



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS

From Community Outreach Programs following the 110th Arizona Town Hall

In programs held around the state to follow up on the fall 2017 statewide Town Hall titled “Funding preK-12 Education,” 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.

PHOENIX – ARIZONA LEGISLATURE (January 16, 2018)

Fixing problems with Arizona’s public education system will be difficult and calls for active, effective legislative leadership. Improving our status will require more than just increasing current funding to increase teacher pay. Simple fixes, such as increasing sales taxes, may appear easy but may not be the best approach. A more comprehensive tax reform package may be needed. Our education system is overly complicated, and legislators should study ways to streamline, simplify and improve the overall system as well as to provide adequate funding. In addition, parents and the public should be encouraged to support the schools and to show greater respect for schools and teachers.

PRESCOTT – EMBRY-RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY (March 20, 2018)

We want to see the development of a dedicated, sustainable revenue stream that is secure and not subject to legislative sweep. One idea was to tax private party sales of motor vehicles and dedicate that money to education. With 75% of Arizona corporations paying only \$50 in annual taxes, we should engage the business community to provide more funding for education.

There was very strong consensus that we must increase teacher pay to levels that are at least commensurate with the national average. We need to focus on recruiting and retaining the highest quality teachers and increasing teacher pay is critical.

Results-based funding of schools should be eliminated because it does not adequately support successful student outcomes and students do not understand how their test results directly impact the funding their schools receive. It penalizes schools who have the most vulnerable student populations and causes schools to focus on “teaching to the test” at the cost of educating our children.

We need to renew and expand Proposition 301 to provide for an incremental statewide sales tax of at least one percent. If this does not happen it could reduce salaries by \$6,000 per teacher.

There are many mixed messages regarding funding public education in Arizona. Education is the largest single expenditure from the general fund but the general fund has been decreasing every year for more than two decades. We need to increase awareness within the general public about the value and importance of adequately funding our preK-12 education system, and about what is working and what isn't.

TUCSON (April 4, 2018)

The recommendations that should receive priority are all options that establish a dedicated and guaranteed education budget that supports all education expenses. Education is not a charity, it is a matter of policy and justice. The business community needs to underwrite job training, workforce development and retention. Elected officials must be held accountable for public education or be replaced. All communities need to continue to engage elected officials on developing a diversified approach in developing solutions for our education system problems.

SIERRA VISTA (April 5, 2018)

We can make the recommendations a reality by collectively recognizing the value of education and the funding will follow. We must persistently engage and educate candidates and elected officials with one solid message while assertively holding them accountable. When they talk the talk, we should make them walk the walk. We all need to mobilize, be committed to and vote for education in order to bridge the gaps in the quality of our schools.

DOUGLAS (April 5, 2018)

The recommendations that should receive priority should be focused on providing an education that develops communication and relationship skills, science, math and command of the English language. This education should support jobs in industries that provide good compensation. We have done more with less but there is a point where you can't do more. There needs to be new dedicated sources of perpetual revenues, such as fees, evaluation of current funding sources and maximization of revenues generated by the state Land Department. Every dollar for education depends on politicians and we must hold them accountable. We must teach communities the basics of how education is funded and how to lobby for legislation that supports and improves education. If everyone involved in education votes, we can have anything we want.

YUMA (April 23, 2018)

Funding for preK-12 education in Arizona is crucial and should be the number one priority in our state. Money needs to be spent the right way and funds need to go where they are intended to go. There is concern that initiatives that were voted on and approved in the past have not continued to be implemented in the way that they were originally intended to serve.

Communication and education of our population are necessary. In particular, we need to encourage residents to become involved and vote on issues. PreK-12 education affects all of us whether we have children attending school or not. In Yuma, we have seen a synergy between industry and education where both parties understand that we can work together to support Yuma County education for economic development and a better quality of life for our population. For the community to succeed, education needs to succeed.

In order to have sufficient resources for preK-12 Education, we need to look at various ways to provide funds to finance education at a sufficient level because this represents an investment for the state. It is important to have support for education from organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce. It is also essential for all to contact legislators and express support for funds being used for education. An important point to keep in mind is that funds intended for education and teachers need to be protected so that they cannot be swept by the legislature for different purposes. There needs to be a consistent source of funds, such as property tax, that is voted in by residents and protected by law.

We need to look at the resources we already have and utilize them. Empty school buildings could be utilized by different users for educational purposes. Buildings should be maintained so that they remain safe to be occupied.

Here in Yuma County, we need to own how we support education in our community. Yuma County is known for its collaboration and teachers and students need to know the many ways they are supported. There is no one solution to providing preK-12 education funds at the level where the funding level will be most effective, but by working together we can activate our community and bring forward initiatives that will make a difference for education, and therefore, for all of us.

WEST VALLEY – SURPRISE (May 2, 2018)

We need to develop a stronger commitment to education and define a common vision for education in Arizona. To maximize the potential of our state and attract the businesses we want to Arizona, we need to better showcase our commitment to education.

Lobbying the legislature is critical. There are so many bills that impact the bottom line and impact teacher salaries. As we track these bills and communicate with our legislature about the need to better support preK-12 education, we need to be cognizant that funding increases in areas such as teacher salaries should not be done at the expense of other programs that also support quality education—such as the arts.

Our level of per pupil funding needs to be increased to a level that allows our education system to be funded adequately and in a way that allows us to be competitive with other states. We need to fund full day kindergarten and invest in preK education which saves us money on the back end by reducing costs of extra remedial efforts and costs of the criminal justice system as there is a direct correlation. We should also consider our current system of tax credits and whether those create inequities that negatively impact the system overall.

As we investigate new revenue sources, we should consider the best mix of funding that takes into account not only our future needs but also fluctuations in the economy. For example, sales tax fluctuates widely with the economy and should be balanced with more stable revenue sources. Other sources of revenue can provide more stability and more diverse sources, especially if the revenues come from out of the state. We should consider excise or other taxes on exports such as energy or natural resources such as copper.

While our formula for funding can always be improved, the most important issue to address is the overall lack of funding.

FLAGSTAFF (May 3, 2018)

We need to develop an overall strategy that allows us to move on the momentum created with a coordinated strategy and unified communications strategy. The strategy should be empowering because it's difficult to sell a problem. Instead of focusing on the funding problems, we should focus on our vision of having the best preK-12 education system in the country.

We need information in one place that allows us to market from one collective voice about the need to fund and support education.

As part of this strategy, we should create a list of bullet points for conversations with those who do not support funding education—a list that is coordinated for all of us to use and that allows us to counter those who do not support a strong public education system with information about the impact of the education system on everyone, including them. We also should create a list of actions that people can take—a list that is created strategically so that we act collectively, not by piecemeal.

We can use the current “state of emergency” to drive continued action because many needs are still unmet and will require continuous effort. Actions can be local, by publicizing efforts, shining a light on conflicts of interest and supporting grassroots efforts that keep the momentum going. We should also consider statewide efforts to reverse the 2/3 majority for increasing taxes. Whether the efforts are local or statewide, we must continue them until we have an adequate and dedicated funding source.