

Apache Junction Unified School District

FOCUS IN SCHOOLS



Elaborate choreography and dancing are essential elements of the upcoming AJHS musical, *West Side Story*, that will be presented on February 10-13 by the students of Apache Junction High School. Students are practicing hard and are gaining a new respect for the athleticism that is necessary for successful dancers to possess.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) re: Possible School Closures

Q: What are the reasons that closures of Gold Canyon Elementary School and Thunder Mountain Middle School are being considered?

A combination of factors including the following:

1. A drop in district student enrollment of approximately 600 students over the last two years, resulting in empty classrooms at some of our elementary schools and middle schools. Current projections indicate that growth will not return to this area for at least three to five years;
2. The drop in enrollment will probably continue due, in part, to a new high school at J.O. Combs District in Queen Creek that is absorbing many students to the south who formerly attended Apache Junction High School;
3. The need to cut \$2.6 million from the Maintenance and Operation budget for school year 2010-2011. The need for this reduction is due to the decline in student enrollment, the State of Arizona cutting education funding to school districts, and the failure of the November 2009 M&O Override in our community;
4. This is not a one-year financial problem with regards to state funding cuts. Projections are that the state of Arizona will face a shortfall next fiscal year that will necessitate even deeper cuts in education funding. Our district needs to be positioned to deal with that eventuality, as well; some predict harder times yet are ahead for education in the state of Arizona;
5. Dollars captured from school closures will afford students expanded opportunities to use state-of-the-art computer hardware and software and technology tools in the classroom. Learning how to use the

technology itself has become an important learning objective in addition to computer-assisted learning. Both are needed to keep our students competitive in a global economy and prepared to pursue higher educational opportunities they may desire following their graduation from AJHS;

6. Closing schools and consolidating student populations is considered to be a much preferable choice to cutting extra-curricular programs including fine arts, athletics, clubs, etc. or academic programs. It was felt that these moves would have a much more negative impact on the quality of students' educational experiences. The emphasis needs to be on *how* and *what* we are teaching our students, rather than *where* they are being taught.

Q: What has the district done thus far to save money?

Over the last two years, more than 50 positions, including administrative and classified staff, have been cut. A salary freeze was imposed on all employees for this budget year. Deep reductions have been made in departmental and school budgets across the board for the last two years. More staff positions, the number dependent on whether the school closures are enacted, will be cut for the upcoming school/budget year.

Q: If the school closures are not approved, what other steps would have to be taken to balance the budget for 2010-2011?

If the Governing Board decides to keep the schools open as they are now, the unfortunate reality is that larger cuts will have to be made in other areas, including staffing and programs. This would include cuts in the teaching staff, resulting in less teachers and

larger class sizes. Also possible would be a substantial pay cut for all employees, motivating the best teachers most in demand to seek work in another school district.

Q: Why Gold Canyon Elementary School rather than another elementary school?

The student population at Gold Canyon Elementary School is currently 350 +/- students, one-half of its capacity. The student population in the Gold Canyon area cannot currently support two elementary schools (Gold Canyon Elementary and Peralta Trail Elementary), due to foreclosures and the fact that some of the planned/projected growth in the east section of the school district never materialized.

Q: Where will the students from Gold Canyon Elementary School be transferred?

The attendance boundaries for all four of the remaining elementary schools will be adjusted to balance the student populations as effectively as possible. In addition, the student populations will be reconfigured into K-6 student bodies. Students actually living in the Gold Canyon area will be transferred to Peralta Trail Elementary School. The proposed new attendance boundaries for the other three elementary schools are posted at the above website.

Q: If approved, what is the timeline for implementation?
Closures and transfers would take place in time for the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year next fall in August, 2010.

Q: Only 7th and 8th grade students would then be enrolled at DSMS?

Yes, the student body at DSMS would then become 7th and 8th grades only and change from a middle school configuration to that of a junior high school. It will become a "new" school with a new principal, the newly-configured student body choosing a new mascot, etc. Seventh grade students will be introduced to a technology-infused curriculum and an academic plan geared to better preparing them for the challenges of high school and post-secondary educational opportunities.

Q: Why close Thunder Mountain Middle School rather than Desert Shadows Middle School?

Desert Shadows is the larger of the two facilities and has a higher student capacity. Also, due to the completion in the last few years of two new classroom buildings, it is a more modern campus. Its closer proximity to the high school also is advantageous in re-aligning bus routes more efficiently and allowing for the possibility of joint educational opportunities.

Middle School?

The physical plant of both of these schools will be closed, but remain well maintained, so that when the economy stabilizes and growth returns to this area, the district will have schools ready to put back into use to accommodate this growth. Short-term leasing of the facilities to bring in extra income to help maintain these facilities will be seriously considered.

Q: What will happen to the GCES and TMMS school buildings/campuses?

Every effort will be made to keep classes at the most effective levels possible. Ironically, if schools are not closed, class sizes will go higher than if the closures are enacted. The reason for is that cuts will have to be made in teaching staff to realize the M&O dollars needed to balance the 2010-2011 budget.

Q: Will class sizes increase greatly?

Criteria are currently being developed to be used in making further staffing decisions. The following criteria will be considered, with order as yet to be determined:

- 1) qualifications and certification;
- 2) overall experience, training and ability;
- 3) past contributions;
- 4) length of service in AJUSD.

Q: What will be the factors used in deciding which teachers/classified staff are retained?

The teachers and staff at the schools being proposed for closure will not automatically lose their jobs. In both areas, the first item to be used is normal attrition due to terminations and resignations.

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More information @
"College Readiness for All"
www.ajusd.org

AJHS Presents 'West Side Story'

One of the most popular American musicals ever to hit the stage, *West Side Story*, will be presented on February 10, 11, 12 and 13 by students of the Apache Junction High School Performing Arts Department.

Interestingly enough, the AJHS production comes just weeks after the play opened on Broadway in a long-anticipated revival. The story, set on Manhattan's West side in New York City in the 1950's, is a modern re-telling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This time, the couple is star-crossed by the enmity of two rival street gangs of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Tony belongs

to the Jets, Maria's brother, Bernardo, leads the Sharks.

Forty-four students from the Drama and Choral classes are currently rehearsing - dancing, singing and generally enjoying the energy created by the dance and music scenes.

Performances are scheduled for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, February 10, 11 and 12 at 7 p.m. and a matinee on Saturday, February 13 at 1 p.m. Location is the Performing Arts Center on the campus of Apache Junction High School, 2525 S. Ironwood Dr. Tickets are \$8 for adults and \$6 for students and seniors.

For more information, call 480-982-21110, ext.5317.



EVIT Open House Is Sat., Jan. 30

The East Valley Institute of Technology is gearing up for its annual Tech Fest event, a large community open house that will feature each of the school's program offerings in a fun, interactive way.

Tech Fest admission is free for the community, and the event gives future students and parents an opportunity to explore each program. Those interested in construction can try out a crane simulator; multimedia students will be on hand to conduct photo shoots; the culinary department will hold a variety of cooking and baking demonstrations; and massage therapy students will offer up free chair massages.

The campus will be open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 30. Last year, approximately 3,500 people attended the event, which features each of the school's nearly 40 programs, as well as a classic car show and a campus-wide scavenger hunt.

"We are opening our doors to the community so

they can see what EVIT is all about," EVIT superintendent Dr. Sally Downey said. "Come on out, eat lunch in our culinary department, get a manicure from the cosmetology students, or learn how to perform CPR on your pet. It is a fun family event, and there is truly something for everyone here."

The East Valley Institute of Technology is Arizona's first joint technological education district. EVIT provides about 40 occupation-specific programs for high school students at ten school districts across the East Valley, including Apache Junction High School. The programs are tuition-free for high school students; classes also are open to adult students at competitive tuition rates.

EVIT, which has been honored as an A+ school in Arizona, is located at 1601 West Main Street in Mesa. For more information about programs offered, please call (480) 461-4000 visit www.evit.com, or call 480-982-1110 ext. 2319 at Apache Junction High School.

Car Show Is Feb. 6th

The Apache Junction High School Navy JROTC is hosting a benefit car show from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, February 6, in the parking lot of Apache Junction High School, 2525 S. Ironwood Drive.

This year's event is being sponsored by the NJROTC Parents Club (The Anchor Club). All proceeds will go to support the AJHS NJROTC program and activities.

And for classic car / truck owners, there is still time to enter a vehicle in the show/competition. Entries are

\$30 and there are 24 class categories to choose from. Free dash plaque and T-shirt to the first 100 entries. Prizes will be awarded. For more information on entries, call Karen Gibbs at (480) 720-5777 or Nick Aranda at (480) 246-7187 or Craig Kennedy at (480) 375-5722.

Each February, hundreds of attendees join the fun for the celebration of classic vehicles. Besides viewing the cars, there are raffles, 50/50 drawings and lots of music and food.



Cuts In Administrative, Operational Costs

Associate Superintendent Jim Lockwood reported that district administrative costs had been cut and large inroads made on cutting the district's operating costs during a summary that he gave the AJUSD Governing Board at the January 12 meeting on the results and outcomes of the Auditor General's Performance Audit that was done in 2008.

He explained that Auditor General's Performance Reports were created with the passage of Proposition 301 and are given randomly to Arizona school districts with the purpose of checking on how much money actually goes into the classrooms, compared with other school districts of similar size.

That performance audit of the 2006-2007 budget year is entirely different from the overall financial audits that are given to every school district

by an independent, outside accounting firm every year, he emphasized.

The outcomes and pursuant changes that were reported to a State Legislative Committee recently by Dr. Lockwood and Dr. Wilson showed the following:

-AJUSD has reduced administrative costs nearly \$400,000 since 2006-2007. He commented that districts with smaller, neighborhood schools generally have higher administrative costs because it includes office staffs at each school and the district's business services, purchasing, etc. -Operating costs have come down greatly by eliminating positions in maintenance, grounds, and custodial areas, implementing more low-water use landscaping and retrofitting both lighting and air condition systems in facilities.

Spelling Bee Winners Named



The winners of the annual Apache Junction Unified School District Spelling Bee will represent the district at the annual Pinal County Spelling Bee on February 19. They are (l to r) Emilio Couchee, TMMS; Alyssa Willis, DSMS; Shaeli McAlister, SMES; and Grave Javier, DSMS.

Thirty-five students, the winners of competitions at all of the district's elementary and middle schools, went head to head and brain to brain in the competition held on January 13 to decide who would be the AJUSD representatives sent to the Pinal County Spelling Bee at the Vista

Grande Union High School Auditorium in Casa Grande on February 19.

- 1st~Emilio Couchee, TMMS
- 2nd~Alyssa Willis, DSMS
- 3rd~Shaeli McAlister, SMES
- 4th~(Alternate) Grace Javier, DSMS

Gov. Bd. Info

At the organizational AJUSD Governing Board meeting held on January 5, Bd. President Wendy Moore was re-elected to serve another term and Vice-President Debbie Skinner was elected to a second term, as well. The time of the evening meetings, held on the second Tuesday of the month, has been changed to 6 p.m.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Feb. 4-5 - Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Feb. 9 - Gov. Bd. Mtg. - 6 p.m.
- Feb. 10-13 - West Side Story at AJHS PAC
- Feb. 15 - President's Day - No School
- Feb. 23 - Gov. Bd. Mtg. - 1 p.m.