



STATE OF EDUCATION

Remarks by

Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal

Monday, February 4, 2013 (House Education Committee)

Thursday, February 7, 2013 (Senate Education Committee)

Madam chair, members of the education committee, hardworking staff, and members of the community:

It is an honor for me to be here today to talk about the state of education in Arizona.

Building a Culture of Excellence

Education in Arizona is highly impacted by the leadership at the Department of Education and the support we provide to our schools and districts. At ADE we are focused on building a culture of excellence. Our priority is to provide “Knock your Socks Off Service,” and we are making progress in that mission beyond my best expectations.

As I travel the state, I am continually humbled by the great response we are receiving to our improvements in service. We have reviewed hundreds of processes that are burdensome to schools and have reduced bureaucratic red tape. We recently analyzed our process for handling prior year student data error complaints and reduced the processing time from 220 days to less than 65. Today I will be asking you to partner with us to improve our technology so we can reduce that to 0.

In the coming months we will complete the online automation of our teacher certification process, saving teachers thousands of hours of travel time. These are just two examples of many improvements we’ve made.

Arizona's Education Landscape

During the last two decades Arizona's education reform movement has created a school choice environment that is number one in the nation. Only now is the rest of the nation awakening to the power of school choice.

Open enrollment allows students to cross district boundaries. Education opportunities for students are no longer limited by the real estate values in their neighborhoods.

One out of every four schools in Arizona is a charter school, with over 518 charter schools educating about 14% of our students. Students can receive a classical and powerful education relying on the teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, or they can attend schools with a back to basics approach, an arts emphasis, a science and technology focus or a language immersion approach. We have hundreds of flavors for hundreds of tastes.

In Arizona students can create their own educational experience by attending a district or charter school, while simultaneously taking online courses, attending a JTED and being concurrently enrolled in a community college. High quality career and technical education opportunities are spreading across the state, and we have the best home school laws in the nation; more recently, we empowered students from poverty backgrounds, foster homes and military families with scholarship accounts.

A-F letter grades provide parents with the knowledge they need to make informed choices. Since adopting A-F labels, we have also seen the power of this accountability system to improve our schools as they work to improve their grades. 117 of our schools moved from a grade of B to A and generally the grades have trended upward.

Because our rich school choice environment is steeped in innovation, and the forces of a competitive marketplace;

Because replication of quality charter schools is easily achieved; and

Because identification of high performing schools is possible through our A-F accountability system

Arizona is poised to become among the best education systems in the nation.

Already, if you're a conscientious parent and educated consumer, you can find a school that's among *the top 5%* in the nation for your child.

School Choice is paying dividends

Our school choice environment is improving student outcomes, and while school choice may not be the only contributing factor, it is likely a very significant one.

In the U.S Department of Education's national ranking of 2006 to 2011 graduation rates, Arizona shows steady improvement, jumping dramatically from 46th in the nation in 2006, to 27th in 2011. More specifically, in 2011 Arizona ranked 8th for African Americans graduates, 15th for low income students, 19th for Hispanics and 19th for Caucasian students.

It appears that keeping students in school and on track has also kept them off the streets. As graduation rates have increased, juvenile arrests and violent crime in Arizona have dropped steadily and dramatically.

In spite of many positive graduation indicators, our Native American students face enormous challenges. They rank almost dead last among states with published rates for Native Americans.

A quick look at our demographics illustrates our challenge.

Sadly, the percentage of our students living in deep, dislocated, and enduring poverty in Arizona is increasing every year. This creates a huge burden for our education system.

Because Arizona has the 4th highest percentage of students living in poverty, it is imperative we understand how well we are educating these students.

The National Assessment for Education Progress, NAEP, is the Gold Standard for comparing academic achievement among states. With some analysis, we can use NAEP data to draw apples-to-apples comparisons.

Our 2011 rankings for low income students, when comparing them with low income students across the nation, ranged from 36th in 8th grade math to 46th in 8th grade reading; our rankings for Hispanic students ranged from 31st in 8th grade reading to 35th in 4th and 8th grade math; our Caucasians ranked from 22nd in 8th grade math to 38th in 4th grade reading.

Because we have such a disproportionate number of students who live in poverty, when we average all test scores our overall student score ranking drops in national rankings to as low as 47th for 4th grade reading. As education policy makers, we have an enormous amount of work to do.

Reforms Underway

In 2010 the State Board of Education adopted Arizona's common core standards. These new standards are focused on preparing students to be college and career ready. President Jaime Molera, Executive Director Vince Yanez, and my policy director, Stacey Morley, did an excellent job of briefing you last week on these standards and the transition to new assessments.

To implement these new standards, ADE's standards division first mapped our previous standards to the new ones. We are now conducting three phases of training for educators on the differences between these standards, on approaches to achieving the objectives of the standards and on organizational techniques for continuous improvement toward the standards. To date we have trained over 17,500 teachers and administrators. Thousands of others have been trained at their own district level. We are working as a team with numerous business and education partners to reach out to parents and teachers on how these standards will impact current teaching practices and learning environments.

Arizona's common core standards are a seismic shift in teaching and learning. They incorporate 21st century skills of problem solving, critical thinking, project based learning and collaborative team work. They provide strong phonics emphasis, and more complex math concepts introduced earlier into the curriculum. They take an interdisciplinary approach and shift language arts content from fiction materials to more nonfiction. These standards are more carefully focused on what is needed to be successful in college and career, and address the fact that currently over 40% of our students who graduate high school and enroll in community colleges and universities require remediation, and too many of our students do not have the skills to be successful in the workplace.

The PARCC test, the new assessment aligned to Arizona's common core standards, is scheduled for implementation in the 2014 -2015 school year, and we anticipate shock waves as the transition from AIMS to PARCC occurs. Currently only 8% of our students are estimated to be college and career ready on the math PARCC test and 26% of our students on the English Language Arts test.

As many of our students face the challenges of this test, we will also undoubtedly experience enormous pressure to dumb down the test. The test of our mettle will come with how well our districts and schools can adapt their local curriculums and teaching strategies to the new standards and successfully teach their students to meet these standards.

PARCC is designed as a technology based assessment. As a state, we will face significant challenges in assuring the technology infrastructure is in place to enable technology based testing. There are three levels of technology upgrades required—improvements in broadband at the state level, technology devices and wiring at the local level, and technology infrastructure at the Department.

In addition to Arizona’s Common Core and PARCC, our schools are also implementing teacher and principal evaluations.

My staff has worked closely with educators throughout the state providing training and guidance in developing teacher and principal evaluation systems.

The Gates Foundation, Vanderbilt University, and Gallup all have invested hundreds of millions of dollars studying measures of effective teachers and converting these measures into performance pay systems. As we develop performance measures and performance pay systems for teachers designed and mandated at the state level, we should be relying on this body of research for direction. Equally valuable is the work being done by some of our state’s leading superintendents, like Superintendent Calvin Baker of Vail, Camille Casteel of Chandler, Olga Block of Basis Schools and Maricopa County Superintendent Don Covey. All of these leaders have achieved outstanding results driven in part by performance pay for teachers. Chairman Goodale’s legislation provides an excellent foundation for continued development of policy work in this area so we don’t end up mandating failure and prohibiting success.

Technology Needs at ADE

Without upgraded technology at the Department of Education, performance pay for teachers, Arizona’s common core standards, or data driven decision making will not work effectively.

As a legislator for 18 years, I only had a small inkling of the chaos caused by the Student Accountability and Information System, (SAIS); I didn’t fully understand the administrative costs SAIS was imposing on our schools and districts, or how it

was distracting school leadership from their primary mission of educating students.

I also didn't fully realize the enormous benefits a great student information system could provide to teachers, principals, parents and students. A great technology system can deliver real time student information, for over 1million students, to teachers before the first day of school, and it can instantly move student information from school to school as students transfer throughout the year. With over 200,000 students annually transferring to different schools, it is critical their information travel with them.

SAIS is so dysfunctional and obsolete it is currently crippling our ability to provide accurate and timely student information to our schools and teachers. It is the brainstem of our education system, and it is on the verge of collapse.

My IT Department has developed a state of the art information technology plan. In the first phase we will replace SAIS. There is complete consensus among leading technology experts and business officials throughout the state that this is a necessary first step. Gartner, a reputable independent technology consultant, and Chairman Craig Barrett and all members of the Governor's Arizona Ready Council have also endorsed our IT plan and vision.

Without updated technology at the Department of Education the Arizona common core, teacher principal evaluations, performance pay, timely processing of PARCC tests, A-F labels, accurate school accounting and budgeting, and any data driven instruction, cannot be effectively accomplished. To work effectively all of these initiatives need timely and accurate student data embedded in sound technology. By completing an upgrade of ADE's technology systems, not only will we all benefit by having timely access to critical student data, but also we will be able to redirect over \$110 million annually from school administration back into our classrooms.

Technology in the Classroom

Technology in the classroom generates enormous excitement. We believe technology can do for education what it has done in so many areas of our society--profoundly improve outcomes and efficiency.

Preliminary evaluations are now in on the hundreds of schools that have been doing one to one computing and blended learning. While all vendors claim superior academic gains, when rigorously evaluated, these claims evaporate. Yet, we remain confident that technology will soon yield huge dividends in the classroom.

Although technology so far has largely duplicated existing education culture, I believe we are now poised for breakthrough. The technology that will achieve breakthrough will solve two classroom problems ---the software will achieve much higher levels of student motivation and engagement, and it will be designed with a knowledge of how the brain learns, reflecting the latest neurological science.

We intend for Arizona to be among the first in the nation to implement classroom technologies that lead to dramatic student achievement. We are currently piloting several software programs that are showing great promise.

Career and Technical Education

Another source of pride in Arizona is our career and technical education programs

Clyde McBride, the CTE director at Monument Valley High School, has a powerful vision for career and technical education. He built two surgery rooms that would be the envy of Harvard Medical School and were so compelling they were featured in the centerfold of Time Magazine. Integrated into the Navajo Nation culture of raising livestock, students learn and provide surgical prep, surgical support and post-surgical care in training to become veterinary technicians, with a vision for becoming veterinarians themselves.

Examples of great CTE programs like this exist across Arizona from aviation maintenance, to NATEF certified automobile technicians, to the National Institute of Metal Working Society, to fire fighter certification, or to certified nursing assistance programs. The power of these programs is exemplified by a student in a fire science program who enthusiastically described his intent to seek a chemical engineering degree. Career and technical education is not an alternative pathway, but rather a fundamental part of a world class education.

The Peoria School District has used the power and energy of CTE to drive its graduation rate to 94%. The East Valley Institute of Technology is the envy of every other state for its achievement of this great vision. We are creating greater

focus on national certifications that can both give our students direct entry into high paying jobs and open more doors at the community college and university level, as well as give credit to our JTEDS on their program successes.

Vital Services Need to be Restored

ADE has tightened its belt and weathered the budget crisis using carryover funds to continue providing vital service to Arizona schools. As the economy rebounds, if some of these funds are not restored our ability to calculate our A-F labels, provide assistance to D and F schools and basic maintenance and support for SAIS is severely threatened.

GED Program

Another program negatively impacted during the budget crisis has been the GED program.

GED students are the most motivated among all of our students. One out of every five diplomas in Arizona is a GED. With a GED diploma a student can enter the armed forces, community colleges, universities and many businesses. The GED is a powerful economic tool advancing our economy. Any dollar that the legislature invests in the GED program is leveraged 3 to 1. We are requesting that the legislature support the thousands of students seeking GEDs, who have the potential to become contributing taxpayers and stronger citizens.

School Safety

National attention in Newtown Connecticut has focused us all on the safety of our students. I'd like to just assure our parents that our School Safety Division offers exemplary training for schools in threat assessment and developing emergency response plans. While a tragic event like the one in Newtown can happen anywhere, the districts and schools that take advantage of ADE's training have staff who are well prepared to assess potential threats, immediately respond to emergencies and minimize potential injuries and casualties. The Department is committed to making sure that every school in Arizona makes safety a part of its education culture. School Resource Officers are effective in deterring the escalation of more serious threats on school campuses. We support increased funding for School Resource Officers.

ADE has strong partnerships with schools and law enforcement and actively promotes safety on school campuses around the state.

School Funding

Lastly, we cannot ignore the concerns we all have about where school funding will come from in the future. While more funding is not the total answer to improve education outcomes, we cannot ignore the fact that the expiration of the one cent sales tax in May will challenge us to be able to adequately invest in education improvements in the future. Investing in providing excellent education opportunities for all our children should be our number one economic priority.

I look forward to working with the governor, legislature, business community and education community during the next year to address funding issues and find supportable solutions.

In Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the state of education in Arizona. We have built a great school choice environment with opportunities for innovation. And as you can see, we have some profound standards, assessments and accountability reforms unfolding that will not be without challenges. The reforms we have put in place, however, cannot be effectively accomplished without replacing our Student Information System and upgrading technology at the Department. At the Department we are focused on providing great service, and your support of our upgraded technology systems can enable us to provide even greater service.

Madam Chair, members, I'm happy to answer any questions.