

Report of the

EIGHTY-FOURTH ARIZONA TOWN HALL

**“PRE-K – 12 EDUCATION:
CHOICES FOR ARIZONA’S FUTURE”**

Prescott, Arizona

June 13 – 16, 2004

The future of education is one of Arizona’s and our nation’s most important challenges. Perhaps no other aspect of public life has the same universal impact as education. Most citizens have spent years in schools, coming to a comfortable familiarity with the way things “ought” to be, or at least the way things were in their experience.

The 153 participants in the 84th Arizona Town Hall gathered to discuss pre-K–12 education in Arizona for the fifth time in 41 years. Recognizing that nearly every school is struggling to build consensus on a range of issues such as quality, effectiveness, efficiency, access and accountability, the participants sought to identify the expectations that Arizonans have of their education system, to discuss the various challenges and dilemmas facing Arizona’s schools and to formulate reforms and recommendations for change. All agreed that Arizona’s leaders, elected and appointed officials, parents, administrators, teachers, students, businesses and communities must strive for excellence in Arizona’s schools.

Although not all participants would subscribe to all of the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report, the report does reflect a significant degree of consensus achieved at this Town Hall.

Our call to action for Arizona—for Arizona students, teachers, administrators, political leaders, business and community interests—is to quickly bring Arizona pre-K–12 education into alignment with dynamic 21st century requirements. We can do this by:

- Having high expectations that our leaders will be visionary, be willing to deviate from the status quo and fairly implement change to provide for student needs.
- Targeting entry level teachers at \$35,000, insisting they be highly prepared, advancing the compensation to \$50,000 within their early years of practice.

ARIZONA’S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

Arizona’s Expectations for PreK-12 Education

Arizonans expect that our public schools should provide a safe learning environment to prepare students for life after graduation, whether it be obtaining a job, or moving on to the next level of education. Arizona’s education system should prepare students to be productive and well-rounded citizens with the skills necessary to participate in and contribute to our society.

...public schools should provide a safe learning environment to prepare students for life after graduation, whether it be obtaining a job, or moving on to the next level of education.

Students should attain, at a minimum, basic academic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. Arizona must recognize that technology is a new basic skill for the future. Schools also should prepare our students to be creative problem solvers

equipped to compete in a global community and economy. Arizona’s public education system should provide an equal opportunity for every student to attain a quality education that meets the student’s individual needs. Schools should create a challenging environment that assists students in discovering their interests and abilities, and fosters ambition.

Currently, Arizona’s public education system, while improving, is not meeting all of the needs and expectations that Arizonans have of public education. The system should address the needs of those students who are not progressing and also the needs of gifted students. In addition the system should meet the needs of all students, including students who will be moving on to postsecondary education and training as well as students who will immediately enter the work-force. The current system is not always meeting the needs of employers in the new Arizona economy. Ultimately, Arizona’s public education system must be more flexible to meet the various and increasing expectations of parents, the business community and our changing economy.

Key Components of a Quality Public Education System

Prioritizing key components to a quality public education system is difficult as many elements are integral to success. Participants agree that evidence-based data demonstrates that quality, highly trained and effective teachers are most critical to student success. Also essential are a rigorous and relevant curriculum, parental and community involvement, motivated learners, and strong, visionary leadership. Additional key components to a quality public education system include, in no particular order:

...evidence-based data demonstrates that quality, highly trained and effective teachers are most critical to student success.

- Adequate funding, resources and materials for students and teachers;
- Well-maintained facilities (including technology infrastructure);

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- A clean, safe environment that encourages learning;
- Academic standards that are clearly defined and communicated and that may be implemented, measured and assessed; and
- Small class size and acceptable teacher/student ratios.

All of these components exist to some extent in our current system, but need improvement. Collaborative decision-making, meaningful parent and business relationships and alternative programs for special needs students are components that must be strengthened in our public education system.

The Role of Government in Our Education System

Public education will be addressed most effectively at the local level if our communities support the recruitment and training of dedicated school board members who will listen and respond to the educational needs of the community. Local districts must be creative in maximizing their available resources and developing strategies to better involve parents and the business community in the education system.

At the state level, state officials must support and provide greater funding for public education. Curriculum standards should be set at the state level with significant involvement and implementation occurring at the local level.

While some believe that the development of federal standards regarding accountability is appropriate, others expressed concern over the possible “strings” attached to funding that accompanies such standards and that federal involvement should be minimal. Federal and state officials must communicate with each other and local officials to better understand the needs at the local level and the full impact of federal legislation. State officials must demand that federal mandates be adequately funded.

To work more effectively, officials at the local, state and federal levels must better align themselves to provide for more effective collaboration and communication between the various governmental entities. Some participants suggested that liaisons and local school site councils (collaborative groups composed of administrators, teachers, staff and community members) may be used to bridge the current communication gap. Training and support should be provided to further this collaborative effort. All levels of government must have a shared vision of our expectations for a quality public education system. Strong leadership at all levels is essential, as are clearly defined roles for each of the various levels of government.

District, School and Classroom Size

In determining the ideal size for a school district, school or classroom, “one size does not fit all.” Size is most important at the school and classroom level and should be determined at the local level. District, school and classroom size ultimately should be determined by the

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community it serves taking into consideration all aspects of that community including demographics, availability of qualified personnel and geographic limitations.

The ideal size for a classroom will depend upon the age and needs of the students and the subject matter being taught. All agreed that small class sizes are better because they contribute to greater student-teacher interaction and create an effective learning environment. For pre-K through third grade, class size must be no greater than 15 students with classes of 15-25 students being appropriate for classes after the third grade.

With regard to school size, students and parents should be able to choose whether a small school with a more individualized environment or a larger school with a greater variety of programs and diversity within the district is appropriate for the individual student. With regard to class and school size, the basic needs of the students should be kept in mind.

There is no ideal district size. There are alternatives to consolidation for addressing economies of scale, such as forming consortiums to provide teacher training, transportation, and bulk purchasing of items such as supplies, equipment and insurance. Use of educational technology-assisted learning for smaller and/or rural schools, and building upon and coordinating with existing community programs and resources are some of the possible alternatives to consolidation efforts. Districts should be consolidated only where the consolidation improves student learning and works economically to provide a better utilization of resources, if it results in a similar community of common interest, does not adversely impact the community and is approved by local voters.

A number of participants felt that the unification of elementary and high school districts (K-12) is desirable. Unification will present an opportunity to better articulate and coordinate curriculum. Regardless of unification, however, such articulation should occur to improve student learning. Such unification should occur only with the approval of local communities and if it can be shown to result in better communication, implementation of educational standards and better business practices. All unorganized territories should be drawn into a school district by the legislature so those residents will contribute to the tax support of education.

A commission ... should design a unification/consolidation plan based upon research, physical boundaries and educational advantages.

A commission, not composed of any legislators, should design a unification/consolidation plan based upon research, physical boundaries and educational advantages. Current local school indebtedness should be paid off by the existing districts and all new bonds overrides and taxes should be imposed by a vote of the newly organized districts.

TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND CURRICULUM

Attracting and Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers

There are a number of ways to encourage the “best and brightest” to enter the teaching field in Arizona. One means to effectively recruit quality candidates is by providing economic incentives such as increased starting pay; real salary growth over time; paid summer programs; clinical work and internships; housing incentives; and forgiveness of student loans.

Mentoring programs with experienced teachers also may encourage new recruits to enter the profession by creating a supportive environment and learning opportunities. Quality ongoing professional development and training opportunities also must be offered to create professional learning communities within schools.

Creating innovative recruiting programs that provide for early recruitment in high schools may encourage additional promising students to become teachers. Professionals in other fields should be encouraged to become teachers. Any expedited certification of professionals still should ensure adequate knowledge to promote student learning and result in highly qualified teachers.

Respect from the community, parents, students and administrators for teachers is essential to both recruitment and retention of quality teachers.

Problems relating to a lack of respect for teachers impede recruitment of new teachers. Respect from the community, parents, students and administrators for teachers is essential to both recruitment and retention of quality teachers. All

stakeholders must support teachers and administrators in matters of school discipline and classroom management. Strategies should be created and implemented to increase the professional prestige of teachers.

Arizona’s current criteria for identifying “highly qualified” teachers are a compliance tool for the No Child Left Behind Act and do not appropriately define a highly qualified teacher. A highly qualified teacher is passionate about student learning and possesses comprehensive knowledge of what is taught, how students learn, sound classroom management practices, and the ability to apply his or her knowledge so that every student may develop a love of learning and become a productive member of a democratic society. A quality teacher in Arizona must demonstrate proficiency, through practice and evaluation, in the Arizona Professional Teaching Standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

To provide the highest quality of preparation to future teachers, we should require more clinical experience earlier in a student’s education to see if teaching is a “fit.” Student teachers should be exposed to many teaching environments and perspectives, akin to an apprenticeship. A restructuring of teacher preparation programs to achieve higher standards should include content such as classroom management, family psychology and other such necessary life skills as well as professors with relevant classroom experience.

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Once recruited, the retention of high quality teachers is essential. To improve teacher retention, adequate working conditions, facilities and resources must be provided. Teacher pay structures should reward experience, skills, knowledge and performance. This should include reimbursement for course work, professional development and National Board Certification to improve teaching practice and student learning. Teacher induction programs, including mentoring and professional development, also will serve to retain teachers. Highest quality teachers must be identified and paid to coach and mentor other teachers and teacher candidates. Consistent pay and salary portability between different school districts also would improve teacher retention.

Ensuring Student Success

Parents must be involved in their child's education to ensure that the child will succeed. Schools should work to promote parental involvement by educating parents on the importance of a quality education, including the importance of early, pre-K education.

Students at-risk of educational failure must be identified early and appropriate intervention should follow. We must immediately resolve the issues that are causing students to fall behind. Given the critical nature of recent information from neuro-science that the early experiences children have from birth to five years have a major impact on a child's ability to learn, teachers must be flexible to address varying student skills and needs, and be supported at the state and local levels in using a variety of materials and instructional methodologies to address these needs. Existing community, volunteer and nonprofit programs also should be utilized and built upon.

We must address and invest in the health and welfare of students to ensure that all come to school ready to learn. There must be a focus on pre-K programs that involve the family and community. Families strongly affect a student's readiness to learn.

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Developmentally appropriate education should begin as early as feasible and ensure a focus on health, social and emotional development, and certainly formal education should begin with kindergarten. Formal education should be defined as a continuum of learning activities that will vary with the developmental level of the learner. Formal education in kindergarten must include a program of active exploration and physical movement that respects and enhances the physical development of the student's brain and creates a foundation for more sophisticated abstract learning. Preschool education should be supported and accessible, but not mandated. Pre-K and child care settings should be held accountable and receive support to meet educational standards, including certification of preschool and child care providers. The focus should shift from child care to early education and development.

Many Arizona high schools must be fundamentally restructured to meet the needs of their student populations to adequately prepare them for citizenship, higher education or technical school, and the challenges of the work force in the future. This reform must be more than tinkering around the edges of change. Schools and districts should explore fundamental shifts that will ensure the delivery of a relevant and rigorous curriculum and high expectations for all

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students, the formation of smaller learning communities for more individualized and personalized student attention, more flexible scheduling, less reliance on seat time and more focus on student performance across the curriculum, and integrated, cross-curriculum structures for teaching and learning.

All agreed that encouragement by qualified mentors serves to keep students in school. Students must be challenged by and excited about their education. Resources should be dedicated to identifying and assisting students who are likely candidates to drop-out of school. There should be

flexibility to accommodate varying circumstances in student's lives (i.e., the need to work after school). Some felt that the business community needs to be more involved by supporting students to continue and complete their education, by complying with existing regulations concerning student work hours and by offering internships.

As a matter of common respect and concern for safety, all students, as human beings, have a right to attend school without fear, intimidation or harassment.

Offering a Balanced Curriculum

A balance must exist in the curricula that gives significant emphasis to preparation for work, college, and the development of informed and active citizens in the community. Standardized testing should not dictate the curricula. The best balance must emphasize studies that are necessary for both college preparation and vocational and career-focused education. All students must be prepared for post-secondary educational opportunities, whether college, career or technical training.

To achieve student preparation for occupational areas, curricula needs to integrate rigorous academic standards with life, workplace, technical, organizational and interpersonal studies and critical thinking skills. Schools should form partnerships with businesses and other institutions to optimize and leverage access to appropriate technology and other resources.

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The K-12 curricula must incorporate a stronger emphasis on citizenship, character education and service learning to develop informed and active citizens. Some participants suggested that education also should include character development and self-esteem. The core curricula must include the arts (theatre, music, dance, visual arts) as required by state standards. Opportunities should be provided for all students to visit cultural sites and to learn additional languages.

All believe that educational technology-assisted learning should be incorporated into the education system. Educational technology-assisted learning should be designed and implemented to support and increase traditional teacher-student interaction. Technology can serve as a tool to make education more relevant to students and to develop organizational and communication skills. Ultimately, flexibility and options will be essential in developing the most balanced curricula and ideal interaction among teachers, students and curricula.

English Language Proficiency

Arizona currently has not identified the best possible path for teaching students for whom English is not their primary language. The current law does not allow sufficient time to become literate in academic English or for the use of instructional strategies that ensure students do not fall behind in their course of study. Teachers should be allowed the flexibility to teach students using bilingual strategies, at least initially. While all agreed that the goal should be to transition these students to classes taught in English, opinions differed on how quickly the transition should occur. Arizona must provide our students with a language base that allows them to be academically competent and to have the appropriate language skills for success.

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Arizona must develop accurate and comprehensive data to measure the progress of its English-language learners. Arizona should identify successful programs and emulate them. Programs must be based on research and data and be sensitive to cultures and languages that impact students' educational success. Some participants supported a state-funded pre-K program for English-language learners to assist such students to enter kindergarten with sufficient English proficiency. Others recognized that bilingual and immersion programs both have their own positive and negative aspects. Language labs, reading programs, dual language and tutoring programs can be used to help expedite the students' understanding of the English language.

Whether a student's parents speak and read English is an important factor in the ability to successfully teach English-language-learning students. The parents of English-language-learning students should be encouraged to benefit from programs to teach them English. Teachers, counselors and administrators should be encouraged to learn a second language. All teachers should be prepared and capable of teaching students for whom English is not their primary language. This involves understanding language acquisition and implementing appropriate English-language-learning strategies. Recognizing the global nature of our society and economy,

all students should be encouraged to learn a second language. Multilingualism would be a positive attribute of our education system and would enable students to better compete in a global economy.

THE ROLE OF BUSINESS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Workplace Skills and the Role of Business

A gap or disconnect exists between the skills and skill levels required to graduate from our public schools and those needed in the workplace and entry into higher education. This gap must be reduced, with better alignment of the exit and entry requirements. In addition to having basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, students also must be well-rounded and

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competent in the skills that most employers expect of their employees. These skills include: good communication and people skills; public speaking; critical thinking; problem solving; team building; conflict resolution; and writing skills. Students also must possess practical skills such as basic interviewing skills (including appropriate appearance); time management; how to find a job; how to

complete a job application; and the importance of showing up on time for work.

Arizona's schools must be more responsive to the needs of the business community. The public education system must teach workplace skills to students by integrating career and technical education programs into the academic curriculum. Technical and career training must not replace basic academic skills, but should be an integrated part of each student's instruction. Concerns were expressed that a focus on technical training might discourage some students from higher education, especially minority populations. Schools must be clear that technical programs are offered as an opportunity for students to explore different career paths, as interim jobs before possible entry into the next level of education, and as an opportunity to develop a transferable skill base. Schools also must be abundantly clear in promoting the importance of a post-secondary education in order to foster an environment in which students are considering and striving for a college education.

The business community can play a valuable role in enhancing public education. Businesses must communicate their needs and current expectations to the schools and have an expanded role as vocal advocates for change. While many successful programs exist, public/private partnerships between the business community and the schools should be expanded across the state. A number of programs were suggested such as: increased internships and on-the-job training; business mentors; business people teaching in the classroom; investment of business capital and time; early career guidance; use of joint educational and technical consortiums; and use of community college programs. Ultimately, businesses, educators and

technical trainers should unite to graduate students with appropriate skills for use in today's workplace.

The Role of Nonprofit Organizations

The arts must be an integral part of a well-rounded and comprehensive curriculum. Our publicly-funded education system has a responsibility to provide access to the arts and other cultural programs in order to graduate well-rounded human beings. Limited funding and high-stakes testing are driving arts out of many schools. This is an unacceptable trend.

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A number of excellent and effective nonprofit organizations exist. Nonprofits are in a unique position to leverage funds to support students. These nonprofits include arts, cultural, civic, educational and health and human services organizations. Arizona's

public education system should encourage the continued participation of these organizations in our schools. Nonprofit organizations should have an active role in enhancing and supplementing programs currently offered by schools. These organizations provide students with access to programs that contribute to their academic success and cultural enrichment. Nonprofit and arts organizations could assist with training teachers to integrate arts into the curriculum.

Schools, colleges and nonprofit organizations should work in partnership. Schools must cooperate with these organizations to permit use of classrooms for programs and to collaborate in funding efforts. Schools should partner with service clubs and other nonprofit organizations providing social and behavioral health services to address the physical, psychological and social issues that affect a student's readiness to learn. Some participants suggested that grants should be identified, communicated and linked through a "clearinghouse" website. Others suggested the creation of a state or district liaison to list resources, share successful models, advocate for more arts programs and educate school administrators.

The Role of Parents, Family Members and Other Adults

Parental and family involvement is one of the most important factors in the success of a student's education. Parents must be partners with the school in the education of their children.

The school will assist parents in understanding their role as learners, teachers, volunteers and leaders. A variety of methods exist to successfully engage parents, family members and other adults (collectively, "parents") in students' education. No one "best way" exists. Instead, educators must be flexible and

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identify the best method of engaging parents in each instance. Methods include: inviting parents to participate through early outreach programs; inviting parents to events that showcase their child's work and performance; holding face-to-face meetings at convenient times for parents; reaching out to parents through home visits; personal requests for parental involvement; providing parent-volunteer opportunities; educating parents to understand the value of education and the importance of the parent's role; training parents to assist in the education process; creating an expectation of family involvement; empowering parents to feel a sense of ownership and involvement in their child's school and education; and using technology to communicate with parents by e-mail and website newsletters. Parents also should be encouraged to participate in parent-teacher organizations and school site councils.

Obstacles to parental involvement include language and cultural barriers, demographic and socio-economic factors, lack of transportation, time, and lack of knowledge of the scope of the parent role. Schools should find creative ways to overcome these obstacles and induce parents to come to school events and meetings, for example arranging convenient meeting times, providing translation services and babysitting, and offering food.

Many parents often are intimidated by the system for a variety of reasons. For example, to overcome intimidation, the climate of schools should be more culturally sensitive, welcoming and friendly. Teachers and administrators should be encouraged to develop language skills to communicate with non-English speaking parents. Schools should be a focal point or "hub" for community activities, meetings and cultural events where parents and students alike feel welcome.

Educators must strive to build a personal relationship with parents. Professional development of teachers should include training on encouraging parental involvement. Some suggested that the Arizona Department of Education should maintain a website for sharing best practices for parental outreach methods. School districts should implement the parental outreach requirements of Title 15 of the Arizona Revised Statutes and work cooperatively to develop appropriate models to reinvigorate parental involvement.

Businesses should be encouraged to support parents who need to take time off from work to become involved in their child's education. Businesses, faith-based and community organizations also should encourage parents to be involved.

The Role of Community Members

Community members play an important role in public education. To encourage community member involvement in public education, schools should: open their facilities (including recreational facilities) for community events; invite community members to attend and participate in school programs and celebrations; offer volunteer opportunities; hold career nights and grandparent activities; and recruit community members to serve on school committees, site councils and as student mentors. However, since there are legitimate costs associated with opening school facilities to the public (e.g., utilities, janitorial services, security), we recognize these costs and suggest the state explore how it can assist schools in dealing with these costs. Some recommended that schools and districts should develop systematic and

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organized approaches to soliciting, screening, coordinating and nurturing community volunteers. Community involvement should include both parents and adults without school age children. For example, senior citizens are a valuable and often untapped source of volunteer assistance to schools. Community members should be encouraged to share their real life experiences with students to provide a contextual basis for their education.

Schools should have better public relations to highlight school activities and successes. Some participants recommended a statewide campaign to promote volunteerism in our schools. Others suggested the creation of a volunteer coordinator position at the school or district level. Student involvement in service learning along with students, teachers and staff being involved in community service and with service organizations are important ways to link schools and the community.

The community should serve as a laboratory where students can apply the skills they've learned in the classroom. To this end, community members are invaluable resources as teachers for our students.

ACCOUNTABILITY: STUDENTS, TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND POLICYMAKERS

Student Responsibility For Learning

We can best encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning through the guiding belief that successful learners engage in independent learning. To this end, schools must promote instructional approaches and strategies that create learners who can effectively analyze and apply knowledge. We also can best encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning by:

- establishing high expectations, communicating those expectations and encouraging students to meet those expectations;
- communicating that all students are capable of succeeding and not labeling them;
- empowering students to take progressive responsibility for their own learning;
- involving students in setting clearly defined expectations and educational goals and documenting their progress;
- allowing students to learn from their failures;
- teaching and requiring students to be responsible (from ensuring their homework is done to meeting teacher's expectations);
- keeping students motivated through meaningful learning that relates to the youth's world; and
- giving students opportunities for meaningful input into evaluation of teachers, administrators and school operation.

One of the most important variables in student performance is a strong relationship with a caring adult including strong student-teacher or other adult mentors relationships. Activities and requirements in school routine that take away time for teacher-student interaction must be kept to a minimum. Other variables that play a role in student performance include: poverty, emotional and physical conditions, and language barriers. Cultural variables and socioeconomic status also play significant roles in students' perceptions of the education system and of themselves.

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To minimize the negative effects of such variables on student performance, schools must identify underperforming students and the variables impacting their performance as early as possible so that the appropriate support systems, resources and programs are provided. Teachers also must be trained to be culturally competent to allow them to recognize hidden factors within cultures and to address those differences.

Teacher Accountability and Performance Measures

Teachers must both be held accountable and be adequately compensated for student performance and meeting reasonable expectations and goals for their classroom. Teachers also should be accountable for measurable results and for following established procedures and curricula. The review of teacher performance must be fair and take into account variables beyond the teacher's control. Evaluations should be conducted with the goal of improving and enhancing performance.

Student progress is an important measure of teacher performance, but should not be the sole criteria. Nor should assessment of teacher performance be tied solely to any specific high-stakes test. Additional measurements that may be used in evaluating teacher performance include:

- Student performance as compared to the standards;
- Student progress over time;
- Teacher's knowledge and willingness to engage and implement ongoing professional development;
- Use of a qualified evaluator;
- Willingness to engage in extra curricular activities with students and in the community;
- The ability to meet goals established by the teacher and administrator;
- Meaningful input from parents, students and peers;

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- Comparison to Arizona Professional Teaching Standards;
- Multiple evaluations throughout the school year; and
- Self-evaluation.

Teachers must have a voice in determining the best measuring tools. Teacher compensation must relate to performance as measured by these criteria. Some noted that rewards, incentives or bonuses for exceptional teacher performance are important.

Administrator Accountability and Performance Measures

School administrators must be accountable to a significant extent for the performance of their schools. Administrators must be accountable in each area over which they have responsibility and authority such as: school operations, fiscal management, public and community relations, and the performance of students and teachers. Principals should have authority over their own school's operations, fiscal management and hiring practices.

The evaluations of administrators, to a large extent, must be consistent with the criteria used in teacher assessment. Some of the best practices to assess a school administrator's performance include:

- instructional and visionary leadership;
- student performance;
- quality of management skills;
- parent and community feedback (i.e., customer satisfaction);
- peer reviews;
- self-evaluations;
- superintendent evaluations; and
- staff evaluations.

Districts and schools should have written plans and goals. Administrators should be evaluated in relation to whether these plans and goals have been met. Some participants believe that teachers should have a key role in assessing school administrators.

High-Stakes Testing, Standards-Based Accountability and Labeling

While recognizing that standardized tests may not be the most effective means of assessing every student, all agreed that standards-based testing can be used appropriately for objective evaluation of a school and students. High-stakes testing, however, must not be the only component for effective evaluation. There must be multiple measures of student and school performance. High-stakes testing should be used in conjunction with other measures administered by school districts and with ongoing classroom assessment. Arizona should "stay

the course” with high-stakes testing while allowing sufficient time to perfect and effectively implement that testing.

Suggestions to improve the high-stakes system of testing include:

- alignment of the skills tested on the AIMS test with the skills tested on college entrance exams, college placement exams and with skills needed by Arizona businesses;
- better correlation of course credit with proficiency on the Stanford 9;
- consideration of end-of-course testing for science and math to better incorporate the research regarding effective testing methods;
- broaden the range of content tested;
- faster turnaround of test results and data so that schools can incorporate results immediately into teaching;
- better information to the public about the purpose and goals of testing; and
- better feedback to parents to clearly understand student performance on standardized tests.

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Many participants agreed that the introduction of the AIMS test has focused institutions and individuals on higher standards in academics. Many also believe that the test has had the beneficial effect of focusing attention on underperforming students. Concern was expressed that the AIMS test will produce additional drop-outs. Some suggested that differentiated diplomas that would permit students to graduate without passing all portions of the test should be considered. Others believe

that AIMS, as a test of basic competency utilizing Arizona State Standards, should be required for graduation with an Arizona high school diploma. Those students who meet all the requirements for graduation but do not pass the final test of competency for an Arizona diploma may receive a certificate of high school completion. By no means should we narrow the scope of what we are teaching to “teach to the test” to the detriment of other subjects.

Labeling of schools, to some extent, may be necessary and useful to hold schools accountable. The ramifications of labeling, however, must be carefully considered. Some noted that labeling may have the effect of rallying community support around a struggling school. Others expressed concern that labeling causes the abandonment of underperforming schools by teachers, students and parents who are best able to help those schools improve performance. Labeling also may cause schools to narrow the scope of subjects taught to those on the test to the exclusion of other subjects such as art and music. Punitive labeling, such as the word “failing,” should be eliminated and a more instructive label utilized.

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The system of labeling should continue to include factors in the evaluation of schools such as drop-out and literacy rates. Additional time should be allowed for struggling schools to improve before being labeled as “underperforming.” Resources must be available and tied to benchmarks after a school is determined to be underperforming. Others suggested that solution teams be effectively utilized to visit individual schools to assess needs and methods to increase performance and greater resources should be provided to the Arizona Department of Education to enable timely and effective use of solution teams.

Political Considerations and the Performance of Arizona’s Schools

Political considerations significantly impact the performance of our schools, primarily through funding and also by how politics polarizes the issue of public education. Policymakers at state and federal levels must ensure that Arizona’s schools are not burdened with unfunded mandates.

To build public policy support to improve Arizona’s public education system, Arizona’s schools should set goals, meet them and communicate these successes. Accurate information and data communicated clearly to the public on reforms and accomplishments in public education also is a key to building public support.

In addition, we should elect open, objective, visionary and responsive leaders who are champions of education. Arizonans should be encouraged to vote for such leaders. Advocacy coalitions of business leaders and educators should educate and influence our legislators on the importance of education to our economy. Business leaders, educators and parents should communicate clearly and frequently with Arizona state legislators to

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convey their wishes that funding education must be the state’s #1 priority. Arizona’s policymakers must engage in more dialogue forums to address Arizona’s public education needs. Education policy must be considered from a long-term perspective to ensure the success of our students and our future.

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Janet E. Barton, Judge, Maricopa County Superior Court, Phoenix

Richard E. Geasland, Interim C.E.O., Chief Clinical & Operations Officer, Jewish Family & Children's Services; Az. Certified Independent Social Worker, Phoenix

Joseph A. Gelinas, Manager, Employee & Labor Relations Services, Salt River Project, Phoenix

Gordon Lewis, Attorney, Jennings, Strouss & Salmon, P.L.C., Phoenix

Greg Stanton, City Councilmember; Attorney, Gust Rosenfeld, P.L.C., Phoenix

PLENARY SESSION PRESIDING CHAIRMAN

Alan E. Maguire, Chairman of the Board, Arizona Town Hall; President, The Maguire Company, Phoenix

TOWN HALL SPEAKERS

Craig Jerald, Principal Partner, The Education Trust, Washington, D.C.

(Luncheon Sponsor: Maricopa Community College District)

Stanley Litow, Vice President, Corporate Community Relations, IBM; President, IBM International Foundation, Armonk, New York

The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Governor of Arizona, Phoenix

TOWN HALL PARTICIPANTS

TOWN HALL RESOURCE CONSULTANTS

Daniel Kain, Dean, College of Education, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff
— *Project Director*

Sherry Markel, Professor & Dept. Chair, Teaching & Learning, College of Education, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Gary Martin, Associate Professor, Education Leadership, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Alex Molnar, Professor, Education Policy; Director, Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University, Tempe

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Caroline Alcaida, Program Director, Head Start, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Parker

John Allen, Assistant Principal, Round Valley Middle School, Springerville

Judith M. Alston, English Language Learner Coordinator, Grand Canyon Schools, Grand Canyon

Kevin A. Arndt, Teacher, Sandra Day O'Connor High School, Deer Valley Unified School Dist., Peoria

Vickie Asermelly, Program Director, Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Central Arizona Association of Governments (CAAG), Superior

Tacy C. Ashby, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, Arizona Department of Education, Phoenix

Calvin Baker, Superintendent, Vail School District, Vail

Kate Baker, Vice President & Treasurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, Phoenix

Dora Barrio, Program Administrator, Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona, Scottsdale

Janet E. Barton, Judge, Maricopa County Superior Court, Phoenix

Deanna Beaver, Community Volunteer; Former Banker, Parker

Ken Bennett, President, Arizona State Senate (Dist. 1); C.E.O., Bennett's Oil Co., Prescott

Bette S. Bergeron, Head of Education, Arizona State University East, Mesa

Yvonne Billingsley, Associate Superintendent, Pinal County Schools, Casa Grande

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Judith S. Bliss, Chief Executive Officer, Mindplay, Tucson

James L. Boles, Mayor; Ret. Administrator, Winslow Unified School Dist. No. 1, Winslow

Kathy Brown, Owner, Center Edge, Phoenix

Robert L. Burns, Chair, Appropriations Comm., Arizona State Senate (Dist. 9); President, BGM Investments, Inc., Peoria

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Susan Carlson, Executive Director, Arizona Business and Education Coalition, Tempe

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Myrtle Charles, Director, Tribal Education Department, Gila River Indian Community, Sacaton

Christine Clouse, Director, University Relations, Midwestern University, Glendale

Panfilo Contreras, Executive Director, Arizona School Boards Association, Phoenix

Amelia Craig Cramer, Attorney; Deputy Pima County Attorney, Tucson

Marilee Dal Pra, Program Officer, The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, Scottsdale

Rita Harkins Dickinson, Special Needs Preschool Teacher, Washington Elementary School Dist., Phoenix

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Linda J. Elliott-Nelson, Chair, Division of Modern Languages, Arizona Western College, Yuma

Chuck Essigs, Director, Government Relations, Arizona Association of School Business Officials, Phoenix

William A. Estes, Jr., Real Estate Developer; President, The Estes Co., Tucson

Betty H. Fairfax, Dean Emeritus & Counselor, Central High School, Phoenix Union High School Dist., Phoenix

Terri Fields, Teacher, Sunnyslope High School; Author, Phoenix

Joan Fleming, President-elect, Arizona School Boards Association; Ret. Public School Administrator, Prescott

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