



## 2014 STATE OF EDUCATION Remarks by Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal

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Madam Chairman and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share with you my thoughts on the current state of education in Arizona.

As a young child growing up in Arizona it was a public school teacher who cared about me and who inspired in me a much bigger vision for my life.

As Superintendent of Public Instruction, I am committed to creating schools, supporting teachers and inspiring students the way Jack Segerson inspired me. Being the Superintendent of Public Instruction isn't just a job for me, it is a calling.

Aristotle noted that, "All who have meditated on the art of governing have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."

Through the education of our youth we perpetuate our American ideals, preserve our civilized society, and improve the quality of life for succeeding generations.

It is not enough to *recognize* the value of education, it is imperative we also *invest* in it. It is critical we develop thoughtful public policy that reflects the best science in education, and that we reject less thoughtful fads.

Thoughtful policies should provide Arizona youth with great education opportunities, support the mission of teachers, and provide parents the information they need to make excellent education choices.

Through our efforts Arizona's children can become intelligent stewards of America's guiding principles.

### **Education Transformation in Arizona**

Evidence clearly shows that over the last 30 years, our school systems have failed our youth. How do we know this?

National Assessment of Educational Progress has seen no significant improvement. Many disadvantaged youth lack the basic skills to survive in a complex economy. We're losing competitiveness in the marketplace with high paying jobs increasingly going overseas.

This evidence is powering an education transformation that is sweeping across the United States and Arizona.

### **School Choice**

So what are the elements of this transformation that we need to lead? The first element is school choice. Starting in 1993, Arizona more so than any other state, aggressively expanded school choice.

Currently over 180,000 students attend over 500 charter schools, and over 200,000 students attend district schools outside their attendance boundaries. Our home school laws rival the best in the nation. All of our community colleges offer dual enrollment to high school students. A robust selection of online courses is available from a wide variety of providers. Our Joint Technological Education Districts have partnered with local districts to provide Career and Technical Education Programs across Arizona. We provide Empowerment Scholarship Accounts for military families, foster children, and those students living in locations with failing public schools. Finally, we lead the nation in our tuition tax program.

The evidence suggests that thousands of children are being saved by Arizona's wealth of education choices. They are being kept out of detention centers and juvenile correctional facilities because they're finding a school that works for them.

This week is Arizona School Choice week. In support of this and our department's efforts to expand this concept, I am proud to announce a new tool for parents and teachers that will bring information about schools to their fingertips.

[www.azreportcards.com](http://www.azreportcards.com) is now available. Test scores, student achievement and so much more is available in a new format and we think this tool will transform how parents choose a school for their student.

### **A-F Accountability**

The second element of our education transformation is accountability.

In 2011, the Department of Education implemented the A-F letter grade system. Several pieces of evidence illustrate the value of these grades:

Generally, schools are migrating to higher grades, indicating improvement in quality. The A-F letter grades led to increased focus among education leaders on their schools' relative standings.

And finally, informed parents increasingly rely on these grades to gain information about school quality.

## **Raising Arizona's Academic Standards.**

The third element of education transformation was the raising of Arizona's academic standards. In 2010, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.

After comprehensive study, I'm confident in the ability of these standards to improve outcomes for our students.

Almost all of our exemplary schools and districts have embraced the challenge of these standards and have assembled teaching materials they are proud to use and share.

On a recent visit to Show Low, I met with Principal, Sandy Brimhall. She proudly shared this book with me. They chose this curriculum to achieve the English Language Arts standards. Ms. Brimhall pointed out with pride, that this book was written **by teachers for teachers** and provided magnificent guidance.

Her enthusiasm was contagious. She also pointed out that they continue to use Saxon Math, a proven method to achieve the math standards.

Show Low is just one example where local school boards and education leaders rose to the challenge and properly vetted curriculum materials to assure they are of the highest quality and consistent with community values. Indeed, this has been the case with the majority of our schools, but not all of them. Some school boards have implemented curriculum that does not appear to be effective and offends community values.

I have fought my entire public career to ensure local control of our schools. With the power of local control, however, comes responsibility...local responsibility.

For our state standards to be successful in their schools, local school boards must select a quality curriculum consistent with community values, and teachers must develop and deliver quality lesson plans.

Fortunately, local school boards that have adopted objectionable materials are going to be aided by an increasingly competitive market place. This market place will make a wider selection of higher quality materials available at a lower cost.

## **The New Assessment**

The fourth element of our transformation is the transition to a new assessment. How do we measure the effectiveness of these new standards?

Over the next several months the State Board will adopt an assessment to replace AIMS. This session, we ask for your authorization to proceed.

We have an opportunity with this new test to overcome all the imperfections of the AIMS test. It is especially critical the new test accurately measure the abilities of students at the high end, students who have the potential to lead the world, and that it be more accurate at the low end, where our students are at risk of ending up in jail, prison and on welfare.

The test needs to have ironclad reliability to ensure the integrity of our letter grades. A passing grade on this test needs to measure college and career readiness, not mediocrity. Never again should Arizona be by ourselves where we can't compare the academic gains of our schools with the best schools across the nation.

As we transition from AIMS to our new assessment, we must consider the technology readiness of our schools. Already our real estate agents, engineers, lawyers, medical doctors and GED candidates are tested online. We risk losing a competitive advantage for our students if we don't provide modern testing environments that other states and industries are providing.

How do we get the job done with over 35% of Arizona school districts lacking the internet capacity of the typical urban home? Even some of our best schools, with fiber into every school, lack enough bandwidth to be competitive.

Utah, one of the few states to outperform Arizona economically over the last 20 years, has a gigabit of capacity into every school.

These deficits block our schools' ability to download instructional videos and intensive graphics, as well as their ability to conduct real-time online instruction on a widespread basis.

Under the coordination of Aaron Sandeen, the Executive Branch is advancing a statewide plan that will simultaneously increase capacity and lower the cost of delivering broadband, while retrieving millions of dollars of unclaimed e-rate money. While other leading states with similar plans pay less than \$1 per megabit, most of our schools pay from \$6.00 to \$85.00 per megabit, making effective broadband cost prohibitive.

A huge part of ADOA's plan is the coordination with communities and current private providers. This coordination spreads the cost more broadly, reduces the cost to schools and makes remote communities more economically competitive.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

Classroom technology is the fifth element in our transformation. What are the benefits of increasing broadband capacity?

We will be able to customize teaching and learning for every student. Last week I visited Principal Stuart Starkey at C.O. Greenfield School in the Roosevelt School District. Despite the

enormous academic challenges he faces in a low income, minority district, he has 60 students taking algebra in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Principal Starkey's broadband connections and the ST Math and Kahn Academy software technology enable him to customize his lessons for those 60 students. We have a moral obligation to bring this technology to every student in the state, particularly those in high poverty neighborhoods.

### **Data System**

The sixth transformation element is the data system at the Department of Education. At the Department of Education we work to provide outstanding systems to support students, teachers, and their education leaders. But we can't provide these excellent systems without your support and authorization.

Our data system promises huge reductions in bureaucracy, redirecting large sums of money to the classroom.

It will reduce wasted staff time by eliminating inaccuracies in the current student information system.

It will eliminate tens of millions of dollars of duplicative education information systems that don't talk to each other.

It will provide accurate calculation and distribution of state aid, eliminating the financial destruction of schools that have received excess funding that has been later ripped back.

It will allow you, as policy makers, to fine tune education funding, which is impossible with the current system. One example is the ability to fine tune the complex relationship between online schools and brick and mortar schools.

Finally, it will give parents ownership of their child's information. With over 100,000 students moving from school to school their data needs to move with them.

Moving data with the student will save schools millions of dollars yearly in administrative and testing costs by enabling teachers to immediately meet the educational needs of new students.

We are ready to deliver this system and waiting for your authorization. And, we have the horses to get the job done. Computer World named Mark Masterson, our CIO, one of the top 100 Chief Information Officers in the world. He is the only government CIO to be so honored this year.

In summary, education is in an incredibly dynamic phase and we need to be steady at the helm with a clear sense of purpose and direction.

### **Department Initiatives**

Now, I would like to take a few minutes to talk about some of our Department initiatives.

Education is caught in the grip of math and language testing that is narrowing education and limiting the potential of our students. To break this grip, my Department is engaged in six initiatives to improve education quality.

### **Career and Technical Education**

The first initiative improves Career and Technical Education. We have four main elements to better prepare our students to enter the work force:

We are transitioning from state certifications of CTE classes to nationally recognized credentials in trades such as auto mechanics, aeronautics, nursing, welding, manufacturing and other valuable trades.

We are implementing Information Technology Academies that provide credentials in Microsoft, CISCO, ADOBE and other software certifications.

We are expanding the use of Career Planning. Gallup research shows students with a vision for their future experience much greater success in both high school and postsecondary education. With career planning, some of our exemplary schools have driven their graduation rates to over 90%.

Finally, the time demands of language arts and math drives students out of CTE courses. We are embedding these core credits in our CTE programs. This frees up students to take Career and Tech Ed courses. More importantly, it begins to establish a new definition for a world class education--one that combines the timeless value of a "Classical Education" with the action learning of "Career and Technical Education."

### **Structured English Immersion and English Language Learners**

Our second initiative relates to English Language Immersion. Our structured English Immersion program out performs comparable states in transferring English Language Learners into regular classrooms as shown by WestEd's cohort evaluation. We are more finely tuning the balance between English Language instruction and the core course load to improve our graduation rates.

### **Increasing Statewide Literacy**

In our third initiative, ADE is a founding partner of a statewide literacy initiative, “Read On Arizona.”

I frequently visit with inner city students and I find these students read books. Students are often shy initially, but as our conversation moves ahead, they begin waving their arms and are anxious to tell me about the books they are reading.

With Read On Arizona, we are lighting a firestorm of reading excitement across Arizona, paving the way to a better life for these children.

### **Foreign Language Immersion**

Our fourth initiative takes advantage of a revolution in the teaching of foreign languages-- a revolution that Utah leads. Using an immersion technique, teachers don't teach the foreign language per se, they teach content in the foreign language.

At Gavilan Peak, a Deer Valley school, kindergarteners are taught mathematics in Mandarin Chinese. It's amazing to see these students interact with their teachers in Chinese. Even more amazing is that Utah found that students in classes like these have greater academic gains than their peers taught strictly in English.

Companies like Intel and Boeing do business around the world. We want our students hired to conduct that business, and knowledge of critical world languages is needed for their employability.

### **Civic Engagement Initiative**

In our fifth initiative, I have created an **Excellence in Civic Engagement Project**. This program spotlights “Schools of Merit” and “Schools of Distinction” that use exemplary practices to teach the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, and creates a passion for civic awareness that I believe that our founding fathers regarded as the cornerstone of our nation's success.

### **Closing Remarks**

In summary, a tidal wave of transformation is engulfing our schools. At the Department of Education we are working closely with our schools and our public and private partners to steer this transformational energy to positive outcomes. Our education culture is embracing school choice, accepting the challenge of the new standards, looking forward to better measurement of academic results, and anticipating technology support that will soon yield massive dividends in the educational arena.

We are initiating programs that will expand the quality of our education system, including initiatives in career and technical education, critical language immersion, English Language Learners and Civic Engagement.

In closing, coming back to Aristotle's quote:

"All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."

My Department strives every day to provide the best customer service and highest quality systems available to ensure our youth receive a high quality education.

Again, Madam Chairman, and members, I appreciate your support, commitment and partnership. Thank you for your time and I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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