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## Dropout prevention a top priority

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Based on historical numbers, 45,720 members of the Class of 2006 would be expected to graduate if there were no high-stakes test. After three tries out of five, 39,700, or 87 percent, have passed all three AIMS tests.

From *The Arizona Republic* news story reporting these numbers, a reader could draw the erroneous inference that my announcement of these numbers reflected a cold-hearted indifference to students who drop out of high school. Nothing could be further from the truth ("12,000 more pass AIMS, but thousands may drop out," Valley & State, Friday).

One can often tell an officeholder's values by how he or she prioritizes the budget. On dropout prevention, I put the money where my mouth was. I created a new position devoted solely to dropout prevention and increasing the graduation rate.

Our dropout specialist is studying best practices in dropout prevention in our schools, so that all of our schools can emulate those who have had successful dropout-prevention programs.

Since I took office, the graduation rate has increased from 70.8 percent to 74 percent. Implementation of the AIMS test, which requires objective demonstration of proficiency to graduate, can cause a temporary reduction in this progress.

But assurance that graduates have demonstrated academic proficiency means that, as we resume increases in the graduation rate, it will be of students who have mastered the skills needed to succeed in today's economy, not the result of social promotion.

**Tom Horne, Phoenix**

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