



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

Dear Governor Brewer,

The Arizona Education Association's (AEA) 33,000 members—and indeed, Arizona's students, families, and future—are dependent on a modern and viable public education system that delivers a great public school to every student. On behalf of our members and Arizona's students, AEA's leadership will welcome our organization's participation in a constructive and collaborative effort to design, shape, and invest in Arizona's education system.

The Arizona Education Association recognizes that the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative represents an opportunity to make a lasting impact on student achievement, the teaching profession, and public education. Further, AEA applauds the process used to develop the round 2 application. The process allowed AEA to provide input and advice about how to write the Memorandum of Understanding to better emphasize the importance of collaboration between districts and their representative AEA affiliates. Despite a compressed window of time in which to prepare the second application and numerous constraints, the Arizona process demonstrated a commitment to inclusive planning and to collaboration with stakeholders.

To the extent that Arizona's RTTT application signals the beginning of a new commitment to working with education representatives, of investing in public schools, programs, and employees rather than curtailing them, and developing a vision for quality public schools in every corner of the state, the Arizona Education Association pledges its support. While the AEA continues to have questions about the application and about Arizona's direction regarding public education, we commit to serving as a partner in shaping public education for Arizona's future.

The AEA has proven our commitment to participating in collaborative efforts to shape education policy in our previous work with Representative Crandall and education stakeholder groups on SB1040, addressing teacher and principal evaluations. Prior to SB1040's passage out of the legislature, it was the AEA that introduced into the stakeholder discussion district flexibility in weighing student learning data, the critical element of evaluator training, and the need for professional development aligned with evaluation outcomes. We look forward to continuing work in this area as Arizona develops its statewide framework for evaluation in an inclusive process and with a systemic approach.

We must note, however, that Arizona's RTTT application comes at a troubled time in the state—a time when the state's commitment to its educators is at best problematic. The AEA opposed legislation signed into law that sent mixed messages about the perceived value of experienced teachers, marginalized the importance of collaboration with local and state education unions, and diminished compensation for those who educate students. Alone, the RTTT grant—should Arizona receive it—will not undo the harm done at the state level to Arizona's public education system.

AEA's MISSION

*AEA...
keeping the
promise of
quality
public
education*

Simply put, Arizona needs a new ethical, economic, and strategic approach to supporting and sustaining public education. Arizona's state policy leaders and legislators must embrace the mandate evident in Race to the Top's design: Cooperate with—rather than attempt to marginalize—the state education union.

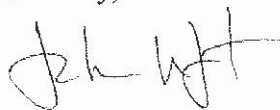
With the AEA's support for Arizona's application and our pledge for future action come questions about both the process for drafting the application and its content. The AEA believes that the hurried timeline to submit the round 2 application precluded thoughtful deliberation and public discussion about a vision for public education in Arizona and will continue to create difficulties in designing a systemic approach to education. We urge state and legislative policy makers to proceed under the mandate of inclusion rather than expediency in future work.

Regarding the content, the Association will participate with other stakeholders as Arizona articulates the tactics and choices that define the strategies outlined in the state's application. We will seek clarity regarding strategies, for example, that call upon Arizona to "expand quality pathways" for teachers, "address equitable distribution" of effective teachers, and intervene in support of struggling schools. AEA looks forward to participating with other stakeholders to build a systemic approach to teacher quality and performance that is not limited to teacher evaluation, and whose highest end is not merely efficient dismissal but high level performance. Furthermore, we will continue to promote the positioning of current educator practitioners in high-level decision making roles to both inform and shape the policies and initiatives that drive education reform. More broadly, we will advance and collaboratively study the research, experience, and data offered to support the policies in the current application and to guide future deliberation about public education in Arizona.

Race to the Top represents more than an application or funding; the application symbolizes a choice presented to our policymakers: to build a systemic approach to investing financial and intellectual capital in public education or continue to advance a politically-driven agenda that ultimately under serves students, families, and educators.

The Arizona Education Association is eager to inform that choice and to support a new direction in Arizona, a direction pursued through collaboration, respect, and investment. We look forward to additional opportunities—within Arizona's Race to the Top and beyond—to share the expertise of our members, our vision for public education in Arizona, and to build a great public school for every student.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wright". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Wright" clearly distinguishable.

John Wright, President
Arizona Education Association