

# **“Funding preK-12 Education”**

**Community Town Hall Report**

**Rimrock, AZ – September 8-9, 2017**



**Verde Valley Forum for Public Affairs**  
***Strengthening PreK-12 Education in the Verde Valley Region***  
**September 8 and 9, 2017**

Participants from across the Verde Valley gathered at the Beaver Creek School in Rimrock, Arizona to consider how best to strengthen preK-12 education in the Verde Valley. Participants developed consensus on the state of education in the region and the action steps that need to be taken to ensure a strong system for the future. The report of their recommendations and action plans is set forth below.

**THE STATE OF PREK-12 EDUCATION IN THE VERDE VALLEY REGION**

The staff and educators in the Verde Valley region are accomplishing remarkable things with the insufficient resources allocated to them. However, the system is under stress, and the Arizona legislature needs to understand the very different education realities faced by districts outside of the State of Maricopa. We are at a breaking point. Doing more with less is simply not a viable long-term solution to the problems we face and the outcomes we seek.

There is a disconnect between legislators and the electorate regarding education prioritization. The current funding system in our region, and statewide, is broken—even imploding on itself. There is an outdated paradigm, really a one-size-fits-all mentality, which must be modernized and overhauled. Sadly, educators are often in a perpetual state of crisis management.

Education funding in our region is wholly insufficient, whether it be capital funding or otherwise. The state legislature must allocate sufficient resources with particular focus on the special needs of rural and smaller-district communities. More paperwork and unfunded or underfunded mandates do nothing to increase student achievement.

There is a lack of quality pre-K opportunities, often leading to long waiting lists. While options for these young students have increased, they are still insufficient. In particular, pre-K educational opportunities are critical for all children, not just children from families with the capacity to pay.

Increasing assessment of students is often burdensome and ineffective. While assessment of student achievement is important, we must be concerned with the holistic development of each individual child while recognizing that much of that development cannot be accurately measured or quantified.

Teacher retention due to low pay, stresses of the job, and unrealistic expectations, is a critical issue that must be addressed. Other issues, especially problematic in rural and low-income communities, include transient student populations, high percentage of ESL students, and insufficient scale to provide needed educational opportunities and options for all students. There is a growing special education population without sufficient funding or teacher training to assist these students. With the increasing diversity of our student population, we should strive to have educators mirror that diversity. A diverse student population benefits from diverse teachers.

Cooperation between districts should continue to improve. Consolidation may be considered. At a minimum, Districts should create more opportunities to connect or support in cooperation and coordination to share services and funding. Additionally, cooperation with families will be critical moving forward. Educators cannot bear the entire burden.

### **BUILDING ON EXISTING STRENGTHS TO ENHANCE PREK-12 EDUCATION**

The region should continue to tap into the strength and talents of the entire community and focus on all generations, including the retired generation. We must change any perception of “their kids” and make it all about “our kids.” We must focus on and communicate the benefits of educating each student for the whole community. We need to strategize and find ways to create intergenerational connections with our schools. We pay for it one way or the other. We can educate them now or incarcerate them later. We are each invested in the success of every student.

The region should work to break down any sense of isolation through more effective networking between schools. Communication should be about collaboration and sharing, not competition. Shared resources create opportunities for our kids and allows us to more fully leverage our limited resources. We need to speak with a more unified voice about the priority of education in the region. Unified technology sharing will help make this process efficient and manageable.

The region should work to build even stronger relationships with our community resources. We should work with municipal and other services, while being mindful that many unincorporated areas do not have this option and should not be left behind. Memorandums of understanding and intergovernmental agreements are in place and can be enhanced. We need to work hard to integrate our business community more fully in the educational process and make sure they know exactly how they can help us in ways besides funding. Work release programs to increase volunteerism would be particularly effective.

The region must continue to focus on teacher recruiting and retention. In addition to prioritizing political action, we should pursue grant opportunities and other funding mechanisms.

### **INCREASING ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION**

We need to build strong community relationships. We need to create safe social networking spaces for kids and the public to interact and recognize the successes of our schools and our kids’ achievements. We need to increase our educational public relations and social media presence and efforts to accomplish this. Specific training for schools in how best to accomplish public awareness campaigns will increase their effectiveness. Sharing resources and staff will not only increase campaign effectiveness, but will allow us to promote the entire Verde Valley. We can change the conversation. We can raise expectations.

We must recruit and retain teachers through increasing salaries. We need to create a culture of appreciation and gratitude that recognizes all of the good our qualified and passionate teachers do for our kids and our overall community. We should work together to

increase salaries fairly and across the board so Verde Valley schools are not competing with each other for highly effective teachers.

We should increase diversity in our education staff and faculty to more fully represent and embrace the diverse communities we serve. We should also work to increase engagement of diverse and underrepresented communities in our schools. We need to consider how to change the way these communities view and interact with our schools. We must declare and convince our communities that we embrace and value the education of all kids. Increased diversity in education has the potential to also increase diversity in all aspects of civic engagement.

We must encourage lifelong learning and bring community members into our schools to increase their overall engagement. We should utilize and leverage the talents of our community and create additional volunteer opportunities. A dedicated but shared volunteer/outreach coordinator could effectively identify volunteer talents and connect them with volunteer opportunities. We can do much more to unleash the untapped potential of our community for increased mentorship, volunteerism, and involvement in our schools.

We should support opportunities for after school programs, STEM programs, all summer programs, high school to college programs, College for Kids, career/vocational training, and others. We should partner with pathway programs, mentoring programs, and post-secondary programs, business partners, and other non-profits in any way to increase the benefit to our kids.

We should encourage our legislators and other elected leaders to regularly visit and spend time in our local schools so they can directly see what is working and what must be improved. We should encourage school leaders to more aggressively reach out to our legislators and elected leaders for the same reasons. We should lobby to decrease unfunded and underfunded mandates. We should ensure that we give our children voice in the process.

## **FUNDING**

- To improve the amount or methods of funding for Arizona's preK-12 schools, the following actions should be taken:
- Encourage an educated citizenry who understands the issues and takes advantage of the opportunity to vote.
- Find ways to communicate effectively and simply about the issues surrounding education funding.
- More frequently and more effectively communicate with the community—especially with residents who do not have any other connection to our schools.
- Educate our community about how to make their vote count in primary elections.
- Educate and train local parents to become education advocates and then connect them to our legislators.
- Ensure that urban families are not the only families heard and ensure that rural families are perceived as a majority, and not perceived as some insignificant special interest which may occur when legislators only hear from administrators.

- Identify candidates for public office who support education the way we want education to be supported. If they will not fund our priorities, we should pursue ballot initiatives.
- Each participant of this forum should individually engage their elected leaders on this subject. We must promote both political intelligence and political action.
- Ensure that education funding on a per kid basis is equal throughout the state without regarding for inequitable bonding capacity of various communities.
- Earmark a funding source for PreK-12 public schools that cannot be swept by the legislature.
- Implement a specific dedicated excise tax to support education, with appropriate protections for low-income families.
- Renew and expand Proposition 301 to specifically support education.
- Increase the threshold for the individual and marital tax credits contributions for education. Allow schools to use those funds more broadly.
- Eliminate waste or redundancy collaboratively and cooperatively with other Verde Valley schools.

## **SETTING PRIORITIES AND TAKING ACTION**

Participants first determined the most important priorities and goals for ensuring the best education future for the Verde Valley community. The areas identified (in no particular order) are: teacher recruitment, retention and pay; funding; collaboration; public relations; and civic engagement. Participants then self-selected into groups to develop outlines of action plans for accomplishing the identified goals. The action plans are set forth below.

### **Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Pay**

Create a 2018 citizen's ballot initiative to have a \$00.0175 excise tax on per kilowatt hour energy generation. Eliminate Proposition 301.

### **Funding**

Create a 2018 citizen's ballot initiative for an excise tax on energy with the money to go to a classroom fund. Matt Kelley, Stephanie Orbe, Jamie Woodard, Ruth Wicks, and Jessica Williamson will meet in October 2017 to begin this process. Matt Kelley will take the lead.

Learn about what Tempe did to fund their Prek-12 programs and see if the Verde Valley can adopt a similar program. Ruth will accomplish by January 1, 2018.

### **Collaboration**

Verde Valley Education Consortium will be structured as an umbrella organization to encourage collaboration, look for common ground, share resources and services, coordinate schedules and transportation, and design and implement briefs to present to all stakeholders with separate action groups representing: (a) public, private, and charter school representatives; (b) business leaders; (c) parents and citizens; and (d) students.

District, private and charter school leaders will develop an inventory of resources across districts and schools including (1) what your school/district can share, (2) what your school/district needs, and (2) areas of current collaboration.

Leverage Verde Valley Education Consortium to get stakeholders including business and community leaders, government, Valley Academy for Career and Technology Education, and Yavapai College to create centralized Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs in the Verde Valley.

### **Public Relations**

Gioia Quisumbing will immediately join an education consortium and research existing public relations positions within other Arizona schools.

The education consortium will seek grant funding for Verde Valley public relations position with the Verde Valley education consortium.

Gioia Quisumbing will provide a list of resources to schools for positive public relations in the meantime prior to the end of 2017.

### **Civic Engagement**

Jessica Williamson will continue to cooperate with the League of Women voters to increase voter registration and turnout to elect education committed political representatives in the 2018 election cycle.

Nikki Bagley will establish a bipartisan stakeholder coalition to endorse and advance the campaigns of education committed political representatives in the 2018 election cycle.

Sebra Choe will establish a regional youth council focusing on civic engagement and will have convened the first regional meeting by the end of 2017.

### **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 Forum. Below are individual actions that were shared

#### ***I WILL...***

- Follow the Town Hall discussions from their website and continue to develop an understanding of political action in regard to the implementation of an excise tax.
- Work toward an initiative to place an excise tax on the ballot to go toward a classroom fund by November 2018.
- Share information gained this weekend with my school and parent population.
- Offer my services to Verde Valley Education Consortium.
- Work with Matt Kelley and advocate on an initiative with the energy excise effort to increase public education funding long term in Arizona.
- Join the energy excise effort to increase public education funding long term in Arizona.

- Support the efforts of the “We Value Teachers Foundation,” which works to support teachers financially with food gift cards and begin tutoring at our local library.
- Share knowledge on building connected learning communities using digital learning platforms. Mentoring, coaching, and co-curricular learning.
- Work with parents and citizens to address needs of teachers and schools and help them see and commit to how they can use their talents to help the students and teachers.
- Help collaborate with schools, community and businesses.
- Organize and educate an action committee and develop a questionnaire to vet and endorse legislative candidates for 2018.
- Use my influence and connections with young adults (18-24) to promote voter registration and participation in primary and general elections (initiative, issue and candidate study sessions).
- Talk to some friends about the proposed excise tax and the benefits to our public school system and communities.
- Educate myself further on the implications of continuing or modifying corporate tax credits.
- Facilitate starting Regional Youth Council, hosting the first meeting this semester and identify goals/vision for second semester.
- Partner with League of Women Voters and Nikki Bagley’s Education Action group.
- Register to vote for 2018, get education on the issues and candidates and vote for education.
- Continue to advocate for school choice especially private schools.
- Facilitate forming of Camp Verde Youth Commission.
- Personally talk with every school board member, the superintendent, and every principal in my district (Sedona-Oak Creek Unified School District) about meaningfully participating in regional cooperation and collaboration.
- Work with the collaboration team in bringing groups together to better serve the Verde Valley in regards to education.
- Act as a community ally to schools, teachers, students and all parties involved to collaborate in improving preK-12 education in the Verde Valley through the Camp Verde Community Library.
- Change my personal dialogue to reflect my positive support of the quality educational opportunities that exist in the Verde Valley and remind others of the positive contributions of parents, teachers and volunteers in Verde Valley.
- Increase awareness of private school funding by working with DOP to involve participation at future Town Halls.
- Participate in the formulation of our initiative petition and the circulation of said petition to get the excise tax for the classroom site fund on the ballot.

# “Strengthening PreK-12 Education in the Verde Valley Region” Forum Sponsors



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