



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS From Community Outreach Programs following the 103rd Arizona Town Hall

In programs held around the state to follow up on the fall 2013 Town Hall titled “Strong Start - Early Education in Arizona”, audience members were asked to participate in a Town Hall-style discussion on priorities and action items. Statements prepared from the discussions at the Outreach Programs are set forth below.

FLAGSTAFF (February 26, 2014)

This community is on the brink of an opportunity to really make a difference in early education. We have the resources and the ability to have a big impact if we prioritize education, participate in actions that are based on best practices, support existing quality programs such as Quality First and make sure that our voices are heard by policy leaders.

To accomplish these goals, we should first create a shared vision of quality early education. We also need sustainable funding.

We should individually become advocates for supporting early education with our neighbors, colleagues and, most importantly, our elected leaders. Guidance on how to more effectively share our thoughts with our state legislature will help empower individuals to become better advocates.

We also should work hard to recruit and retain quality early education teachers because that is “where the rubber meets the road.”

Early education begins at home. We need to better support families by supporting systems that help them-- including access to healthy foods and resources on best practices for early education. We also need to provide them with the tools they need to become advocates.

It is urgent that our community leaders come together to provide guidance and lead the charge for better early education.

VERDE VALLEY - CLARKDALE (February 27, 2014)

Education begins before birth. We need to provide support to parents so that they can provide the best start for children. In addition to educating parents about best practices and providing them tools for the early education of their children, we need to simplify our preK-12 education system and support it--support that includes our time, our talent and our money.

Our education systems are overly encumbered by state and federal laws that are unfortunately tied to much-needed funding. Even with this state and federal funding, we are still underfunded—ranking 48th in the state. We need additional funding. Members of the public need to take a strong stance with state legislators and let them know that we no longer want to be ranked 48th. As part of this goal, we should take steps to provide resources to our youth so that they can become the voice of change. We should also incorporate social media and other tools to bring our younger leaders into the effort.

Programs like Arizona Reads and “Gear Up” are great templates that we need to support. .

We also need to train and better compensate early educators.

In sum: We need to invest in our children. They are our future.

WICKENBURG (MARCH 4, 2014)

- SEE STATEMENT ON PAGE 6

PHOENIX – SOROPTIMIST (March 6, 2014)

Kindergarten in Arizona is not mandatory, although it should be made so, because children who begin first grade already knowing how to read and write are better prepared to do the work that is required for them to be competitive in today's world. Requiring participation in kindergarten and restoring funding for quality all day kindergarten are both critically important to children's long-term educational success. Since some schools do manage to provide all day kindergarten, we should explore how best to expand the resources already in place to cover all children.

The voters who must approve the funding of such programs may view kindergarten as glorified day care, which they view as a luxury. An aggressive grass roots marketing campaign should be implemented to inform and persuade voters and parents about the critical importance of early childhood education to later success.

It is also important to engage parents and prepare them to better support early childhood education in general and their own children's development in particular. The achievement gap between children raised in lower income families and children raised in higher income families begins very early. Parents should be educated about the importance of their behaviors and interactions with their children, such as reading and modeling beneficial behaviors. Parents should be trained and encouraged to become more effective as parents in promoting their children's development. Schools can be particularly effective in reaching out to engage and train parents to work more effectively with their children.

SHOW LOW/LAKESIDE (March 10, 2014)

There are many people in Arizona who are simply not aware of the impact of quality early education and all-day kindergarten. As individuals we need to educate our neighbors, friends and legislators that quality early education and all-day kindergarten are critical investments for our future.

We also need to make sure that all parents, especially those who are young or poor, are aware of the many resources available through First Things First, BUILD and other organizations that can empower them to be better parents.

We need to reach out to those children whose parents are not fulfilling their role. Otherwise, many of these children will end up in the justice system. We need to intervene now with quality early education because it will impact all of us if we don't.

We also need to support our teachers.

Whether it is supporting our teachers, playing educational games with children or advocating to policymakers about the importance of early education, we all have a role to play.

YUMA (March 19, 2014)

"Quality early education has a direct impact on our economy and our quality of life. Because of its critical importance to all aspects of our community's future, we need to support it with a variety of actions. First, it is critical to have active and involved parents.

"We should all support parents, especially those in challenging economic situations who may not have the resources to provide quality early education to their children. In addition to educating parents about the importance of early education, we should provide resources and programs at convenient times – perhaps after working hours.

"Doctors and others who interface directly with parents of young children can also be advocates to the parents, teaching them about the importance of early education and connecting them to available resources.

“While the role of parents is essential, a lot of parents are simply not able to provide the support necessary for early education, often because of economics. The business community can help. They employ the parents and have an impact on them, which will eventually have a broader impact on the community. They can help to educate the parents on the importance of early education, and they can support parents by being flexible when necessary for the parents to access education resources, or to attend a parent-teacher conference.

“Businesses and other organizations can also help by providing sustainable funding for effective programs. Money is one of the biggest stumbling blocks for many of the actions necessary to improve early education.

“However, Yuma is a strong and connected community that can make a big difference with its children if it continues the momentum that has been started, partners and collaborates on effective programs, and finds a way to garner the funding necessary to support early education as part of our school system. Funding methods could include cost sharing, in-kind donations and other creative methods to accomplish the goal of supporting early education and the funding of full-day kindergarten.

“Finally, we all have a role to play as advocates for the importance of early education. Early education is not a fad, it is the foundation of our future.”

TUCSON (MARCH 26, 2014)

To make the recommendations on early childhood a reality, we need a focused effort to involve the business community. Businesses need to be aware of the impact of early education on having a quality workforce. Businesses can be partners in supporting early education efforts by serving as advocates to elected leaders, partnering with local schools, supporting Quality First or providing financial support for early education efforts.

We also need to raise awareness with parents about the importance of quality early education. To reach parents, we should go to where they are—such as pediatricians and other health care providers. We should also use public service announcements and other methods to get the word out about the importance of early education to parents.

To reach our goals, we should consider raising the standards for early education providers, expanding Quality First and supporting competitive salaries for early educators. We should also involve our youth who are an untapped force for using social media to impact change.

We need to involve our state legislators. We must not give up on the need to have statewide governmental support for early education. We should provide legislators with information that demonstrates the return on investment of early education, including full day kindergarten. We should then ask elected leaders focused and specific questions about their support for early education and vote accordingly.

SIERRA VISTA (MARCH 27, 2014)

Quality early education is critical to our state’s future. We need to create equal opportunities for children to reach their maximum potential because it is an investment that has payoffs later with savings to social services and our justice system.

Accordingly, there are several actions we can take to improve and support early education in Cochise County and in Arizona.

First, we need to support parents in making good decisions for their kids. We need to provide them with resources and support in parenting their children. We also need to support programs that develop good social skills such as arts and music programs in our schools. Furthermore, public schools should receive the same opportunities for support as charter schools. This includes funding and tax credits. We can also support schools and parents through partnerships with businesses, philanthropies, chambers of commerce, faith based organizations, the education communities local governments and others. These partnerships and collaborations are critical as well for sustainable funding to ensure the availability of quality early education.

Early education is so important that we need to invest in it now. This includes investment in our educators. Until we pay early childhood educators a decent wage we will not be able to reach our goals of high quality early education. We also need to invest in the use of marketing and social media to get the word out that early education is a critical investment in our future.

DOUGLAS (MARCH 27, 2014)

It is important for the future of our community that we support early education on a statewide level. Such support includes funding. Funding for early education should be part of the entire educational system – including the use of tax credits for early education and oversight to ensure that funding is tied to quality programs.

Collaboration is important and can make a difference. One model program that we should support and emulate is the current collaboration between Douglas Unified School District and Chiricahua Community Health Centers. This type of partnership can help create additional funding for teachers' salaries and early education. Funding can also be obtained through local programs and fundraisers.

Parents as Teachers is another model program we should support that provides resources and education to parents.

There are many actions that we can take as individuals and as a community to have a positive impact on early education. They include:

1. Acting as advocates to get the word out to families about the information and resources available to them;
2. Supporting quality educational experiences by encouraging enriching activities beyond just putting a child in front of a T.V., including reading to children;
3. Providing libraries and health care providers with information in Spanish and English to give to parents and caregivers;
4. Providing web links to organizations like BUILD and First Things First;
5. Having a community event for parents that includes organizations and speakers who can provide resources and information on early education; and
6. Individually volunteering to help guide families through the available resources.

To make a difference for our community, we as individuals need to all become advocates – with actions big and small.

PRESCOTT (APRIL 1, 2014)

Quality early education is important to our future. Research repeatedly demonstrates the return on investment from supporting early education. Support includes funding.

Simply put, we need to prioritize funding for early education. Funding can come from consolidating and reducing administrative costs. It can also come from the expanded use of volunteers with home visits and the supplying of resources and information to families who provide early education within their homes.

Nonetheless, we should not discount the need to invest in early education through the use of increased taxes.

We need to invest now in early education because of the impact it will have years from now on our communities and our state.

PHOENIX PUBLIC LIBRARY (APRIL 10, 2014)

It's important to invest in quality early education programs. As demonstrated by repeated rigorous studies and our instinctive actions to invest in our own children, quality early education is important for all children.

To make a difference on this issue, we need to get the word out about the importance of early education to our policy leaders. We also need to inform and empower parents, not only by educating them about the importance of early education, but also by bringing resources to them through local, community and faith-based organizations.

Unfortunately, not all parents are able to provide quality early learning experiences for their children. Accordingly, sustainable funding for quality early education programs is one method to invest in Arizona's children. We also need to better fund and support our educational systems in kindergarten through third grade. This includes restoring funding for all-day kindergarten.

We can all have an impact by supporting our local schools. We can also have an impact at the ballot box by voting for those leaders who support education.

In sum, investment in all of Arizona's children is an investment in the future of Arizona. We need to act now.

Consensus Report
103rd Arizona Town Hall Outreach Program – Wickenburg
Strong Start – Early Education in Arizona

Setting the Stage

1. How does the quality and availability of child care and early education programs impact Wickenburg? Consider long-term and short-term effects on children, families, schools and the community, including the economy, businesses, social services, government and health care.

The quality and availability of child care and early education programs is extremely important because these programs are the building blocks for our community. Over the past five years, trends have shown more children in our community have not been exposed to early education programs, which may be attributed to changes in community demographics.

Within the community, there are some programs available, including those that are free to everyone, but there is limited understanding about the availability of these programs. The programs could be better promoted to increase utilization. It's important to not only inform parents about these programs, but to ensure their accessibility as well – transportation has been an obstacle for many families. Where programs are accessible, programs can be successful. For example, pre-school for English language learners in Aguila has made a difference in preparing students for kindergarten.

Supporting quality programs requires partnerships, particularly to create a good transition from preschool to kindergarten to first grade. Partnerships need to engage the community, including churches, businesses, and municipal departments such as parks and recreation. We need to focus on finding effective solutions based on studies where lessons have already been learned, including the education of parents. We need to keep trying to engage parents to make them aware of the importance of preparing children for the future.

Content, Caregivers and the Classroom

2. In addition to socialization skills and executive functions, kindergarten – third grade academic standards have increased dramatically over recent years. Considering the spectrum of childcare options, how do we best engage caregivers in actively preparing students for school readiness?

Childcare options are typically family members in our community. Most families do not know or understand the importance of education in the first five years of a child's life – and that there are Department of Education standards for early childhood education. To best engage caregivers, we need to reach out to families at the birth of a child, and somehow make them aware of what it means for children to be prepared for school. Within Wickenburg specifically, the Pregnancy Resource Center and community physicians may provide other avenues for offering information to families and engaging parents that we may not be able to reach otherwise. In addition, we need to work with current kindergarten students, to connect with families where there may be younger siblings. A system of "targeted" social marketing centered on preparing students for school readiness would be effective in (1) promoting awareness, (2) gaining commitment, and (3) changing behaviors. We need to develop partnerships, taking advantage of programs such

as First Things First, to help get the word out to families about early education and child development.

Collaboration and Resources

3. What resources are important to make quality early child care and education accessible? To what extent should government funding, private enterprise, private philanthropy, and others finance or otherwise support early childcare and education? What specific actions would encourage and improve coordination, collaboration and partnership between and among Wickenburg’s families, early childhood care and education providers, and other relevant organizations?

Within our community, the organizations and entities represented here tonight should consider identifying a central location for posting and finding information, such as a social networking webpage or the Chamber of Commerce website, which already provides a calendar and provides local links. However, we should not limit ourselves to a single source, as all families do not have access to those resources and information. We should inventory the “communities” within our community, perhaps including a database of families with children in our community, to understand where they are, what they need, and how to reach them. At the same time, we need to identify which resources are available already and how to connect families with the resources and programs that already exist. Ultimately, there will be gaps and everyone should then focus on those gaps, where organizations come together in a partnership to meet identified needs. Similarly, when there are events for children at a specific location – we should take advantage of promoting the availability of other resources at that same place and time. Schools need to have an active role in the tracking of children, and reaching families with information. We need to come up with a plan first, that is acceptable to the community, City, County, and State, then seek out our funding.

Setting Priorities and Taking Action

4. What actions should be taken with respect to early childhood care and education in Wickenburg that would have the most beneficial impact and how should they be prioritized? When prioritizing actions, consider which recommended actions are most likely to be accomplished and which actions do not require funding.
5. Who should take ownership of the actions identified in Question 4, including any necessary resources?

Consider the impact that can be made by:

- Individuals
- Parents and other family members
- Neighborhood and faith-based organizations
- Teachers
- Educational institutions
- Businesses
- Non-profit Organizations
- Civic Institutions
- Regional resources

Specific actions that should be taken include:

- Reach out to families, which might otherwise be difficult to reach, at the beginning of each school year through the Community Action Program
- Use the Fall Festival sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Department for groups to reach families with early child care and education programs and resources at an event that many families will attend – including SAFE KIDS for car seats
- Establish an early learning coordination council with schools – Chamber’s Education Committee may be a natural fit
- Commit, as a group, to coming back together to further this discussion
- Leverage assistance of Lions Club to provide a free vision screening to families
- Spread the word about importance of early child care and education through WIC Education Services
- Consider creating the message or approach to families that focuses on helping their children not face the same challenges that they are facing (food, housing, health)
- Have bilingual flyers and resources available