



Arizona House of Representatives
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

May 26, 2010

The Honorable Jan Brewer
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Governor Brewer,

We applaud your efforts in submitting an application for Round Two for the Race to the Top Competition. We were disappointed that Arizona was not as competitive in the first round, however, we believe our second round application will be enhanced by the significant education reform legislation enacted in the 2010 legislative session.

As we develop Arizona's educational reform package, we must set standards and assessments for a high quality educational system that not only addresses our immediate needs, but those of our future generations. Our 21st century economy and workforce demands more of our K-12 system than merely completion of required courses and the passage of a tenth grade exam. We must provide our students with innovative educational pathways that prepare them to succeed in college or in a career of their choice. College and career preparedness not only enhances the lives of our children but strengthens the economic lives of all citizens in our great State. And how do we propose to achieve these lofty goals? The Legislature passed and you signed the "*Move on When Ready*" bill in the last legislative session. This ambitious initiative serves two main purposes: a) clarity and a specified path for students who have a sense of their future goals; and b) an intervention tool for high-risk students (dropouts) who lack the necessary focus toward achievement of educational goals.

It is not enough to say that we will transform the public education agenda – we must prove that we have! We know the key to measuring student academic performance begins and ends with a system of data collection, reporting and analysis. The construction of the longitudinal data system began years ago and we have had moderate success with the Student Accountability Information System (SAIS) and the Education Data Warehouse.

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However, we know we must do better. Accordingly, the Legislature passed and you signed a bill instructing the Superintendent of Public Instruction to issue a request for proposal to evaluate our existing data systems for upgrades toward efficiency improvements in functionality and stakeholder accessibility. The end result is to have a system that meets the needs of our students, schools, and policymakers.

How we use the data is critical. In the past, we have looked at outputs – now we should refine these systems to improve instruction. The longitudinal data system should provide instructional tools and training for educators as they manage student academic targets – tools that track student progress through one academic year but also through the child’s entire academic career. Additionally, consensus legislation passed this session directing the State Board of Education to create a framework for a teacher evaluation tool that would incorporate student academic progress in the determination of teacher performance for use by school districts and charter schools beginning in the 2012-2013 school year. Inherent in this framework are best practices for evaluator training and professional development strategies so that the evaluation tool could be used to improve teacher and principal effectiveness.

Our bold targets for improving student performance can only be met if we have highly effective teachers leading the classroom. While our universities and colleges do a good job developing prepared teachers, we recognize the need to find alternative pathways for professionals (mid-career or otherwise) to transition into our K-12 classrooms. These individuals can bring a wealth of skills especially in the fields of science and mathematics. To that end, the Legislature passed and you signed a bill providing the statutory support to the State Board of Education to create rules for alternative pathways to teacher certification through non-traditional and accelerated programs offered by qualified and licensed private providers.

We must also target effective management of student learning and preparedness. The Legislature passed and you signed a bill requiring that students read at third grade proficiency before they advance to the fourth grade. A mandate like this can not be achieved unless it includes interventions and strategies employed by teachers and principals, in collaboration with parents, that begin when the child enters kindergarten and through the second grade. Parents must have adequate notice to respond and schools must have the guidance and resources necessary to react.

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The ultimate fate of this reform agenda rests on the actions of partnerships – those between policymakers in the Legislature and you, the business community, our school boards, superintendents, teachers, students, and parents. We recognize that our round two successes require all of us to believe we can achieve our courageous goals. We stand willing with you and all of the education community to meet this important challenge and offer our cooperation and support in getting this important work done.

Sincerely,



Kirk Adams
Speaker of the House
Arizona House of Representatives



Richard Crandall
House Education Chairman
Arizona House of Representatives