

# **“Funding preK-12 Education”**

**Community Town Hall Report**

**Sierra Vista, AZ – September 23, 2017**



# **FUNDING PREK-12 EDUCATION**

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Participants of the September 2017 Sierra Vista Community Town Hall make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Community Town Hall participants.

### **ARIZONA'S PREK-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM GOALS**

Arizona's education system must prepare students for effective citizenship so students may fully participate in and contribute to an informed democracy. Our education system knits us together as a people, and creates a State that is unique and sustainable. Arizona's education system must foster students that are well rounded and prepared to be thoughtful, curious, critical thinkers that care about community. Arizona's education system should help a child and motivate them, and should help students actualize their potential within any career cluster. Arizona's education system must also help parents, who are the first educators, to make sure students do not slip through the cracks.

Arizona's education system must involve quality with measurable outcomes and academic rigor. This includes programs such as CTE (career and technical education) that provide students with skills to make them college and career ready. Arizona's education system must also address those students with disabilities to make sure they have skills for the job market and are prepared for life.

Moving forward, because of the importance of education funding, Arizona should focus on important practical and economic effects of an exceptional educational system. For example, when a family looks to relocate, parents often first look to the quality of the schools to help with their decision.

### **IMPACT OF PUBLIC FUNDS**

Funding for Arizona's education system is wholly inadequate. Arizona's schools are in crisis. Arizona must change its mindset: education is not an expense but an investment. Funding education in Arizona is often the result of competing ideas about the types and forms of education and how it is delivered. Our legislators are not invested in public education and often seek to dismantle public education.

The current rate of funding for our schools does not allow Arizona's education system to adequately pay our teachers. For example, the starting salary of Sierra Vista teachers makes it difficult to pay bills including student loans. At the current rate of funding for our schools, the pay provided to teachers provides a low standard of living that barely meets minimum wage. If this continues, our school system will not exist as we know it.

We must make sure our community and the legislators we elect support traditional public schools. We should look at best practices of other school districts to help stretch funding, but we must also address funding inadequacies by establishing priorities. We tolerate legislators who do not prioritize education and we need to change this or we will lose jobs to other states such as Virginia whose schools are better funded.

Across Arizona three fourths of schools operate on budget overrides for additional funding. Recently, Sierra Vista supported a \$28 million capital bond, which will make a big difference but cannot be used to pay salaries. Schools must help themselves because schools are not receiving the support from the State.

The current tax credit system takes money out of public education funding and is inequitable. Public schools must use tax credits for nonessentials whereas private schools may use tax credits for teacher salaries. The diversion of education funding through tax credits must stop.

We cannot approach the issue of education funding based on generalizations about political party or views. We must all work together to change the culture and approach to funding education in Arizona.

## **IMPROVING FUNDING FOR ARIZONA'S PREK-12 SCHOOLS**

There are a number of steps Arizona must take to improve education funding. First, Arizona must change the culture of education funding with every adult—including parents and childless adults—and within communities of interest to understand how education matters. We must promote civic engagement to encourage leaders who prioritize education or we will not see improvement.

Second, we can assist voters to enroll in the RTS (request to speak system), which is a tool used to communicate with the legislature.

Third, we must change how we view our students. Our views are skewed. The student next door may be our next mayor or doctor.

Fourth, we must renew Proposition 301. If Proposition 301 is not renewed or permanently extended, education will suffer a \$640 million loss annually, with \$500 million loss alone to K-12 education. We need to begin the discussion now about what we can do to support this measure.

Fifth, we should think outside the box and develop other funding sources including the involvement of the private sector, the use of tax credits, tax rebates, and we should stop using the large percentage of federal lands in Arizona as an excuse for inadequate funding of our education system.

Sixth, we need to change the tax credit laws to address the inequities and inadequacies in public schools.

Finally, we need to make systemic changes to how education is funded. We need predictable sources of funding. Currently, planning for education funding in Arizona is like planning in quick sand—it's always a moving target.

This hard work must begin with all of us. We must engage the governor, the legislators, and other civic leaders to make these changes and ensure these steps are accomplished. We are at a crossroads. There is no time for excuses.

## **SETTING PRIORITIES AND TAKING ACTION**

Participants first determined the most important priorities and goals for ensuring the best education future for the Sierra Vista community. The top priorities that will have the most beneficial impact on Sierra Vista's future are:

- We must recruit and retain quality education staff, we must value our education staff as professionals, and we must recognize the important place our education staff holds in our community.

- We must shift the paradigm in Arizona: education is an investment and not an expense. Arizona must recognize education as a driver of economic development.
- We must increase civic engagement and advocacy to elect civic leaders who understand the importance of investing in public education.
- We must reform education funding policy to address inequities and inadequacies in public school funding.
- We must invest in our schools to keep young adults and families from leaving communities.

## **INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS**

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions at the Sierra Vista Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### ***I WILL...***

- Make the conscience effort to educate others about education funding (example current year funding, trends, spending power, etc.) This includes one-to-one conversations with random strangers. You have to make change one person at a time!
- Ask deeper questions of candidates from the municipal, county, and state level.
- Invite speakers to bring education issues to organization members.
- Vote and advocate for stopping expansion of ESA's and prop 301 renewal/permanence.
- Challenge misinformation about education funding.
- Let my voice be heard in a positive way.
- Be aware of what legislators are discussing that affect education and our students.
- Take advantage of RTS opportunities so that I am part of the community voice and will be heard a state committee meetings.
- Think globally and act locally to find solutions for my community, for students, and for my staff.
- Vote for and advocate for civic leaders who support and value public education.
- Continue to build a large, engaged network of Sierra Vista residents so that we are able to teach how to advocate for our public education district No. 68 and its students on a local, state, and federal level.
- Complete my doctorate dissertation and continue working toward opening my own high school geared to help steer our students to the next chapter of their lives.
- Enroll in request to speak.
- Continue to encourage people to join our Sierra Vista network.
- Communicate the importance of voting for legislators who support education.
- Vote for education friendly leaders in our state.
- Spread the word that education impacts everyone's quality of life.
- Support efforts that close the achievement gap in our State.

- Attend board meetings for my district.
- Become more active for votes (for public education).
- Vote for renewal of Prop 301 and against expansion of voucher program.
- Brief LFSA on this town hall topic and conversation.
- Vote for legislators who support education.
- Vote for governor who values K-12.
- Organize a County roundtable to continue to discuss these issues and concerns.
- Brief the organization with which I am associated.
- Praise the teachers and support them by attending the school board meetings.
- Find ways to increase teacher and volunteer morale.
- Continue to support (education) by challenging legislators.
- Vote!
- Encourage advocacy to be organized and to be more efficient and effective.

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