



**GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM
AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10**

DATE OF MEETING: **December 08, 2020**

TITLE: **Study and Approval of the Governing Board’s Legislative Priorities for the 2021 Fiscal Year**

BACKGROUND:

School district governing board members regularly advocate for public education by raising awareness and engaging in dialogue with both legislators and the community through an established list of legislative priorities. This agenda item is provided to permit Amphitheater’s Governing Board to develop its legislative priorities for the 2021 Arizona’s legislative session. These legislative priorities will then assist to guide and direct Amphitheater’s representatives as they communicate with Arizona legislators to effect legislative actions to benefit the District, its students, and its staff. They will also help ensure that the Board’s philosophies and mission are communicated properly and consistently during the legislative process.

The legislative priorities set by this agenda item will be separate from, but may overlap, those adopted by the Arizona School Board Association (“ASBA”) earlier this year. As a voting member of the ASBA, Amphitheater’s Governing Board provides input to ASBA annually to assist ASBA to form its own legislative agenda with an eye toward benefitting all public schools in the state. As a reminder, the Board previously studied and responded to ASBA’s request for input into that organization’s legislative agenda, and Board representatives have already attended ASBA’s legislative meetings for that purpose.

This agenda item will address a legislative agenda specific to Amphitheater Public Schools. A proposed list of potential discussion items that would be beneficial to Amphitheater, as well as its students and staff, is provided as potential “talking points” to illustrate issues and discussions that the Board may wish to consider as it approves a list of legislative priorities for the District.

1. Provide Adequate Funding for K-12 Education.

- Article XI, Section 1. A., of the Arizona Constitution sets forth that, “The legislature shall enact such laws as shall provide for the establishment and maintenance of a general and uniform public school system...” Section 10 requires that, “... the legislature shall make such appropriations, to be met by taxation, as shall insure the proper maintenance of all state educational institutions, and shall make such special appropriations as shall provide for their development and improvement.”
- The legislature has not only failed to meet its constitutional duty, but has violated that duty as well by cutting essential funding to schools.
- Recent efforts by the state to restore capital funds through the creation of the District Additional Assistance does not reimburse the more than \$107 million dollars in capital funds denied to Amphitheater Public Schools by the state for the decade that followed the 2009 recession.
- The State of Arizona needs to revise its funding system to support the increased expectations for Arizona student achievement to enable Arizona’s youth to remain competitive with the rest of the country. Current federal and Arizona state requirements demand higher levels of student achievement, but the state legislature has not revised its current education funding formula to address those ever-increasing requirements.
- The Arizona legislature continues to create laws designed to increase student success, *i.e.*, the new 2019 law requiring mandatory dyslexia testing in elementary schools, but it does not provide additional funding to support those mandates.

- State legislators, not our schools and our conscientious and committed educators, are failing our students. Simple changes are available to the state’s legislators to increase the state’s education funding budget, *i.e.*, an excise tax would provide a new funding source for public education in a budget-neutral manner for Arizona’s taxpayers.
- The Arizona legislature needs to revise Arizona’s current public education funding system to establish consistent and reliable funding sources that will adequately fund public school districts in each of the following essential areas:
 1. Increase Per Student Spending in the State’s Public Schools: Increase support for Arizona’s students to provide greater learning opportunities in the areas of special education, gifted education, sheltered English immersion, and career and technical education.
 2. Provide Adequate Funding for Special Education: Correct the state education funding formula for special education dollars to address special education through Group B weighed formulas. The current education funding formula that provides for special education services through Group A funding wastes tax dollars by giving school district funds identified for special education services to charter schools who are not obligated to provide the special education services required of public school districts.
 3. Provide Competitive Compensation for Public School Employees: Provide sufficient funds to attract and retain the best and most qualified school staff so that Arizona students are competitive with the rest of the United States.
 4. Attract College Graduates to the Teaching Profession: Provide sufficient funding to encourage qualified professionals to enter the teaching profession, particularly in high needs areas such as science, math, technology, special education, Sheltered English Immersion, and career and technical education.
 5. Address Minimum Wage Compression for Public School Employees: Provide sufficient funding to enable school districts to address wage compression experienced due to the annual minimum wage increases required by the Arizona Healthy Families and Minimum Wage Act.
 6. Properly Maintain and Secure Public School Buildings: The current education funding system employed to assist public school districts to maintain and secure public schools does not benefit school districts or students. The process developed by the state legislature that requires school districts to request funds for building repairs and updates through the School Facilities Board (“SFB”) is time and labor intensive, and it is difficult for school districts to obtain sufficient funds to address needed repairs. Moreover, reliance on the state’s general fund to cover repairs approved by the SFB limits the funding available throughout the state for repairs and pits school districts against each other in a fight for available funds from the SFB. School districts should receive sufficient funding as part of the state’s education funding formula to address maintenance and repairs for their own buildings.

2. Maintain Desegregation Funding.

- Desegregation funding is an important source of funding for school districts who have additional obligation imposed by a desegregation or OCR order.
- Desegregation and OCR orders typically mandate that school districts undertake some form of corrective action, through the implementation of new programs, services or policies that impose new and additional obligations.
- A.R.S. §15-910 (the desegregation funding statute) provides a separate source of revenue for school districts compelled to implement new programs and services by operation of court orders or OCR decrees.
- Programs and services of school districts directly serving Arizona’s children deserve no less protection than the general fund of the State.

3. Provide User-friendly and Practical Reporting Requirements and Provide Funding Support for the Same.

- Federal and state reporting and data requirements combine to create a substantial administrative burden for school districts.

- The state continues to change its reporting requirements to require different and new types of information from school districts.
- State reporting requirement changes are made without input from or sufficient notice to school districts. For example, the Arizona Department of Education changed its reporting requirements for the state's AzSAFE reporting twice during the 2019-2020 school year, and each change required school districts to readjust staffing assignments to meet the state's change.
- The worthy goal of putting more funds in the classroom must be reconciled with the ongoing effort to put more burden in administrative functions.

4. Protect and Support Educator Due Process Rights.

- While the interests of the student must be the paramount focus of all education decisions and policies, those interests will never be met if educators are led to believe that their rights do not matter.
- A careful balance must be drawn between ensuring students receive services from the most-qualified and effective staff possible and protecting the rights of teachers to due process and opportunities for professional growth.
- Legislative mandates for evaluation outcomes, loss of continuing status, and dismissal from employment deprive school boards of necessary local control.
- State mandates ignore inherent deficiencies in state and data systems that have not been supported with capital funding from the state.

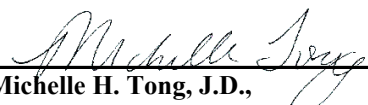
5. Hold School Districts Harmless from the Financial Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- Student enrollment and attendance across the state were significantly and unexpectedly changed during the first 100 days of SY 2020-2021 entirely due to the pandemic. The State of Arizona has reported that school districts are not able to locate thousands of students who registered to attend public schools in Arizona. Because school districts had to develop plans for staffing schools and issue teacher contracts before the pandemic reached Arizona, school districts should not be held accountable for the current year changes in enrollment for FY 2020-2021.
- Due to the pandemic, public schools had to implement new mitigation strategies that enable physical distance between students at school. These changes required by COVID-19 have limited the number of students that school districts were able to accept through the open enrollment process, which negatively impacts school district budgets in FY 2020-2021.
- As community transmissions increased during fall 2020, families have transitioned students between different learning modalities based on individual family needs. These changes have affected the ability for school districts to count attendance for students enrolled in the school. Since the current funding model for Arizona schools is based on student attendance during the first 100 days of schools, a new funding model is necessary for FY 2020-2021 and any other year affected by the pandemic to hold school districts harmless from unexpected attendance changes.
- School districts were mandated by the State of Arizona to provide supervision for students on their campuses despite public health recommendations that schools teach remotely. As a result, public school districts should be held harmless for any liability for COVID-19 exposures.

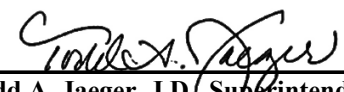
RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for the Board's consideration and approval of the recommended legislative priorities.

INITIATED BY:


 Michelle H. Tong, J.D.,
 Associate to the Superintendent and General Counsel

Date: November 25, 2020


 Todd A. Jaeger, J.D., Superintendent