

**REPORT TO THE CITIZENS  
OF THE ROOSEVELT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**By**

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State of Arizona  
Department of Education

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Letter to the Citizens of Roosevelt School District

For a number of years, my Department has devoted more resources to helping the Roosevelt School District than any other school district – indeed a significant percentage of overall Department resources. The district continues to perform poorly in its academics. This year, there are seven Underperforming schools and four Failing schools in the district.

We believe we should share with you the need for changes in the District. This report does that.

Although this report is issued in my name, most of it was written by personnel in my Department who have worked with the district over a number of years to try to improve academic achievement.

You may send comments to us at [adeinbox@azed.gov](mailto:adeinbox@azed.gov).

Sincerely,

Tom Horne

## **I. School and District Leadership in Crisis**

Political ties among Board members and mid-level management, including principals, leave the Superintendent unable to discipline or provide leadership. The result is a pilotless airplane filled with children, flying in the dark and surrounded by mountains.

Lack of leadership at the top produces poor leadership at all levels, which results in poor performance by the District.

At both the school and district level, many Roosevelt administrative personnel are inexperienced in their positions and have minimal depth of knowledge or ability to describe the purpose of an instructional strategy, resource or assessment, and how they will ultimately affect student achievement. A district focus group indicated there is widespread apathy among the administrators and a lack of and need for strong instructional leadership at many of the schools and the district level.

The RSD Governing Board is a consistent topic of conversation from all stakeholder interviews and focus groups at the district and school levels. The overwhelming consensus is that the board's harmful interference in district operations is the number one reason nothing gets done or done well in the district. District staff, community members and parents state that the board's decisions are based on race, personal favors or personal vendettas and that many district staff are afraid of the board's retaliation. The negativity and personal attacks have caused the district irreparable harm and it will be a long time before it can recover.

All stakeholders shared that drastic action must be taken including removal of the Board's authority, so the district would have a true opportunity to improve. Here are some specific examples:

## **II. District Unable to Focus on Improving Instruction Despite an Abundance of Assistance**

Instruction fails to improve in Roosevelt School District although it receives more technical assistance and support from ADE than any other district in the state—indeed a significant percentage of overall ADE resources. The district has failed to support ADE's Professional Development Learning Academy causing the state to withdraw the district from the program. For the 2006-07 school year, the district failed to take full advantage of Best Practices waivers that would have allowed over 70 staff at the six underperforming schools to attend free of charge. The district sent only 8 staff (out of 70 permitted) to the Best Practices Academies, which covered topics that would have been most beneficial to the underperforming schools.

The district has received substantial support from all levels within the ADE from School Improvement and Intervention; Title I; Title II-Highly Qualified; Title III-English Language Learners; Title IV-Safe and Drug Free Schools; 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Communities;

Exceptional Student Services; Early Childhood Education; and Educational Technology. In the past three years, the district has received almost \$90 million dollars in state and federal assistance. This increases its per pupil funding from the statewide average of about \$6000 to about \$8000 for Roosevelt, yet parents, teachers and students report not enough books and classroom materials for students; consistent classroom management and student discipline issues; inferior and unhealthy school environments; excessive use/misuse of outside consultants to complete work normally done at the school or district level and an inability to attract and retain Highly Qualified teachers.

### **III. Reading First: 8 of the 9 Roosevelt District RF schools were terminated for cause and the district lost \$1 million of assistance over the last two years.**

Reading First provides support to schools to implement proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. By applying the best and most rigorous scientifically-based reading research, this important initiative is aimed ensuring that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade.

8 of the 9 Roosevelt School District RF schools were terminated for cause and the district lost \$1 million of assistance it could have received from this program for the following reasons:

- Core reading program was not implemented with fidelity due to lack of direction, motivation and vision in principal's leadership. Teachers were not held accountable to teach with purpose and intention.
- Serious lack of leadership left reading intervention systems in disarray.
- Campuses in general lacked a sense of unity among staff. Adult issues tend to consume their conversations, and not much focused purposeful attention was given to the issues surrounding effective instruction.
- Failure to provide timely Budget amendments and align resources with allowable Reading First activities.

### **IV. Poor cash controls leave student monies susceptible to loss, theft or misuse**

A compliance review report by the Auditor General on October 31, 2006, informed Roosevelt Elementary School District No. 66, of its noncompliance with the Uniform System of Financial Records (USFR). These deficiencies included:

- The District lacked accountability over its capital assets as its capital assets and stewardship lists were incomplete and inaccurate, and some assets could not be located on the District's premises.
- The District may not have received the appropriate amount of funding since the District did not report membership and absences correctly.
- The District's FY 2006 audit reports indicated that the District had allowed unlimited and unrecorded charge sales for student lunches, resulting in the loss of approximately \$200,000 of FY 2006 food service revenue.

- The District's poor cash controls left student monies susceptible to loss, theft, or misuse.
- Numerous bank accounts were opened by district employees under the District's taxpayer identification number without Governing Board authorization.

The District was given 90 days to implement the recommendations in the report regarding these deficiencies prior to a status review of the District's internal controls as of May 3, 2007. Based on the status review, it was determined in a report dated November 2, 2007 that Roosevelt still has not complied with the USFR. The Office of the Auditor General made a request to the Arizona State Board of Education to take appropriate action as prescribed by Arizona Revised Statutes §15-272, to withhold some school funding until the district comes into compliance.

## **V. High Levels of Violence Persist in District**

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) is a national effort to ensure academic success for all students. The SDFSCA State Grants program authorizes a variety of activities designed to prevent school violence and youth drug use, and to help schools and communities create safe, disciplined, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement.

Despite the ADE recommendation to the district to allocate some funds to a district position to oversee the program, the district continues to contract services to outside resources. The district has poor district oversight of the program and unmet requirements for administrator training

Last year, the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department removed their probation officers assigned to one of the schools because of extensive issues in working with the principal. The probation officer described the principal as unprofessional and explosive.

## **VI. Observations by WestEd**

WestEd is a federally funded regional education laboratory. Roosevelt contracted with WestEd to assist them with District improvement during the 2006 – 2007 school year. After working closely with Roosevelt, WestEd concluded: "Despite the continued failure of the district to meet student achievement targets, the district was not consistently focused on improving student achievement."

## **VII. Bottom Line**

Roosevelt has seven schools that are underperforming and four schools that are failing. This is predictable, based on the systemic dysfunction noted by numerous people working closely with Roosevelt to help the district, and testified to at school and community meetings and focus groups.

