

Improving our school systems starts with valuing our teachers

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Special for the Republic

May. 12, 2008 12:00 AM

Members of the Arizona Business & Education Coalition, or ABEC, recently joined other Arizona residents for the 92nd Arizona Town Hall focused on the teaching profession.

We also conducted our own "Crash Course on Teacher Quality" last week for members of the business and education communities.

Four recommendations are of particular interest to ABEC:

- **Raising the status of the profession.**

Defining and promoting teaching as a distinguished profession is a primary recommendation. Indeed, top-performing systems worldwide consistently attract more able people into teaching because of the elevated status of the profession. These systems recruit from the top 10 percent in their university systems.

Promoting teaching as a profession is a task for all of us and starts with the language we use every day when discussing teachers. How do we attract the top 10 percent if we don't demonstrate by word and deed that we value the profession?

A top demonstration of the value we place on that profession is compensation. The recommendation is to provide teachers with professional pay linked with systemic education reform.

Arizona should establish a statewide competitive-pay structure. ABEC agrees this should be accompanied by a well-developed performance-pay system that includes student achievement as a component. Base pay should provide a professional, competitive wage for all teachers. Performance pay should be significant, focus on teaching conditions, individual student growth and provide accountability measures at the teacher level. And non-performing teachers should be removed from the classroom.

- **Improving the outcomes.**

As the top performers know, the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction. The town hall recommends the implementation of a statewide data-driven professional-development system with a strong mentoring component. Professional development should be required over a career span and either made affordable or subsidized by the state.

We also must provide alternative pathways into teaching that enable content area experts to be effective with students. Teachers need be certified in multiple disciplines and should be able to be qualified in high-need areas.

- **Systemic reform and restructuring.**

Two recommendations reference "systemic education reform" and restructuring the system for school funding. But the bigger questions are: Are we ready? Are key leaders ready to design a system of funding schools that is transparent, equitable, and fully funds the needs of public schools? Do we have the political will to cast aside old models and create a new future? We believe it's possible.

- **Businesses play several vital roles.**

Firms advocate policy change and develop, recruit and support those drawn to teaching - at whatever point in their careers. For example, they can validate teaching as a profession by increasing awareness of the importance of the link between teacher quality and 21st century competitiveness; draw the link between education and economic development; and take a leadership role in developing tax policy to ensure that resources are not subject to political whim.

ABEC will lead the charge on school finance redesign, high school reform, and closing the achievement gap with our "World Class - What Will it Take?" conference on June 2 and 3 at the Orange Tree Golf Resort in Phoenix.

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