

Comments, Utah Education Policy Forum, November 12, 2007

Panel: “School Choice-One Charter Principal’s Perspective”

*Since opening, August, 2003, AMES (Academy for Math, Engineering and Science-early college high school), has been oversubscribed with an average of 350-400 applicants for 135 entering 9th graders.

*The AMES office staff receives at least a call EVERY day from parents wanting to enroll their student, grades 9-12, at AMES. AMES only accepts freshman.

*Approximately half of the AMES student population, recruited from Granite and Salt Lake districts, deliberately choose AMES as an option because of the focused curriculum in math and science, U of U concurrent courses, open access AP classes, diverse student populations (economically disadvantaged 43%; MESA, over 65%), specially selected teaching staff, student interventions such as Saturday School and summer school, and small class size (averaging 18-20).

*The other half of the applicants chose AMES because of what AMES is NOT—a large, impersonal, unresponsive, comprehensive high school with a multitude of gated programs that promote a “sort and select” model.

*AMES molds these two often disparate student populations into a grade level cohort who stay together until graduating. Special enrichment activities open to all AMES students include community-based internships, senior project, guest speakers, field trips, homeroom advisory, award winning science fair, and co-curricular clubs reflecting the diversity of the AMES student population.

*The population of AMES is a microcosm of an adolescent population that demands attention—traditionally underserved (females/ethnic minorities), special ed, 504, gifted, and transient (a growing interest from out of state families moving to Utah whose students have attended similar programs in other states.)

*AMES would not be as popular if more high schools adopted some or any of the recommendations of Breaking Ranks II report (NASSP, 2004).

*Choice options are also reflected in staffing. Teachers from other districts have chosen to teach at AMES because of the school’s vision, focused curriculum, and strong professional learning community.

*Private sector donations and business partners have also chosen to support AMES for similar reasons, contributing to focused needs including professional development, technology, and special student activities (e.g. Micron AMES Science Fair).

For more information about AMES, please check our web site: www.ames-slc.org