

FUNDING PREK-12 EDUCATION

University of Arizona Future Leaders Town Hall Report

October 24, 2017

Participants in the October 2017 University of Arizona Future Leaders Town Hall make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Town Hall participants.

ARIZONA'S PREK-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM GOALS

Arizona's PreK-12-12 education system should focus on preparing students to be good community members with the skills and experience necessary to reach their full potential and who continue to value learning throughout their lives. The realization of this goal requires Arizona to recognize that our student population is diverse and has a variety of interests and needs. Those needs include basic, practical life skills required by all students as they face the realities of adulthood. It also includes the needs of students spanning the full spectrum of academic performance and the spectrum of interests that students may have in post-secondary opportunities. To achieve our goals, Arizona's educational system should provide flexibility in curriculum, empower students to explore diverse opportunities by advising all students of the options available to them, allow teachers the freedom to create curriculum and teaching methods that can be tailored to individual students' needs, and reduce class sizes so teachers can more fully engage their students as individuals and provide more advisors and faculty to help students plan for their futures, including educating them on their options for higher education and the practicalities of student loans. Arizona should also demonstrate that it values and respects teacher experience by requiring better teacher training, raising the requirements for educators, emphasizing the importance of qualities that lead to teacher success, and providing teachers with the time, resources, and management skills they need to be fully prepared on a day to day basis. Arizona's goals cannot be achieved without starting from the bottom and building toward greater achievement: we cannot improve high school graduation rates without first improving the reading and math skills of our elementary school students and providing the programs to ensure that students are prepared for the next grade level before they are advanced. Resources also should be provided to parents to help them better prepare their students for success. Lastly, Arizona's education system should instruct students on working productively in teams and with people who are different from them.

IMPACT OF PUBLIC FUNDS

Arizona's failure to adequately fund public schools seriously harms our state and reduces the opportunities available to all our citizens. Arizona must improve funding for teacher salaries, which is the key first step to improving Arizona's public education system. Without adequately compensated teachers, Arizona is unable to compete with other states to retain quality experienced educators. Funding to reduce the ratio of students to teachers and to improve teacher training and preparedness is equally important. Next, education funding should be equalized between high- and low-income areas so all schools have equal access to funds. Additional funding sources are needed to provide the technology students need to be prepared for higher education and the technology-related training that teachers need to perform their jobs. Lastly, Arizona needs to fund extracurricular activities such as field trips and better nutrition programs so that students have the fuel they need to learn.

IMPROVING FUNDING FOR ARIZONA'S PREK-12 SCHOOLS

The following actions should be taken to improve funding for Arizona's preK-12 schools. First, the governor and legislators need to ensure that all public schools who receive public funds, including charter schools, are subject to the same rules. Politicians need to change their expectation that funding tied to student performance on tests will encourage better school and/or teacher performance. Instead, good schools get better and poor performing schools are starved of the resources they need to catch up. Rather, there should be more transparency and accountability for public education funding and school districts that are misusing funds should be penalized. In addition, politicians should seek more public input on how state funds are allocated for public education. Next, school districts should ensure more transparency and accountability concerning the way funds are spent. All of Arizona's citizens should become more informed about the problems facing Arizona's schools and the political leaders who are representing them. By learning more about political candidates, voters can support politicians who will advocate for the programs they value. Communities should unite to support their schools and be aware of the issues their schools are facing. Unions can help teachers improve compensation. Lastly, parents should be more involved in schools and aware of the classroom setting in which their children are learning. There needs to be a stronger connection between home and school.

OUR MESSAGE TO ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

If we could convey just a few short messages to Arizona's elected leaders, we would tell them:

- To respect teachers by compensating them adequately for the work they do and provide opportunities to make kids feel like they have a chance.
- To reevaluate the State's budget and take notice of how many of Arizona's expenses (e.g. prisons) could be reduced if we simply prioritized education.
- To providing equal funding and opportunity for all of Arizona's teachers and students to demonstrate that education is a priority in Arizona.
- To take responsibility for reallocating public funds away from education in the past and restore that funding now.
- To get to know your community, know the demographics, and listen to their needs so you can better support them and create better opportunities for their futures.
- To make teaching competitive and respected, to raise teacher requirements, look through different lens for teacher education programs

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 Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Advocate more for education and the funding process.
- Become more knowledgeable in the field and subject.
- Be in an environment with my students that is approachable and to have them gain lifelong skills.
- Try to get all my students to take a more aggressive approach to knowing their rights as students – power in numbers.

- Better engage myself and be in a good environment to better my students.
- Make a difference in not only my life but my students' lives as well. I want to be the change. I want to be the one who made a difference in the education world.
- Encourage my peers to be aware of how their votes matter. Words are powerful.
- Become politically engaged and follow the progress/topic of funding in education. I think spreading awareness is important when trying to get something to change as well so letting people know about low funding in AZ schools is something I will do.
- Be more proactive in contacting the legislature about education issues. I will also try to be more aware of the conversations being had in terms of education by the legislature. They need to hear from people actually involved in K-12 education.
- Work to stay informed and inform others on the state of funding for prek-12 education. I will make my voice heard by voting in elections and on legislation especially those concerning education.
- First, I will inform others of the low pay our teachers endure with all they do to contribute to the future of our world through teaching. I will get involved politically so that I can make a realistic change in our education and funding.
- Have the conversation about Arizona's prek-12 education system with people who have never thought about it. I, before this town hall meeting, never had this sort of conversation before and NOW I am aware of it. By continuing to talk to other people, we are raising awareness of the issues at hand.
- Find a solution to actually fund and provide teachers with a better salary so they can be something to look forward to and work hard in the child and higher learning.
- Stay informed about current education issues. This will help me spread the knowledge of things like funding issues to those who are not aware. I would hope this would result in more people becoming politically engaged
- Participate in informing myself on needed solutions to engage the political leaders in understanding the importance of making education funding a vital part of government in schools. Teachers are an important part of developing future elected leaders: our children!
- Inform others of the lack of funding in prek-12 teachers. I will also encourage them to help make a change.
- Refuse to be silent.
- Ask more from political leadership. Become more politically engaged. Promote political engagement and voter turnout.
- Become politically active and learn more about the policy-making that affects the education system.
- Continue to voice my concerns and support change in education through civic action and advocate these changes.
- Continue to advocate for a quality education for every child, including an increased respect for educators.
- Advocate for needed policy changes to increase funding for teacher salaries to be increased. With the information given as AZ state being 50th in the nation states there is a definite problem in AZ.
- Be present and share my voice because I am invaluable! I would hope to engage in a conversation about the positive impacts of education that affects people from all walks of life.

- Vote more often and stay engaged with local and state educational policies. I will also make sure to let my superiors know that paying for good teachers is important because teachers encourage individuals to grow more than anything else.
- Teach my future students the value of education so that the future will learn to better appreciate the power of education.
- Pay more attention and become more engaged with how politics and policy change affect education so I can advocate for educators.
- Pay more attention to undocumented students because they also need to go to school. I think diversity is very important part when we talk about education.
- Speak out for my future students so their voices will be heard. And stay and teach in the State of Arizona.
- Learn more on laws and what policies are in place in the State of Arizona for education to become an informed voter.
- Become more informed about Arizona's educational policies and become a voice for Arizona's students.
- Get more involved with the community of Arizona, being aware of the laws and how it will affect me as a teacher in the future.
- Research and educate myself about the policies currently in place regarding education in Arizona so that I can be an informed voter and future educator.
- Talk with my school directors to find out more information about our own school funding. I hope this would help me better understand at least a part of the education system.
- Always advocate for the rights of all students and teachers. Every student deserves a positive educational experience and I will strive to create political change which allows all students to be successful.
- Become more educated about education funding to help improve our classrooms.
- First take politics out of the equation. Look at what needs to be done, find a solution that would benefit everyone, not just a specific party, and advocate for the solution by informing the community. After, bring it to the politicians' attention.
- Continue to be an advocate for low income public schools and try to network with schools in my community to brainstorm solutions regarding funding Arizona's prek-12 education system.
- Commit to learning more about efforts made by people and organizations in the community in order to get more involved with the conversation at a local level.
- Be active in learning about local politicians and voting.
- Become more politically involved in my community and do my research.