



GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10

DATE OF MEETING: **October 26, 2021**

TITLE: **Public Meeting Pursuant to A.R.S. 15-481(Y) to Provide Update on Programs
Financed through the 10% Maintenance and Operations Override and the 3.5% K-
3 Special Programs Override**

BACKGROUND: Arizona Revised Statute (“A.R.S.”) § 15-481(Y) mandates that school districts with a voter-approved budget override in place hold an annual public meeting to enable public comment concerning the override. Amphitheater Public Schools is fortunate to have two budget overrides in place at this time: (1) a 10% maintenance and operations (“M&O”) budget override, and (2) a 3.5% K-3 special programs budget override. This agenda item is offered to permit the Governing Board to hold its annual public meeting for these overrides.

I. Law Governing Annual Public Meeting for Overrides

A.R.S. § 15-481(Y) states:

Each school district that currently increases its budget pursuant to this section is required to hold a public meeting each year between September 1 and October 31 at which an update of the programs or capital improvements financed through the override is discussed and at which the public is permitted an opportunity to comment and:

...

- 2. If the increase is pursuant to subsection E, F, I or J of this section, the update shall include at a minimum the amount expended in the previous fiscal year and the amount included in the current budget for each of the purposes listed in the informational pamphlet prescribed by subsection B of this section.*

Consistent with these requirements, this agenda item also provides the Board with an update about the programs financed through each of the District’s overrides.

II. Significant Benefits of the Voter-Approved Overrides

According to the recent U.S. Census Data released May 20, 2020, Arizona ranks 48th of the United States in per pupil funding¹. The 2020 Census Summary Report notes that Arizona schools continue to rely heavily on non-state funding sources and specifically noted, “Public school systems in Alaska (15.8%), Mississippi (13.8%), South Dakota (13.6%), New Mexico (13.4%) and Arizona (13.2%) received the highest percentage of their revenue from the federal government.” On average, the states in the northeastern portion of the United States spend nearly triple the amounts for student education than Arizona spends for K-12 public education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Arizona has not funded its public schools at the national state average since the 1980s.² Arizona has “slipped to ‘bad’ and then to ‘worse’, becoming one of the lowest funded

¹ US Census Bureau. (2020, May 11). Annual Survey of School System Finances. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/school-system-finances.html> (October 6, 2020)

² ARIZONA RANKS 49TH IN EDUCATION FUNDING – HOW DID WE GET HERE? (2019, May 22). Retrieved from <https://azcharters.org/arizona-ranks-49th-in-education-funding-how-did-we-get-here/> (Oct. 6, 2020).

public education systems in the country, on a per-pupil basis,” and unfortunately, that is the reality that Arizona school districts face today.

With this in mind, Amphitheater Public Schools made the decision to request voters to approve a general M&O override after significant study and a community survey of the District’s electors. In 2005, the voters of the Amphitheater Unified School District put a 10% M&O override in place to enable students who attend Amphitheater’s schools greater opportunities than those provided generally by the State of Arizona. The Amphitheater community renewed the override in 2009, and again in 2014, and again in 2019. In 2019, the Amphitheater community also approved a 3.5% special programs override specifically for the benefit of the District’s Kindergarten through Third Grade program.

Both overrides are seven-year overrides. This means that the voters approved putting a budget override in place to allow the Amphitheater District to exceed the standard Revenue Control Limit (the amount that Arizona authorizes each school district to spend to educate the students of that district) by 10% for seven years. Similarly, the K-3 special programs override authorizes the District to exceed its K-3 budget by 3.5% during that same time. Both overrides are in place for their full percentage amounts for school years (“SY”) 2020-2021 through 2024-2025 and then will begin to phase out over a two-year period.

Although the State of Arizona began increasing its education spending in 2019 for the first time in a decade, the minimal increase provided does not even make a dent in the amount needed to promote Arizona from its rank as the 48th lowest per pupil spending state. Today, Arizona remains well below average in funding of public education, and Arizona school districts continue to struggle from the consistent and substantial annual budgetary cuts that the Arizona legislature made to public education between 2009 – 2018. Fortunately, the 10% M&O budget override that the Amphitheater voters put in place helped Amphitheater Public Schools to be able to continue to provide consistent benefits for its students despite the significant budget cuts experienced by Arizona school districts. Through the assistance of our voters, students who attend Amphitheater Public Schools had and continue to have experiences that other school districts were unable to provide for nearly a decade.

III. Funds Provided through the Budget Overrides

The amount provided through the voter-approved overrides changes annually depending on the amount of the District’s budget. A school district’s M&O budget is largely determined by its student enrollment so budget overrides can change annually when enrollment changes occur. While the District has seen a declining student enrollment trend for several years largely due to natural changes in the birth cohort, the enrollment changes caused by the pandemic made these changes more significant this year. Sadly, not every student who left the District during the pandemic returned this year and that enrollment decline affects the overall M&O budget and consequently the amount provided to the District through each override as well.

1. 10% Budget Override

Last year, Amphitheater reported receiving an additional \$7,792,593 in its M&O budget through the 10% override. The amount provided through the override this year is less at a total of \$7,149,060.

2. 3.5% K-3 Override

Last year, the funds provided through the voter-approved 3.5% K-3 special programs override were an additional \$2,727,407 specifically for K-3 education in Amphitheater Public Schools. Due to enrollment changes largely attributable to the pandemic, the amount provided this year is less at a total of \$2,502,171.

IV. Programs Financed by the 10% M&O Budget Override

1. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach Art in Elementary Schools

The M&O override also continues to permit the District to provide a certificated art teacher at every one of its elementary schools. Like with class size reduction, the M&O budget only affords a partial contract for art at the elementary schools, but funding from the 10% M&O override enables art teachers to expand the amount of time that students have in art class each week. This year, the number of art teachers at each of the District's eleven (11) elementary schools and two (2) K-8 schools remained consistent with prior years during which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

2. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach Music in Elementary Schools

Similarly, the M&O override continues to enable dedicated certificated music teachers to offer expanded music classes at every one the District's elementary and K-8 schools. This year, the number of elementary music teachers remained consistent with prior years in which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

3. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach PE in Elementary Schools

The same is true for certificated physical education teachers who continue to provide expanded physical education offerings at each elementary and K-8 school in the District as well. This year, the number of elementary physical education teachers in the District's elementary and K-8 schools remained consistent with prior years in which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

4. Choice Middle School Elective Classes, Math Labs, and Writing Labs

Through the 10% M&O override this year, advanced learning and elective courses continue to be made available to middle school students at every middle school and K-8 school. These elective course offerings include career exploration, drama, dance, MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), science, programming and technology. In addition, the override also continues to add math and writing labs for middle school students.

5. High School Technology, Science and Fine Arts Classes

Moreover, the 10% M&O override likewise continues to fund additional technology, science and fine arts electives in all three high schools. The additional courses provided through the override include specialized elective offerings in the areas of art, music, computer science, modern languages, and advanced placement courses.

6. Tutoring and Intervention Programs

The 10% M&O override also continues to fund tutoring and other intervention programs to serve students throughout the school year and into the summer in a manner that is consistent with prior years in which the override has been in place.

7. Amphitheater Public School Employee Compensation Enhancement

The override also continues to provide additional funding to enhance compensation for certificated and classified personnel in the District so that District wages remain competitive to hire the best educators for our students. This benefit provided by the current override is important for the District to compete against private employers and charter schools to obtain trained professional staff. Currently, all staff continue to receive an increase of

approximately three percent (3%) to their base salaries through the funding provided by the general 10% M&O override.

8. Added Technology Positions to Remain Current with Technology Changes

The override has also made possible hiring of added positions in our Facilities and Technology Departments, to better enable the District to maintain facilities and our growing technology demands. The following positions continue to be funded through the override: two Maintenance Tech II positions in the Facilities Department, and one Programmer Analyst in the Technology Department.

9. Class Size Reduction

Before voters put the override in place, class sizes at the elementary level were routinely at or over 30 students, and middle and high school classes in areas like English, math or science ranged upwards of 35-38 students. The current 10% M&O override continues to permit the District to add additional staff in schools where class sizes are larger, particularly in the core content areas that every student in the grade level must take, by adding another teacher when necessary and thereby reducing the number of students in a class at that grade level.

This year, the funding provided through the override was not sufficient to add extra classroom teachers after the dedicated override programs identified above were fully staffed. This is because the amount provided through the 10% M&O override decreased this year consistent with student enrollment decreases. This, coupled with the need to sustain teacher salary increases authorized through the Arizona Governor's 20 by 2020 plan (which did not provide sufficient additional funding to fund the full 20% committed for teachers), limited the ability to add class size reduction positions through the 10% M&O override this year.

V. Programs Funded through the 3.5% K-3 Special Programs Override

The 3.5% special programs override for Kindergarten through Third Grade programs are being used specifically to benefit Kindergarten through Third Grade programs in all District elementary and K-8 schools in the following ways.

1. Free Full-Day Kindergarten

The 3.5% special program override funds free full-day kindergarten at all of Amphitheater's elementary and K-8 schools. Prior to the K-3 special programs override being approved by the voters, Amphitheater Public Schools only offered free all-day Kindergarten to children attending schools that qualify for Title I funds given the ability to use Title I funds for this purpose. Schools that did not qualify for Title I offered half-day Kindergarten and parents who wanted their students to attend the full-day had to subsidize the second half of the Kindergarten day. Now, Kindergarten is offered for the full-day at no cost throughout the District. This has freed-up those Title I funds previously dedicated to pay for Kindergarten for use in Title I schools to benefit students at those schools in alternative ways.

2. Additional Class-Size Reduction in Kindergarten – Third Grades

The special program override also funds additional teachers for Kindergarten to Third Grade classrooms to further reduce class size for the youngest learners in the District. Through the funding provided by this special program override, the District has been able to reduce class sizes in Kindergarten through Third Grades with goals of class maximum student numbers of:

- Kindergarten - 25 students
- First Grade - 25 students
- Second Grade - 26 students
- Third Grade - 27 students

This is a substantial decrease from classes that used to exceed 30. Research has established that smaller class size is an important determinant of academic and social student outcomes due to increasing the time available to the teacher to better tailor their instruction to meet individual student needs. Therefore, the changes provided to the youngest learners of the District through the 3.5% special programs override are helping these students through increased student engagement, focused instruction, and decreased time spent by the teacher on classroom management.

VI. Conclusion

Amphitheater Public Schools appreciates the confidence of its electors in continuing to approve the 10% M&O override and to approve the new 3.5% K-3 special programs override, both of which greatly benefit the students of this District. Each budget override provides critical programs that are necessary for students to continue to receive a high-quality education and develop the Portrait of a Graduate skills that Amphitheater strives for each student to attain before graduating from the District. With other states in the United States dedicating nearly triple the amount that Arizona provides for per-pupil public education funding, the programs that Amphitheater Public Schools is able to provide through these voter-approved budget overrides help keep our students competitive as they prepare for their post-high school colleges or careers in the rapidly changing world.

RECOMMENDATION:

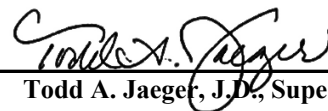
This item is presented for the Governing Board to comply with the requirements of A.R.S. § 15-481(Y) by holding a public meeting for Administration to provide an update of the programs financed through the 10% M&O override and the 3.5% K-3 Special Programs override, and to permit public comment during the public meeting.

INITIATED BY:



Michelle H. Tong, J.D.,
Associate to the Superintendent and General Counsel
and
Scott Little
Chief Financial Officer

Date: October 18, 2021



Todd A. Jaeger, J.D., Superintendent