I. **Call to Order and Notice of Meeting**

President Elaine Gantz Berman called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m. The following Board of Education members were present: Ms. Elaine Gantz Berman, Mrs. Susan G. Edwards, Mr. James Mejía, Mrs. Michelle Moss, Mr. Kevin Patterson, and Mr. Lester Woodward. Rev. Lucia Guzman was absent and excused.

Assistant Secretary Jacquie Lucero read the notice of the meeting.

II. **General Audiences**

**Kitty Balsley**, Chief Executive Officer of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Colorado, Inc., said that Mr. Mejía suggested that a group from their organization speak before the Board to apprise them of the organization’s activities and partnerships currently being developed with the Denver Public Schools.

She said that the traditional Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring model has received a great deal of attention and acclaim over the years and launched the national mentoring movement. The national organization, she said, has decided to make a great commitment not to just the success of the mentoring model, but trying to take mentoring to a significant level by increasing the number of children served from 100,000 to 1,000,000 by 2010. She said that the Colorado branch of the organization is in step with the goals of the national organization and, in the past year, have increased by 89 percent the number of children served.

Ms. Balsley said that Big Brothers/Big Sisters, in the summer of 1997, began a school-based summer mentoring and tutoring program that started with 25 children; and that the program has grown and expanded since that time. It was through that program, she said, as well as a partnership with the district and United Way, that the visit of then Attorney General Janet Reno to McMeen Elementary School was arranged. She said that the partnership between Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the Denver Public Schools has been a rewarding one and that they are always welcomed hospitably in the schools.

**Billy Hufford**, representing Big Brothers/Big Sisters, said that the original school-based mentoring program has branched into six programs active in schools within the district. He described some of these programs, including the following:

- **Community Mentoring Program** – Serving 400 district children, it pairs at-risk boys and girls with a caring adult for a yearlong relationship.
School-Based Mentoring Program – Currently serving 274 children in nine schools, adult mentors work in elementary schools with children for one and one-half hours per week, with a specific focus on tutoring.

HOSTS (Helping One Student To Succeed) Program – A special diagnostic/prescriptive reading program, provides 62 children at Doull Elementary School with up to four mentors per week working 30 minutes per day specifically on reading instruction. This is a new program and initial reports indicate that the children in the program are making substantial gains in reading performance.

Big Literacy Corps – Funded by an Americorps grant, Americorps volunteers work in high schools to recruit, train, and support high school students working in a one-to-one tutoring/mentoring relationship with elementary school students. The program is currently active at Thomas Jefferson High School with students working with 118 children at Southmoor Elementary School.

Sports Buddies – Developed two years ago, this program places a caring adult in a one-to-one relationship with students who are interested in viewing and participating in sports activities. Children and their “buddies” meet twice a month for such activities and spend approximately four hours together. The program was designed to bring more men into the program, as there is a great need for male role models for boys participating in the program.

Life Choices – This program has a special curriculum designed to help middle school-aged girls deal with the decisions that confront them in their adolescent years. This program takes place in nine district schools and serves 421 girls.

Mr. Hufford said that schools have asked that all of the programs be expanded, but that they are only able to serve as many children as their staff and volunteer corps allow.

He said that a review of the effectiveness of Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs had been conducted by Public-Private Ventures, and that the review had indicated that mentoring had made a significant difference in the lives of the children. For example, he said, 46 percent of the children involved in the Community-Based Mentoring Program were less likely than their peers to use drugs; 52 percent were less likely to skip school; and 37 percent were less likely to skip a class at all. He said that similar results were shown in the School-Based Mentoring Program. The results also showed, he said, that 64 percent of teachers whose students were involved in these programs reported that the children developed more positive attitudes toward school; 60 percent reported improved relationships with the adults with whom they came into contact; and 62 percent reported that students were more likely to trust their teachers. He said that students involved in the program are less likely to repeat a grade and have shown a decrease in the number of unexcused absences.
Mr. Hufford said that their own survey results have shown that at-risk factors for children decrease with their participation in the program. Last year, he said, teachers reported that 78 percent of pupil participants made progress in their overall school performance and that 80 percent of them showed an increased level of classroom participation. He said that 70 percent of the children reported a better attitude toward school and 75 percent reported better relationships with their peers. Ninety percent of volunteers in the program reported that they developed a good relationship with their little brother or sister, he said, while 92 percent said that the one-to-one aspect of the program is very important.

He related many anecdotes of the successful relationships developed between “bigs” and their “littles” and said that many volunteers in the School-Based Mentoring Program have requested to become part of the Community-Based Mentoring Program so that they could spend more time and have a deeper commitment to their “little.”

Mr. Hufford said that the staff of Big Brothers/Big Sisters would welcome an opportunity to speak with district officials about ways in which their programs could be expanded in the Denver Public Schools, the quality of the programs could be enhanced, or ways that the program and partnership could be improved.

In response to a question from Mr. Mejía about how people can become involved in the program, Mr. Hufford provided a phone number and contact name. Within a short period of time, he said, Big Brothers/Big Sisters staff members find appropriate matches between volunteers and students.

Superintendent Jerry Wartgow thanked Ms. Balsley and Mr. Hufford for their presentation and stated that he is aware of the importance of Big Brother/Big Sisters within the district and the community. He expressed appreciation for the informational packet provided, which contains statistical information about the success of the program and demonstrates how well it meshes with the district’s goals and objectives. He said that the district is grateful for the help of Big Brothers/Big Sisters and its volunteers and that that help is greatly needed.

Student Cory Harris, junior at Thomas Jefferson High School, said that he wished to speak about the proposal to add time to the school day. A recent study by Wested, he said, showed that there is little or no relationship between the number of hours that a student is in class and student achievement. He said that the study does reveal, however, that there is a relationship between student achievement and the precise time that an instructional activity occurs. Research suggests, he said, that while time is certainly a critical factor, by itself it has little direct impact on student performance; simply adding time to the school year or school day would likely not produce large-scale gains in student achievement. He said that he feels that the money spent on increasing the length of the school day would be better spent on increasing the number of teachers at the elementary school level to decrease class size, as only ten percent of Denver’s children in grades kindergarten through three are in a class whose size is in compliance with the national goal, which is 18 or fewer students.
Cory said that adding more time to the school day would not only cause fatigue among students, but a 15-minute addition per day would only amount to an additional two minutes per class period. In conclusion, he stated that he feels that adding time to the standard school day is unnecessary, and that a higher priority should be placed on reducing class size, as smaller class sizes would have a far greater impact on student achievement.

Student Garrett Buckmaster, sophomore at Thomas Jefferson High School, said that he agreed with Cory Harris’ statements and that a possible solution to what many feel is inadequate class time would be to deal with problem students in a swift and responsible manner. Half of the time in many of his classes, he said, is taken up with the teacher having to deal with students causing disruptions and disturbances.

Student Daria Reaven, sixth grade student at Denver School of the Arts, said that she believes that school should start later in the morning because students would get more sleep and would have more energy to learn. She said that she is aware that students should taking responsibility for going to sleep early enough to ensure adequate sleep, but that most teenagers simply do not operate in that manner. A later start time, she said, would provide greater performance in academics and other activities, as well as higher levels of concentration.

She suggested that middle and high schools start at the 9:00 a.m. time that is currently the start time for elementary schools, and that elementary schools start at 7:40 a.m., as most district secondary schools do now. She said that the extra 80 minutes would make a big difference to teenagers, who need more sleep than younger children in order to achieve peak performance. In a recent study reported on National Public Radio, she said, it was stated that the hours in the early morning are the most important sleep hours for teenagers. She said that scientists quoted in the report affirmed that it would be better for students to start school at a later hour because more sleep would lead to better concentration.

Marissa Richen, sixth grade student at Denver School of the Arts, said that another reason for Denver School of the Arts, in particular, to have a later start time is that the school is a magnet school and draws students from all over the district, who often must travel long distances to get to school and must wake up very early in order to do so. A later start time, she said, would allow these students to sleep longer.

Shelby Barsh, sixth grade student at Denver School of the Arts, said that she and her friends started a petition to have a later start date for their school. She presented the petition, with 79 signatures, to the Board. She thanked the Board for listening to her and her friends.

Mrs. Edwards said that many middle and high school students feel that the start time for secondary schools should be later, but that few of them have ever come before the Board to state their case, and she expressed admiration for the students’ courage in doing so. She said that the issue has come before the Board’s consideration a number of times and
that there are pragmatic reasons that the Board has not approved the request. If start
times for elementary and secondary schools were changed, she said, very young
children—kindergartners and first graders—would be out waiting for buses at 6:30 a.m.,
and that it is dark outside at that time for several months.

Shelby replied that most people do not have to leave for work that early and that the
children’s parents could wait with them at the bus stop.

Mrs. Edwards said that that was a fair and thoughtful response. She said that all of the
Board’s decisions require careful consideration and that she was pleased that the DSA
students came forward to provide input into that decision.

Dr. Wartgow thanked all the students attending the meeting to provide input on the
calendar and the school year. He informed them that the district has a committee
working on the calendar and other scheduling questions, and that serious consideration
would be given to all opinions. The committee, he said, has read the information and
studied the implications, and he was glad that the students had come and provided
information to help the Calendar Committee see the issue from students’ standpoints.

George Lang said that he feels that middle and high school start times should be pushed
back to 9:00 a.m., given the vast amount of research that states that teenagers need more
sleep and do not perform well in the morning.

He said that he has two nephews attending a district middle school and that he is opposed
to the school year starting in mid-August because the school they attend—like many
district schools—does not have air conditioning. He said that he has visited classrooms
in the school and that the temperatures in them well exceed 100 degrees when the outside
temperature is only 80 degrees.

Claire Brockbank, parent of two children at Bromwell Elementary School, said that she
opposes the idea of starting school five days earlier than in the 2001-2002 school year,
and ending the year five days later. She reminded the Board that the past summer
vacation was shortened by more than two weeks to compensate for the first year of the
calendar adjustment to the earlier start date. The proposed calendar, she said, does not
appear to have many changes, but there are several instances where students attend
school for only one-half of the day, which she does not feel is beneficial to students, as
they are too distracted by the early dismissal time to pay attention to their studies.

As mentioned by the previous speaker, she said, temperatures in non-air-conditioned
classrooms in August are stiflingly hot, and it would be difficult to imagine that that
environment would be conducive to learning or translate to significantly higher test
scores. She said that she feels the district’s obsession with test scores is happening at the
expense of students, parents, and teachers. Not only has the calendar been expanded, she
said, there is an increasing emphasis on greater and greater amounts of homework, which
has left very little time for other enrichment activities for students.
Ms. Brockbank said that she agreed with the student who stated that the $2.8 million proposed to be spent on extending the school day and school year would be better used hiring additional teachers at the elementary level or targeting services to lower-performing schools.

**Student Austin Bakhtiary**, seventh grade student at Hill Middle School, said that adding fifteen minutes to the school day would interfere with students’ outside and enrichment activities, such as Destination Imagination, soccer practice, and piano lessons—all of which he partakes in. He said that it is important for students to have their spare time to pursue their own interests rather than doing school- and education-related activities all the time.

**Student Alex Becker**, seventh grade student at Hill Middle School, said that he opposes lengthening the school day by fifteen minutes because it would make scheduling for students too tight. For example, he said, he has after-school activities five afternoons per week, followed by dinner and homework, leaving little time for rest or relaxation. He said that even weekends are filled because that is the only time available to work on complicated or extended school projects.

**Bill Johnston**, member of Cheltenham Elementary School CDM, said that his comments were personal and did not necessarily reflect the position or opinions of other CDM members. He said that he feels that public education in Denver must be reformed, which was recently begun with the adoption of new district goals and strategies, and the Superintendent’s proposed initiatives to implement those strategies. He said that the proposed calendar would increase by 50 the number of hours of student instructional time, prove an additional six and one-half days of professional development for teachers, and an additional two days for student assessment.

The Cheltenham community, he said, recently began implementing a reform plan for their school and found that there is not sufficient time in the school day to accomplish some of the school’s reform objectives. He said that their teachers need time for more instruction; instructional planning; extensive professional development and articulation; assessment and testing; and greater parental involvement. However, he said, the additional time has budget implications that must also be taken under consideration. Some of the costs issues at Cheltenham, he said, were solved by voluntary teacher participation in staff development and articulation outside of the regular school day and school year. He said that Cheltenham teachers currently receive 14.5 days per year of professional development, and that the teachers voluntarily returned from summer break four days before they were required to in order to participate in staff development activities, and would continue to engage in such activities on their own after-school time—the equivalent of an additional four and one-half days before the end of the school year. The school, he said, engages substitute teachers to provide for an additional three days of development in half-day increments. He said that all professional development for Cheltenham staff is on-site and exceeds what the district would provide in the calendar proposal. With a high turnover of teachers, he said, continuous professional development will be required to sustain the school’s new instructional program.
Mr. Johnston said the district’s calendar proposal would provide more time for some reform actions but that the proposal needs refinement, as the Superintendent has suggested. The proposal, he said, speaks of area and district staff development, but that the nature of that development and its relationship to school improvement plans and on-site staff development should be addressed before adopting the calendar. He said that the instructional coaching suggested in the proposal is already provided at some schools and that that coaching is related to current instructional programs. He also stressed that sustainable funding for the proposed calendar must be demonstrated.

In closing, he said, it is important to realize that fundamental systemic change might take as long as a decade, but that it must begin. The proposed calendar, he said, would be a limited first step in implementing the district’s new strategies and that, with fleshing out, it merits the Board’s consideration.

Richard Rosavich, American Government teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School, said that the proposed additional fifteen minutes per day of instructional time is a matter that should be addressed in negotiations between the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) and the district, and that he would not address that issue. However, he said that he did wish to address the fact that the proposed calendar has semesters that are significantly disparate in the number of days. As a teacher of a semester course, he said, having an imbalance between semesters in excess of ten days, even allowing for four days of state-mandated assessment, means that students in one semester receive an additional week of instruction than students taking the course in the other semester do not receive. One possible solution, he said, would be to change one of the staff development days in the fall to a day during the spring semester, which, if timed properly, could reduce the difference between semesters to only two days.

He said that teachers do not have adequate time at the end of either semester to grade meaningful final exams, especially at the end of the school year when they are expected to complete grading, turn in grades, and close up classrooms in half a day. He said that delays in deadlines would also be delays that students would receive feedback on their performance. To avoid some of these problems at the high school level, he suggested that the two assessment days be changed to the end of the school year, since high schools do not participate in walk-in assessments. In that way, he said, the teachers could use those days to grade finals and get grades to students within a reasonable amount of time.

Mr. Rossavich said that the proposed calendar gives students a short break in October, but that teachers would be participating in staff development activities during that time and would not have a break between Labor Day and Veterans’ Day. He proposed that the Veterans’ Day holiday be eliminated and that it be moved to sometime in October to provide a rest for students as well as teachers. He stressed that he does not mean to disrespect veterans, but that a break is needed during that long stretch for both students and teachers.
Kathi Mitchell, grade four-five teacher at Knapp Elementary School, said that she entered teaching from another career field three years ago and that she does not object to the addition of fifteen minutes to the school day, although she has heard that some of her colleagues object to it. However, she explained that she was not certain of the purpose of the two assessment days at the beginning of the school year—whether students attend those days or whether they are used to set up times for assessments.

She said that she also questions the reason for changing teacher planning days to staff development days. As a teacher, she said, she does appreciate the opportunities for professional development provided by the district and that she always learns useful things for working in her classroom. However, she said, without the planning days, there is little opportunity to learn to use the information provided during the staff development sessions. She said that teachers must have time to absorb the information they are given and think of ways to use it most effectively in their classrooms with their own unique students.

Dr. Wartgow said that many of the decisions regarding details of the calendar would be site-based and situation specific. He said that clearer and more concise information would be provided to teachers and school communities in a format more conducive to understanding how schools and the district can use the new calendar to better accomplish their goals and objectives.

Connie Archuleta, parent of a child at Traylor Academy, read an editorial posted last year in the Rocky Mountain News stating that starting school in mid-August robs children of their summer vacation, especially in light of the fact that starting school earlier does not provide for extra learning days. Given Colorado’s climate, she said, starting two weeks earlier is a poor alternative to keeping the school year going through the middle of June, when the weather is much more tolerable for schools that do not have air conditioning. She stated that the two weeks prior to Labor Day are the best time to experience activities in the mountains that do not include snow, while late May and early June are often still too cool in the mountains to partake of many activities. On the other hand, she said, the average daily temperature in August is 87 degrees, which is very uncomfortable for children squirming in their seats in classrooms without air conditioning.

She said that there are claims that districts that start school earlier get a head start on hiring teachers, but that it would seem to her that teachers would want to be out of school in August as well. The second advantage listed, she said, is the fact that students who are out of school prior to Memorial Day get a head start on obtaining the most desirable summer jobs; however, those same students would have to quit those jobs prior to the true end of summer to return to school. She said that districts that start school in mid-August claim that they cannot afford to be at a disadvantage when testing season rolls around—a district opening early has three more weeks of classes before students are tested. However, she said, if children stiflingly warm, they are less able to concentrate and learn, and that the additional three weeks would have been wasted.
Jennifer Richards, teacher at McElwain Elementary School in Adams County District 12, said that if the district wishes to produce children who only score well on standardized tests, then officials should put a halt to such content areas as social studies, mathematics, science, writing, and reading, and use the extra time to teach to the tests.

Becky Wissink, President of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA), said that she wished to assure the audience and the teacher corps that she and Superintendent Wartgow have had, and continue to have, constructive discussions regarding instructional practices and the conditions that affect those practices, and that they will continue to work collaboratively to attain higher levels of achievement for the students of Denver Public Schools.

She asked the Board not to approve the draft calendar until the teaching staff has had an opportunity to react to it and their questions have been addressed. She stated that she understands the importance of adopting a calendar quickly; however, doing it correctly is more important than doing it quickly. Since the calendar sets forth the use of instructional time, she said, it is the intention of DCTA to find out from teachers what they like about the proposed calendar, what they don’t like about it, and what recommendations they have for improving the draft proposal. She said that DCTA would provide feedback to the district as soon as possible, but no later than the end of January.

Ms. Wissink said that DCTA representatives look forward to meeting with district staff in the near future to address teachers’ concerns regarding the placement and intent of assessment, planning, and district and area inservice days. She assured the Board and the audience that her statements regarding the calendar were not motivated by union positioning for power and that DCTA is completely committed to helping Denver students improve their learning and achievement, and in partnering with the district toward that end. She said that the district is fortunate to have highly dedicated staff members who work far in excess of forty hours per week to improve student achievement. Denver teachers, she said, already have more contact time with their students than is required by state regulations and, by contract, they are required to work a longer day than teachers in most other districts. The current discussions, she said, are about examining how staff uses the time presently available before making decisions to expand that time; there must be a higher focus on quality over quantity. She said that it is important to know how much of the current 6.5 hours per day is used for direct instruction, guided practice, checking for understanding, individualized instruction, independent study, and evaluation.

In closing, she said, teachers are committed to providing, through their instruction, the best educational opportunities for the students they serve. She urged the Board to allow their voices to be heard before making very important decisions that impact their lives.

Dr. Wartgow said that he and the district’s administrative staff look forward to fully engaging the teachers in discussions around the calendar and scheduling. He said that staff would listen to all concerns and attempt to work through issues on a consensus basis. Everyone agrees, he said, that the goals of increasing student performance, setting
high expectations, and closing the gap between better and poorer performing students must be foremost in every consideration. He said that staff will ensure that people have an opportunity to fully understand the intent of the calendar proposal and receive clarification on any issues that arise.

Dr. Wartgow said that it is important to realize that the calendar is one part of a much larger plan, and that it is understood that extending the day by fifteen minutes, in and of itself, will not change much if other aspects of the educational system are not changed as well. There are plans, he said, for significant change throughout the system and those changes need time for refinement, and that the purpose of this and other public hearings is to get issues and concerns out in the open. He explained that other important parts of the changes will be careful monitoring to ensure that the district-approved curriculum is being taught in classrooms and that parents are fully engaged in the educational process through a compact that involves parents, students, and teachers with a full understanding at the outset that everyone involved has a commitment to improving students’ performance. There are other proposals, he said, dealing with the full implementation of the English Language Acquisition Program. He reiterated that the calendar issue is a part of a much larger comprehensive plan, and that staff looks forward to working with every segment of the community to move the plan forward. Based upon the current school accountability ratings, he said, there are 21 schools in the district that carry an “unsatisfactory” rating and there is not a great deal of time to wait, study, and evaluate the situation; serious measures must be undertaken immediately and it is hoped that the comprehensive plan is a move in the right direction.

J. Vaughn-Harris, substitute teacher in the Denver Public Schools, said that he spent the last two weeks of the last school year working at Manual High School and that it had been a very pleasant and positive experience for him. He said that he had been looking forward to returning in some capacity this year and that, when he finally did during the third week of school, he was shocked and appalled to see how things were going at the school. The school environment, he said, was less than congenial and, in his eyes, not conducive to an attitude of learning. He said that he was not comparing Manual to any other school, just to how he saw it late last year compared to this year. He suggested that Board members visit the school and see for themselves that students are roaming the halls during class, and to sit in classrooms and see the disrespect shown by some students to their teachers and their classmates. He said that many teachers do not have control of their classes and that school officials do not seem to be adhering to the law, which states that a student receiving three office referrals must be removed from school pending a meeting between the student’s parents or guardians and school officials.

He said that he would continue to work at Manual at every possible occasion and that he would work to try and reestablish what he considers a good learning environment for the school. However, he said, the way things currently are in the school, if something is not done soon, the school will receive a great deal of negative publicity and scorn within the community. He again urged Board members to visit the school and see the situation for themselves.
Ms. Gantz Berman said that she appreciated Mr. Vaughn-Harris’ comments, but that it is important to consider the fact that Manual is undergoing a major transition and that any change as significant and comprehensive as the school is experiencing is bound to stumble along the way. She expressed confidence that some of the issues facing the school would be resolved over the coming months and that, in the end, the changes undertaken by the school community would pay off in success for the school.

Joseph Thomas-Hazell welcomed the new members of the Board of Education and wished them well during their tenure. He expressed opinions regarding the influence of various religions on the world politics of the United States and decried “political correctness” as the downfall of the country.

Carolyn Smith, second grade teacher at Whiteman Elementary School, said that she opposes the proposed boundary changes for Whiteman and hopes that the boundaries will be kept as they are with the exception of drawing the line at Quebec Street, so that children would not have to cross that busy street to go to school. As proposed, she said, the boundary changes would move approximately 80 students from Whiteman, which would leave the school with a student population of less than 250 students. She said that losing that many students would cost the school a great deal in terms of flexibility in terms of resource teachers serving children who are highly impacted economically. She said that they have a student population that is highly mobile and economically challenged, that those students will continue to require the services of nurses, social workers, and psychologists, and that the drop in population would mean a potential loss of those services.

She said that students living in the area of Alameda Avenue and Monaco Parkway should continue to attend Whiteman, rather than Lowry Elementary School, because that area has never been considered a part of the former Lowry Air Force Base compound. She said that the loss of those students would also be a loss of diversity for the school, as these are the children of working and middle class families.

Alice Matsuda, first grade teacher and CDM member at Whiteman, said that the opening of the new Lowry Elementary School will impact Whiteman by increasing Whiteman’s percentage of economically impacted students. She said that the school continues to draw a number of English language learners and that it has one of the highest mobility rates of any school in the district. Having 80 less students next year, she said, will result in a loss of resources and will not be fair to the children who will still attend Whiteman and are still in dire need of additional services.

Ms. Gantz Berman said that she had attended a discussion on boundaries held at Whiteman and had heard the concerns raised there. She assured the Whiteman community that those concerns would be taken into consideration in discussions by the Board prior to final action on the boundary changes.

Aubrey Duran President of the Schmitt Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and CDM member, said that members of both organizations have visited both
Grant and Kunsmiller Middle Schools and that they feel that their student population would be more successful and happy at Kunsmiller. She said that the primary education focus at Grant is on technology, whereas Schmitt students have a stronger focus on reading and writing. Transitioning from elementary school to middle school is difficult, she said, without the added pressure of an entirely different educational focus. She said that, in speaking with Schmitt parents and students, the majority of people in the Schmitt community oppose the boundary change.

In visiting Grant, Ms. Duran said, she found that examples of student writing are not posted around the building as they are at Schmitt, and that Schmitt teachers feel that it is important to post student writing to let them know that they have made important accomplishments. She said that a similar visit to Kunsmiller revealed that student writing samples are posted both inside and outside of every classroom. The writing samples, she said, revealed proficiency and creativity, and was a suitable follow-up for what students are taught at Schmitt.

She said that Grant staff members were invited to visit Schmitt so that they could see how and what Schmitt students are learning to better prepare themselves to teach Schmitt students. She said that she is excited about the technology aspect of Grant’s educational program, but that she felt that more emphasis should be placed on reading and writing. Schmitt’s principal, she said, stated that good performance by students in Grant’s technology program could lead to students being placed in the Computer Magnet at Thomas Jefferson. Other area children attending Grant, she said, would be placed at South High School instead of Abraham Lincoln High School, which is the high school currently serving the neighborhood. She said that many parents want their children to attend high school in their own neighborhood.

Ms. Duran said that the distance to Grant is too far for children so young, and entails crossing the Platte River, dangerous railroad tracks, and Broadway; and that children who miss the bus after school would be hard-pressed to be able to get home from a school so far away. She said that parents are also concerned that Grant has far fewer bilingual classes than Kunsmiller and that many of the children who live in the Schmitt attendance area are English language learners. Many parents sat in on classes at Grant, she said, and found that teachers there instruct using a “lecture” method, without students asking questions and being involved in the lesson; as a result, it did not seem that the students got a firm grasp of what was being presented to them in the lesson.

She said that one of the main concerns of Schmitt parents is the question of transportation. She said that Grant is very far from their neighborhood, that many parents of Schmitt students work early in the morning, and that there is concern that students who miss the district-provided transportation will be unable to get to or from school, as many of them are too young to navigate public transportation on their own.

Ms. Duran said that there is also concern about the high school their children will be attending after Grant, as neither South nor Thomas Jefferson has a primarily Hispanic population, and the children who attend Schmitt are, for the most part, Hispanic. She
said that there would also be a problem with students from an economically impacted area, such as the Schmitt neighborhood, attending classes with students who are economically much better off than they are.

Ms. Duran said that their visit to Kunsmiller showed that many more students were involved in their classroom discussions, raising their hands to contribute or taking notes. She said that students there were using planners and that teachers paid attention to those planners and kept students on course.

Kim Valdez, parent of six children who have attended, or are attending, Schmitt, said that she does not want to send her children on a bus across town to attend middle school. She said that one of the great advantages of her children attending Schmitt is that she is able to walk them to and from school, and that she also likes the teaching style and educational environment at the school. If necessary, she said, she would have her children attend Kunsmiller under the Choice option, as that is the school she wishes them to attend. She stated that she has lived in her home for fourteen years and that she is very happy with the education her children have gotten at Kunsmiller.

Maria (no last name provided), parent of children at Schmitt and Kunsmiller, said that she is very happy with her children’s education there and that she does not wish to send them to Grant. She said that her daughter will be only eleven years old when she begins attending middle school and that she does not feel secure or good about her attending a school so far away and with which she is not familiar. She said that if her daughter missed the bus home from Grant, it would be a serious problem because her daughter does not know how to use public transportation by herself and she would not be able to pick her daughter up because she is not able to leave her job in the middle of the day. Kunsmiller, she said, is within walking distance in case of an emergency, and it is a route with which her children are familiar, because they have followed it before.

Debbie Templeton, Schmitt paraprofessional and parent of a child attending the school, said that it would make more sense for Schmitt children to attend Henry Middle School than Grant, because Henry’s educational environment is similar to Kunsmiller’s and, therefore, similar to Schmitt’s. If Kunsmiller is too full to accept Schmitt students, she said, it would be better for them to attend Henry.

Lourdes Valenzuela said that she was present to represent many of the Spanish-speaking parents at Schmitt who are very concerned about the proposal to send Schmitt children to Grant to attend middle school. Many Spanish-speaking parents, she said, do not know how to drive a car and don’t speak English well enough that they feel that they will be able to communicate with staff at Grant about the welfare of their children. She said that middle school is a difficult age for students and that these Spanish-speaking parents are concerned about such a great upheaval for their children. Like all parents, she said, they simply want what is best for their children.

She urged the Board to keep parents like her in mind when they make their decision about boundaries for the district. She said that she and the other parents are not making comparisons about the quality of one school over another; they are simply stating that
they would like to keep their children attending school in their own area, as other parents in the district are able to do.

Ms. Duran said that the views expressed by her and other Schmitt parents are the prevailing opinions of the neighborhood. She said that many families in the neighborhood have a longstanding tradition of sending their children first to Schmitt, then to Kunsmiller, and finally to Abraham Lincoln for high school; and they do not want to part from this tradition. It is clear, she said, that Kunsmiller is overcrowded and that Grant is losing some of its population in the opening of the new middle school; however, it is also clear to the parents in the Schmitt community that Grant is not the right school for their children. She urged the Board to allow Schmitt families to attend Henry if Kunsmiller is too crowded to accept the children because they would fit in more readily in Henry’s environment than Grant’s.

Mrs. Edwards thanked the Schmitt parents for attending the meeting and bringing their concerns before the Board of Education. She said that the level of achievement for children is directly related to the level of parental involvement of their parents, and that the children at Schmitt are doing well because they have the support of a group of caring, loving parents.

Mrs. Edwards said that parents of Schmitt students had been invited to a public forum at Grant regarding the proposed boundary changes and that she wishes that more Schmitt parents had decided to attend the meeting. She said that the Schmitt parents who did attend the meeting raised some concerns that were addressed, but that they were in favor of the boundary change and that they did not hear any opposing viewpoints that evening.

She said that the opening of the new middle school in north central Denver would signal a new beginning for Grant and the opportunity to create the school that best meets the needs of its new student population. She asked the Schmitt parents to consider working with the administration and staff at Grant to create a wonderful school that will do many of the things that the parents present at the meeting stated that they wished to see in a new school. Sharing these concerns with Grant’s staff, she said, would be one way of ensuring that the new school meets and reflects their needs and desires for the education of their children.

Mrs. Edwards stated that the purpose of this proposal is not just to send Schmitt students “somewhere” but to give them, and students in middle schools experiencing overcrowding, the advantage of attending a smaller school with more reasonable class sizes. She said that a middle school with a population in excess of 1,100 students does not allow for much individualized and personalized attention. She urged the parents to consider the possibilities of being able to create the kind of school they want for their children, which they would be able to do if their children were allowed to attend Grant.

Mrs. Moss said that she, too, wished to commend the Schmitt parents for their caring and involvement in education. She said that their wish to send their children to Henry if Kunsmiller could not accept them is unlikely because Henry has nearly the same problem
with overcrowding that Kunsmiller has, and Henry would simply not be able to accept 200, or even 100, more students from Schmitt.

Ms. Moss said that she supports the idea of parents using the Choice option to keep their children at Kunsmiller if they feel that is the best educational option for them, but that she hoped that the Schmitt parents would return to Grant and give the school and its administration a chance to demonstrate that their school would be a good choice for Schmitt students. She urged them to present their concerns to the Grant principal and allow the administration a chance to address those concerns, especially if they would improve the overall educational experience for all children at Grant.

To clarify a point, Wayne Eckerling, Assistant Superintendent, said that not all Schmitt families live in the South attendance area; some families would continue to send their children to Abraham Lincoln while those who have been in what has traditionally been the South attendance area would continue to send their children to South. Also, he said, students who live west of Broadway and wish to attend a computer program would attend the Computer Magnet at North High School rather than Thomas Jefferson High School.

Ms. Duran said that Schmitt parents have spoken a number of times with the Grant principal and that they still remain convinced that Kunsmiller is a better school for their children. She said that the Kunsmiller principal has also shared with them his desire to keep the Schmitt children among the population at Kunsmiller and said that he would write a letter to that effect to Dr. Eckerling, stating that he feels the boundary change would be the wrong thing to do.

Ms. Moss said that a public forum is not the proper place to settle issues as important as those brought forward by the Schmitt families. However, she said, she did wish to express her appreciation to those families for their involvement in education and their sincere desire to make the best educational choices for their children by doing research and visiting the schools involved. She encouraged parents to stay active in schools and to continue to fight for what they feel is best for their children.

L. W. Morrow, said that he attended Denver Public Schools as a child and graduated from Manual High School. He said that he is interested in and works in the area of alternative forms of transportation, such as solar powered, fuel cell, and hybrid engine vehicles, and that he has been seeking financial support from many governmental entities to develop these ideas. He said that the United States’ dependency on foreign oil and environmental issues, such as global warming, will eventually require that science and the transportation industry find alternative forms of transportation.

He said that it is also important that such ideas get a foothold in high school education so that students emerge from schools aware of the issues and prepared to deal with them. Additionally, he said, American students must be made more aware of historical and geographical influences and their relationship to current events. New knowledge does exist, he said, and American students must partake of it in order to take their rightful place in world economics and politics.
III. Adjournment

Ms. Gantz Berman adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Susan G. Edwards, Secretary
Board of Education