

State of Education Speech – 2008 – FINAL 1.7.08

When we speak of the State of Education in Arizona, we need to give credit to Arizona teachers and administrators for the performance of Arizona students on national tests. Even though we rank 49th out of 50 in our expenditures per pupil, according to Education Week, our students perform above the National Average on the TerraNova test, a National test that is given to all Arizona students grade two – nine, and the SAT and ACT college entrance tests.

There are three things that really matter in education: the quality of the teachers, the quality of the curriculum, and the motivation of the students. At the Department of Education, we try to do all we can to help the schools attract and retain highly qualified teachers, and help maintain the highest possible morale, to implement a rigorous curriculum, and to stimulate student motivation.

Helping teacher morale became a priority of mine many years ago, when my children were small, and I served on a school board. In the morning, I would help prepare my children for school: get them washed, dressed, fed, shiny faced and enthusiastic for school. Then it all depended on the teacher that I left them with. So I wanted those teachers to have a high morale.

At the State level, we have been doing what we can to make life easier on teachers, so they can focus more energy on the students in their classes. Here are four examples.

Teachers said the students were over-tested. We reduced testing time by one half, but with more efficient use of questions, were able to issue just as detailed reports. In fact, we have made the reporting from tests much more useful for teachers by reporting grades, not just on subjects as a whole, but for every concept tested.

Teachers were burdened unnecessarily to get finger printed every six years, even though their finger prints do not change. Under the new requirements, fingerprint clearance cards can be renewed without re-fingerprinting. This will be a benefit to our teachers and maintains a high level of security for our student's safety.

Teachers were concerned about the complex requirements to be highly qualified at the Federal level, and appropriately certified at the State level. We have implemented the most liberal rules for Highly Qualified that the Federal Government will allow, and are introducing legislation to align the State requirements to the Federal ones.

Teachers said they needed more opportunities for professional development. We developed over 260 courses attended by at least 50,000 teachers per year in the past 2 years. Some of these are free, and available on the internet.

Now, we are reaching out to teachers for ideas on how we can help make life easier for them, so they can focus more on teaching the students in their classes. For the next thirty days, we will have a website

(makemylifeeasier.azed.gov) where teachers can give us their ideas. We entrust to our teachers what is most valuable to us, our children, and we want our teachers morale to be high.

Each year, I have announced anywhere from three to eight initiatives at the beginning of the year. The following year, I have reported what we achieved, under the theme “promises made promises kept”, and announced the new initiatives for the next year.

I – Prior Year Goals

1. Education and Career Action Plans

The first goal last year was that every student should have a personalized learning plan. Students should get long term goals, revise them each year, and adapt their curriculum to their goals. The result is that they take a more rigorous curriculum which is better preparation for higher education or the job market. Over the past year, this initiative has evolved into the education and career action plan, also known as the ECAP. We have made significant progress over the past year in reaching this goal.

Nine out of ten seventh and eighth graders aspire to go to college, but only two out of ten will actually complete college. Students who establish an Education and Career Action Plan will be more likely to plan in advance for college readiness, and will be encouraged to take the kind of more rigorous curriculum that leads to success in college, or in high skilled occupations.

Over the past year, we have been actively engaged in professional development and technical assistance regarding ECAPs for all students

through our Arizona High School Renewal & Improvement initiative. One entire summit for high schools was dedicated to personalizing instruction. Our September national dropout conference, held in Phoenix, attracted nearly 500 participants, who were engaged in discussing strategies for keeping students in school, including the utilization of ECAPs. Our Career and Technical Education Unit has a head start on this initiative with 26,000 students creating plans between August and December of 2007.

We have proposed a rule for adoption by the State Board of Education that would require that all students have ECAPs. The adoption of a rule requires two votes. The first vote is called “Opening the rule making process”. The State Board voted unanimously in favor, in the first vote, for a proposed rule that will require ECAPs for all students. One more vote is required. If, as we hope, the State Board of Education adopts this rule, then all high school students in Arizona will be required to have education and career action plans, and I believe that this will greatly increase the rigor of courses students choose to take, which will make them more successful in school and in life.

2. Digital Support

This past year, we began a pilot project for high schools where every student would have a laptop. Empire High School in the Vail School District became our lead school. Empire is the first public school designed and built for student laptop based instruction in the country. Pilot schools, following Empire’s lead, included: Benson High School (Cochise County), Vail High Charter School (Pima County) and Gilbert Classical Academy (Maricopa).

These schools attended a two day 1:1 boot camp at Empire high in July. The boot camp introduced participants to effective strategies to integrate digital resources to assure students are successful at meeting state standards. In addition, Empire High School teachers presented classroom management tips and shared their experiences in using laptops and digital resources with their students.

Eventually, we expect that every high school in Arizona will have a laptop for every student. We have proven that digital tools enhance teaching and learning. Students that use digital media applications find learning fun and exciting. Districts and schools that have implemented digital initiatives have cited decreases in absences, tardiness and disciplinary problems, and increased student motivation and higher levels of communication between students, parents and teachers.

3. International Schools

Our third initiative was to promote international schools, in which students would become fluent in world languages, and acquire the international knowledge needed to compete in the 21st century, which will increasingly be dominated by international trade.

We formed a steering committee that involves partners in this initiative, including the three major Universities in Arizona, the Thunderbird School of International Business, the Apollo Group, legislators, businesses, and other partners in promoting international education.

Schools that have an international emphasis, and that are participating with this initiative, include: White River High School, Rhodes Junior High

School in Mesa, Desert Willow Elementary School in Cave Creek, Pueblo Elementary School in Scottsdale, and Country Gardens Charter School in Laveen.

It has been documented in other states that students in international schools do better on academic examinations because of the added motivation provided in these schools. In addition, as we increase the number of international schools in Arizona, we will increase the number of graduates prepared for the important jobs of the future, as international trade becomes more vital to our economy.

II – New Goals

1. Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds

Our first new initiative for this year is titled “Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds”. Those who began history and literature, science and mathematics, and the arts, as we know them, in classical Greece and Rome, emphasized not only the development of the mind, but the importance of a healthy mind in a healthy body.

Everyone knows that we have been working hard to increase academic rigor in the classroom. But at the same time, we must be sure that our students are healthy, and develop lifelong healthy habits.

Nationally, the percentage of overweight students has doubled in the past 20 years. Being overweight can contribute to the serious disease of Type II Diabetes, which has almost doubled in the past 10 years.

We have worked hard, since taking office, to encourage the Legislature to stop the use of vending machines in schools that push foods high in sugar and saturated fat on students. We succeeded, and the Legislature acted, for grades K through 8, but so far the Legislature has not acted with respect to high schools. We hope that at some point they will. In the meantime, we have encouraged high school districts to voluntarily comply with nutrition standards, and a number of districts have done so, including: Gilbert, Phoenix Union, Scottsdale, Flagstaff, Willcox, Blue Ridge, Douglas, Window Rock, Tuba City, Tucson, Casa Grande, Humboldt, and Mary C. O'Brien Accommodation District. The following Charters have also voluntarily implemented the above nutrition standards: Sonoran Science Academy in Tucson and Phoenix, Copper Canyon and Desert Pointe Academies, Ecademie/Woods High School, and Berean Academy.

Part of our goal will be to add at least five new high schools to the list of those that have adopted the voluntary nutrition standards, and ten new schools to adopt our program to encourage more physical activity among students.

In an experiment, high school classes in a pilot school took a workout course right before math and literacy classes. In the literacy classes, the students who worked out improved their reading level by a whole year over one semester. In algebra classes, students who took the P.E. course improved their scores by 20 percent compared to two percent improvement in the non- workout classes. The results make sense as most of us know that sitting down all day does not increase brain function.

Partners who have agreed to work with us in making a success of the Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds initiative include: Arizona School Nutrition

Association, the Arizona Action for Healthy Kids, the Arizona Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, the Department of Health Services, the Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Dairy Council of Arizona. To help set an example, I have pledged to lose at least 20 pounds this coming year, and others in the Arizona Department of Education have pledged to lose a total of 1, 700 pounds.

2. Transparency in Depth in Academic Achievement Data

The second new goal for this year is Transparency in Depth in Academic Achievement Data. Technology now makes it possible to report to teachers, administrators, and the public, not only how our students are doing, but how they are doing with respect to every AIMS concept that we test.

The information that can give us this kind of transparency in depth , as to how our students are doing down to the concept level, is gathered in what is referred to as a Data Warehouse. Two years ago, the Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for us to develop this Data Warehouse. Then, last year, the Federal Government set aside \$25 million for the same purpose, and invited all 50 states to compete. Arizona submitted the best application in the country, and was awarded \$6 million out of the \$25 million, by far the largest award, and a significant percentage of the total for just one of the fifty states.

We now have the resources and by the end of this year, we will have the Data Warehouse. For example, we will be able to report to principals how well each teacher's class did in learning each concept, according to the

student's test scores, to help the principal target professional development of teachers.

And, we will have the data to provide, for the public, the kind of transparency in depth which is the hallmark of good government.

3. Adjunct Teacher Program

The third new goal for this year is an Adjunct Teacher program so that we can be sure that every student has a highly qualified math or science teacher. At the moment, there is a shortage of highly qualified teachers, and over the next few years, that shortage in some areas is going to get much worse. For example, the State Board this year increased math and science requirements, so that freshmen entering in 2009 will need four years of math and three years of science. Currently the number of math teachers retiring is exceeding the number coming into the field, so that we would need an additional 70 math teachers per year just to keep up. To deal with the new 4 year requirement, we will need an additional 400 math teachers.

We will need a number of strategies to deal with this. Universities and businesses who have supported the increase in requirements, are hard at work on partnerships to solve this problem. One example of a strategy will be a new initiative to enable companies to allow highly knowledgeable employees to have release time to teach one course per semester. Consistent with the existing alternate pathway for teacher certification, these adjunct teachers would have a summer course in methods of teaching, then go into the classroom to teach the subject in which they are

experts, and then would be expected to continue to work toward full certification. Companies that are working with us to develop this program include: Intel, Boeing, Pinnacle West, Avnet, Medtronic, Texas Instruments, Cox, Wells Fargo and the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We hope a number of other companies will join this partnership and explore other strategies as well, such as tutoring and mentoring.

Part of education is to develop habit for lifetime education. For those adults who continue to educate themselves, one of this years books that I recommend is The Age of Turbulence, by Alan Greenspan, former Chairman of the Federal Reserve. Here is what he has said that is relevant to our job in education:

“During the past quarter century, as incomes at the middle and lower levels of the U.S. income distribution lagged, those of the most affluent rose rapidly ... To a greater or lesser extent, most developed countries have experienced the impact of technology and globalization much as the United States has. Yet, although they confront increasing income concentration, the impact to date appears to be significantly milder than what we are experiencing in the United States ... A very likely significant part of the explanation for recent developments appears to be the dysfunction of elementary and secondary education in the United States.” (pages 397, 399)

What he is saying is that the only solution to our country’s economic problems, caused by the impact of technology and globalization, is to produce more of the highly skilled workers the modern economy demands, and rewards with high wages.

So as we at the Department of Education continue working, as we have for the last five years, to increase academic rigor in the classroom, it is partly to assure students a better life, and it is also partly to help ensure the economic prosperity of the state of Arizona and ensure that the United States will be a great nation in the future, as it has been in the past.