quality of teaching is given some priority next to duration of service. No notable surprises were announced in the presentation and the superintendent's salary was raised later in the meeting by 2.3% to match inflation with only one no vote.

The subsequent two reports dealt directly with conditions in particular schools and even rooms from very different and perhaps complementary perspectives. The report presented by a student from the advisory council included many factual, but negative items about termites, non-functioning drinking fountains (which I can vouch for), and moldy ceiling tiles in particular schools as well as broader issues like lack of AP and honors courses at some. I can identify with many of the students' frustrations. If punctuality is so important, for example, why can't schools I've visited provide working, synchronized clocks? This sort of information can hopefully reach the school board or even school administrators in a convenient way. I have yet to encounter a school or school district with a feedback form on its website and it would surprise me to discover suggestion boxes inside. The OMA (Opening Minds through the Arts) presentation was in contrast very positive, but also very general except for the monetary figures which were specified down to the penny. It gave the impression that organizers were attempting to justify the cost. I have heard high praises for the program, but the presentation left the impression of an unwelcome sales pitch.

The Data Dashboard is designed to be a one stop shop web portal for comprehensive school district data. For an outsider it appears to be little more than an updated, highly interactive website. Behind the scenes it no doubt consults numerous, disparate, and previously incompatible databases. Its intended audience is the public, educators, employees, and administrators and it comes in intranet and internet versions. Only the former was ready for demonstration and it included only very limited data. Just four months of calendar time had been invested its development, but it was unclear how many people were working on it. My interest was as a former programmer of such projects, and watching the demo quickly reminded me that I would rather be teaching.

The remaining major presentation dealt with high school reform, which is of particular interest to me as a future high school teacher of (computer) science and/or math. Proposed new standards add one year of science, one year of social studies, and two years of foreign language to graduation requirements. Organizations like the Computer Science Teachers Association lobby for computer science to qualify for general science credit. The PowerPoint slides repeatedly referred to "lab science," so there is reason for optimism. Although no additional math courses will be required, class size is to be reduced thus necessitating more teachers. The district intends to "[a]ssertively pursue highly qualified and appropriately certified teachers," which may eventually include me. TUSD recently dispensed with German classes, which rules out foreign language teaching for me. However, I was very pleased that a component of the two-year foreign language requirement is credit for students' "native foreign" languages. This is wonderful progress for any students who can still remember their native language after English immersion.

Overall the meeting was fairly interesting, somewhat enlightening, and quite long. Since school board agendas are available online (see below) in advance of meetings, I intend to monitor for the most interesting presentations or compelling issues and attend at least once each year. It would also be prudent for me to investigate school board meetings of neighboring districts to gauge their performance, direction, and educational philosophy before narrowing my search and targeting one as home of my future classroom.

[School Board Agendas](#)

[Word Format for Jan. 16, 2007](#)

[PDF Format for Jan. 16, 2007](#)