

AFP Arizona Argument for Voting NO on Your School Override on Nov 3rd

Half of the school districts in the state are holding override elections on November 3rd. (Early ballot voting began October 8.) In some cases, school districts are asking taxpayers and voters for more money. In other cases, they are asking taxpayers and voters to maintain spending at current levels.

The truth is that your school district has plenty of taxpayer money--more than enough to pay for excellent teachers and good administration. The simple fact is that they are WASTING MUCH OF YOUR MONEY.

According to page 6 from the Annual Report of the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction, school districts in 2008 had revenues from all sources of \$9,232,916,095:

<http://www.azed.gov/annualreport/AnnualReport2008/Vol1.pdf>

On page 8 of that report, you can see that Arizona school districts in 2008 had 951,117 students.

Do the math, and you find that Arizona school districts had resources of \$9,707 per child.

That figure includes capital costs. To find per-child costs for your district, go to page 58 of the superintendent's report, and search by county and then in alphabetical order by district.

Note: The per-child figures for each district do NOT include "expenditures for land, land improvement, buildings and building improvements, furniture, equipment, or vehicles. Also excluded are Internal Service Fund operations, Community School Fund operations, debt retirement, student activities, and nonpublic school programs, (e.g., adult/continuing education, community college education, community services, and day care centers)." See page 52 for the definitions.

The average unified school district in Arizona had \$7,730 per student in 2007-2008.

If the average classroom in that district has 25 students, that means there is \$194,000 of potential resources in that classroom. Think about that for a moment.

Let's assume an annual reserve of 5 percent. That still leaves \$184,000 of potential resources in that classroom.

That means there is enough money to split that average classroom into TWO classes (class size = 12.5 kids), and pay TWO teachers \$61,000 each in salary and benefits, with \$61,000 left over for supplies and all of the other programs (library, band, sports, etc) and overhead that may be needed to support those two classrooms. (Remember, the capital expenditures the district makes are not counted in the \$7,730 per student figure.)

Or, if the district could limit overhead and other programs to 25 percent (\$46,000), it could allocate \$70,000 for the salary and benefits of a good teacher in the classroom of 25 (managing

25 kids—or more—is easy for a talented teacher), and still allocate \$68,000 towards a special education instructor who deals with the IEPs in that classroom.

The BIG QUESTION is why the average unified school district, with resources of \$7,730 per student, does not pay good teachers what they're worth. (Bear in mind that some other public schools spend even more, per student, than unified districts do. See page 57 of the superintendent's report for more.)

The reason your district does not pay good teachers what they're worth is that your district is mismanaging its resources. Much of the blame goes to the labor rules imposed by the teacher unions. Under those rules, good teachers are paid the same as bad teachers, and bad teachers are not given the pink slips they deserve. Also, most school districts are very heavy on bureaucratic overhead.

Powerful lobbying groups, such as the Arizona Education Association and the Arizona School Boards Association, promote the BIG LIE that Arizona schools do not have enough resources. Your newspaper editorial boards then repeat that BIG LIE. They tell us that Arizona is 49th in the country in per-pupil spending. Even if Arizona was 49th in the country, \$7,730 per child for unified districts, or \$9700 per child for the whole state, including capital costs (we spend much more than we need to on capital), is more than enough money to give Arizona the best school system in the country.

Again, the problem is not a lack of money. The problem is mismanagement.

On November 3rd, when it comes time to vote on your school district's override, do not be bamboozled by promises that more money will lead to increased student performance. There is no evidence whatsoever to support that notion. If you give more money to Arizona school districts, they will very likely continue to waste that money.

America's government schools have sucked up more and more money for decades. Since 1970 we have more than doubled per-pupil spending, in constant dollars. Sadly, we have very little (if anything) to show for those investments when it comes to student performance:

http://www.heritage.org/research/Education/images/b2179_chart4.gif

If your school district is asking to renew an existing override, do not be blackmailed by the myth that the result will be drastic spending cuts. Even school districts that are trying to renew full 15 percent overrides will lose less than ten percent of their budgets if the overrides fail.

According to the superintendent's report (page 57), charter schools in Arizona received \$6,659 per child in 2008. That's 14 percent less than what the unified district schools get. And yet, charter schools have proven to do a better job of educating kids, including disadvantaged student populations:

<http://www.nber.org/~schools/charterschoolseval/>

For a brief outline of how to use the charter model to reform Arizona education, check out the latest blog post by *Republic* columnist Bob Robb:

<http://www.azcentral.com/members/Blog/RobertRobb/64748>

Further, many Arizona private schools provide an excellent education for tuition of less than \$5,000 per year:

<http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/article/1851>

There are proven ways to improve school performance, but they do NOT involve giving lots of money to mismanaged school districts. For ideas, start in Florida:

<http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/article/2577>

The bottom line is that we need more education for our tax dollars, not more tax dollars for education.

Please join us in voting NO on the November 3rd school overrides.