

“Funding preK-12 Education”
White Mountains Community Town Hall
Show Low, AZ
June 9, 2017

Introduction

Participants used the Arizona Town Hall process to create the following consensus report of their discussions and recommendations for action on how best to fund preK-12 education.

PRINCIPAL GOALS FOR ARIZONA’S PREK-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM

On a broad scale, Arizona’s education system should be giving Arizona students the tools they need to think critically, ask questions, understand how to learn, engage productively with others, understand their bodies, use technology appropriately, advocate for themselves and for others, and exhibit compassion.

To realize these goals, the education system itself must be comprehensive and equal. A comprehensive system begins with integrating early childhood education as a fundamental component as Arizona’s education system because early childhood education is the foundation of all subsequent learning. To maintain that foundation, students must also have continuous access to interventions and tutoring to fill any gaps that develop as their education progresses past the early childhood years. Providing parents with additional resources and training would also supplement these goals.

As students reach higher grade levels, they should also receive aptitude testing and be presented with options, including vocational education, continued academic education, and remedial education. One size does not fit all. This type of model has been successful in European countries.

For these goals to succeed, Arizona’s education system needs fundamental structural reform. Early childhood education, technology training, educational training, parent education, and the arts all require adequate funding to succeed. Additional funding will be necessary to attract highly qualified teachers who are adequately training in child development. Funding and other resources must be distributed in an equal matter that would provide students in all districts and all schools with access to the same high quality educational opportunities.

Beyond funding, these goals must be supported by regulatory reform. Regulatory reform should give districts and schools more local control over standards with less political intervention. Local control would provide more flexibility to implement consistent educational standards from year to year. Regulatory reform should also provide increased access to grant funding, and should provide increased accountability for voucher and home schooling programs.

These structural reform goals would allow for the student outcomes described above: students who become confident, productive citizens, have a sense of purpose, and are prepared for a global economy.

IMPACT OF CURRENT AMOUNT AND METHODS OF FUNDING PRE-K-12 EDUCATION ON PRIORITY GOALS

You get what you pay for. The methods of funding and amount of funds available to Arizona’s preK-12 schools *eliminate* the ability to achieve the goals discussed in question one.

The methods of funding schools in Arizona are fundamentally unequal with charter and private schools benefiting in many direct and incidental ways that public schools do not share. For example, unequal tax credit policies provide more funding to private schools, private and charter schools have more fundraising options, such as selling real estate, from which public schools cannot benefit, and

public schools bear the burden of higher expenses that private and charter schools do not bear, such as paying for school lunch programs and transportation needs. This unequal funding structure makes it impossible to reach the goals of creating equal, quality, and comprehensive opportunities to all students in the state.

The overall amount of funding available for all Arizona's schools, meanwhile, is inadequate. Facilities are in need of repairs. To the extent money comes available, the roof over students' heads must be addressed first, which leaves little to no money to expand facilities and reduce class sizes, to improve technology, to attract and retain qualified teachers and staff, to invest in new equipment, or to keep or expand arts, music, and elective programs (including vocational programs), as a few examples.

Secondary effects of the lack of funds include economic impacts. Businesses do not want to remain in or relocate to an area where there is not a qualified work force. Lower levels of education and graduation rates also lead to increased use of welfare systems and a rise in the prison population. This also impacts the morale of education professionals, including teachers, staff, and local communities at large.

Finally, Arizona's current school funding system is punitive. It is designed to punish underperforming schools based on proficiency rather than growth. This inevitably and directly punishes the students themselves by making it harder to learn, depriving students of opportunities, and forcing schools to shift costs (such as those for extracurricular activities). As a result, students are less likely to become proficient, which leads to additional punitive funding reductions. This is an endless cycle that makes it impossible to reach the above-stated policy goals.

HOW TO IMPROVE THE AMOUNT OR METHODS OF FUNDING PRE-K-12 EDUCATION

Business Actions

- Encourage local businesses to sponsor classrooms

Legislative Actions

Budget / Funding Related

- Create a state education budget that works effectively and productively
- For all increases in schools, there must be an increase in funding so that the overall funding does not drop
- The legislature and/or voters need to increase sources of revenue
- The legislature and/or the voters need to protect sources of revenue (e.g., lottery money marked for education was diverted)

Tax Related

- Eliminate tax credits for private schools or change the way the tax credits operate to promote equality between private, charter, and traditional public schools
- Legalize marijuana and put the money to education (modeled after Colorado)
- Impose a sugar tax to fund schools (modeled after Philadelphia)
- Close all sales tax exemptions and not bring them back until renegotiated (as suggested by a Tucson lawmaker)
- Tourism tax to fund education
- Legislators and/or voters should review and reevaluate tax cuts and sales taxes exemptions
- Halt automatic 20% tax credits for private school tuitions

Accountability Related

- All educational entities receiving public funds should be equally accountable and subject to the same requirements and regulations (through legislation)
- The legislature and/or voters need to impose strong conflict of interest provisions for public officials
- Localize control over funding

Communication/Media Actions

- Educate the public and state lawmakers on the needs and benefits of a successful public school system

Local Civic Action/Personal Commitments

Fund Raising

- Hold a state-wide car wash (tongue-in-cheek ... but perhaps a bit of satire is necessary to help boost public support and get the ball rolling)

State and Local Election Related

- Elect legislators who support and prioritize education
- Hold public officials accountable through elections
- Pay attention to school board actions and attend school board meetings – be more involved and supportive
- Encourage parents, schools, and school boards to form community alliances that can work with and influence the legislature
- Create rural coalitions to support rural public school issues
- Make individual voices heard through elections and contacting lawmakers directly
- Individuals can study issues (such as candidates' positions on school funding) before voting
- Be willing to pay higher taxes
- Be involved—run for office

Legislation Related

- Lobby existing legislators to support and prioritize education
- Pay attention, personally, to legislation as it moves through
- Renew the penny sales tax
- Stop the legislature from gutting citizen initiatives—many of the above suggestions are far more likely to pass through initiative than through the legislature.
- Establish a non-partisan pro-education campaign to bring to light issues about public education and to advocate for public education
- Have this campaign profile all office holders regarding their positions on public education and acceptance of donations / relationships to lobbyists and publicize these profiles
- Advocate for Prop 301

Public/Private Partnership Actions

- Create public/private partnerships and community partnerships as possible to help with shortfalls

Public Schools Action

- Make changes to public schools that attract more students back from private and charter schools
- Model and validate the funding system to ensure that it works and provides equal funding
- Solicit community feedback

ACTIONS

At the conclusion of the Community Town Hall, participants committed to personal actions they would take as a result of the discussions. Each participant completed a card beginning with the statement "I will..." Participants retained the cards with their individual commitments. Some of those that were shared are listed below.

I WILL:

Take Personal Actions with Local Impact

- Educate local community members about school needs and concerns
- Volunteer in local schools and donate to local schools
- Support local bonds and overrides
- Stay informed about school issues and pending legislation

Take Personal Actions with Statewide Impact

- Write to Arizona congress people regarding increasing the maximum tax credit for public schools, other methods of funding education, and conflict of interest laws
- Vote in state elections for politicians that support local schools
- Support renewal of Proposition 301

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