



State of Arizona
Department of Education
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The State of Education in Arizona: The Need for Transformative Change

Chairman Crandall, Chairman Goodale, members of the House and Senate Education Committees, dedicated staff, honored guests and fellow Arizonans:

Thank you for inviting me to share my perspective on the state of Arizona's education system and my vision for transformative improvement. After just one year in office, and on the eve of Arizona's Centennial, I am pleased to report on the progress we've made at the Department of Education and the opportunities we have before us to lead the nation's education system in the next 100 years to follow.

As I stand here as Superintendent of Public Instruction, my thoughts go to a public school teacher, Jack Segerson. Jack cared about a student who had potential but not direction - a student from a poor but proud family who was never told he could go to college. That high school student was me, 40 years ago.

Coach Segerson, as I called him, literally called the Dean of Engineering at Northern Arizona University to enroll me. He sent me on my way.

I've had a passion for the transformative power of education ever since.

If Coach Segerson were still with us today, he would be so proud of all of us and the stage we have set for great education progress over the next few years. Because of the education choice environment the legislature has pioneered, Arizona has among the best district and charter schools in the world for parents who know how to find them.

Now, it is our challenge, our duty, to make those schools available to *every* parent and *every* child in Arizona.

We are now on the verge of great education reform in Arizona - reform that will accelerate our students' academic achievement in the coming years.

But, we also face a crossroads. One path allows us to seize upon the enormous potential for academic growth - *if we do it right*. Other paths lead us simply to maintain an unacceptable status quo or worse - *if we do it wrong*.

This morning, I will review with you where Arizona's education system currently stands, and how my Department is partnering with other states, the Governor's Office, WestEd, our universities, all levels of government, school boards, school administrators, charter and district schools, teachers, parents and many other education stakeholders to move beyond the inflexibility of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I'll talk about what ADE has done to improve service levels to the education community, the unique challenges Arizona faces, and how we must pursue reform.

Finally, I'll discuss redesigning the classroom around blended learning and initiatives my Department is piloting to advance education at an accelerated rate.

Before we can move forward, it is important to understand where Arizona stands relative to other states, because as the famous football coach Vince Lombardi once said, "If you're not keeping score, you're only practicing."

And, in education, if you aren't keeping score scientifically, there's even a chance you are moving backwards.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is the gold standard used to compare student achievement across states. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam is the standard used to compare student achievement across nations. Using these two measures, we can see where Arizona ranks both nationally and internationally.

Let's make this simple: On the PISA scale, which evaluates student academic achievement across the world, Shanghai, China students rank at the 70th percentile while Arizona students rank at the 42nd percentile. Need I say more?

Another way to view Arizona's academic achievement profile is to look at the trend of our NAEP math and reading scores at the 4th and 8th grade levels. The reading trend over the last fourteen years has been as flat as a pancake, while the math trend has moved slightly upward.

On an encouraging note, in this year's NAEP Arizona ranked third in the nation in student academic growth from 2009 to 2011 - when math and reading test scores are aggregated. We can all be proud that in Grade 4 math NAEP scores, Arizona led the nation in growth from 2009 to 2011.

While this small trend is encouraging, while we have many great schools, overall, our education system has failed to meet its potential.

We face enormous economic and cultural challenges as a border state with a rapidly growing high-poverty population. Many of our students come from severe poverty, enduring poverty and dislocated poverty.

But we can ill afford to simply make excuses. We must prevail - for the sake of more than one million children in our K-12 public school system. If Arizona is going to be in the game, we will need nothing short of *revolutionary* methods to overcome these challenges.



At ADE we are developing these transformative methods because tinkering around the edges of slow, mediocre progress will not suffice: our education system requires front on, immediate, substantial improvement.

Over the past decade the Arizona State Legislature and the State Board of Education have set the stage for education reform. These measures have expanded school choice and empowered parents to choose the best educational environment for their children.

There are also many recent education reforms that my Department is focused on implementing, including:

- Arizona's new College- and Career-Ready Standards;
- A brand new assessment that aligns with our new college- and career-ready standards;
- Arizona's A-F School Accountability Letter Grade System;
- The reforms made possible by Arizona's \$25 million Race to the Top grant;
- Statewide teacher and principal evaluations;
- The reorganization of the Arizona Department of Education to provide better support and service;
- The Arizona Department of Education's robust, comprehensive and daily executed strategic plan;
- Seeking flexibility waivers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and
- The overhaul and stabilization of the Department's education information technology systems.

In 2010, The Arizona State Board of Education adopted new and more rigorous math and language arts standards aimed at ensuring our students are college- and career-ready. These new standards were a part of a national state-led effort to create more academic rigor.

Following their adoption, ADE's team began working intensely to transition our old standards to the new more rigorous standards. We are now working with schools across the state to train and support teachers with implementation in the classroom. Our more rigorous standards will be fully implemented by 2014.

Since our current AIMS assessment is not designed to determine our students' mastery of the new college- and career-ready standards, Arizona has assumed a leadership role on the Partnership for Assessing Readiness for Career and College (PARCC) consortium. We are also taking independent steps to beef up AIMS' ability to assess college- and career-readiness.

Several of Arizona's most significant reforms have been in the area of accountability. We all recognize it is essential Arizona have one comprehensive school accountability system to drive and inform greater academic achievement. Currently, we have *three* school accountability systems—two state and one federal.

This year, under the leadership of Chairman Crandall and Chairman Goodale, we will streamline our two state accountability systems into one system--the A-F system--which looks at both academic growth **and** achievement to provide a better and more accurate measure of each schools' true performance.



We're already seeing the positive impact of the new A-F district and school labels. For starters, parents are becoming better consumers of education knowledge. Districts can no longer hide behind their highest performing schools. Schools can no longer hide behind their highest performing students. Schools, districts and charters are now being evaluated on how well they are advancing **all** of their students, with particular emphasis on the *lowest performing students* – the students who need our help the most.

Schools with historically low performing students are now in the game, because they are not being judged on their test scores alone but also by their ability to “academically grow” their students – how much their students’ learning progresses over time as compared to their academic peers. This accountability system allows us, as policy makers, to see which schools, districts and charters are best meeting Arizona’s educational challenges.

Another reform effort we’re focused on is alleviating some of the burdensome regulations from the U.S. Department of Education while reinstating local flexibility and control.

By all indications, it is unlikely that Congress will reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year, leaving in place a federal accountability structure that is both burdensome and lacking in scientific foundation.

As a result, Arizona is pursuing the largest possible waiver under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This waiver will allow us to free ourselves from burdensome regulations; streamline duplicative processes and enable Arizona to use the very best science to drive education policy.

Recently, we were awarded \$25 million in a Race to the Top grant, with the help of the Governor’s Office and WestEd. This grant will provide additional resources to our schools and to regional centers in partnership with our county school superintendents. This funding will be used to implement Arizona’s new, more rigorous, college- and career-ready standards.

Arizona’s Race to the Top Grant will also improve our data system by supporting development of data linkages with teachers, students and courses, so that we can provide better information to teachers about their students’ academic gains.

In 2011, the legislature passed SB1040: teacher/principal evaluations and the State Board of Education developed and adopted a framework for schools to implement these evaluations.

At ADE we are developing a reliable, research-based teacher and principal evaluation model in collaboration with teachers, administrators and national and state research experts.

Measuring the link between instructional quality and leadership and how much students learn is **critical** if Arizona is to move education forward.

In developing our evaluation system, my staff and I are working with the Gates Foundation, Gallup, WestEd, Battelle for Kids along with other state and national research experts. These evaluations should



be used to identify our best performing teachers and principals so that their practices can be highlighted, and used to help other teachers and principals improve.

Every student deserves quality teachers and a quality principal.

When I think back over the last year, I feel as though my staff and I have run 365 marathons. We have developed a strategic plan that isn't collecting dust on a shelf. At ADE, we live, eat and breathe implementing our strategic plan every minute of every day. It is a part of our culture.

We have reorganized the entire agency to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency. We are transforming ADE from a compliance bureaucracy into an education customer support center that strives to deliver 'knock your socks off' customer service to ALL education stakeholders.

We have transformed the Department at breakneck speed, and our divisions are now organized around service and support function rather than by state and federal program area funding source.

While we celebrate our successes and are optimistic about our direction, one major barrier is keeping us from providing even basic, *acceptable* levels of service to the education community—***the inadequacy of our Information Technology System.***

Many of you have heard me speak of the challenges of our Student Accountability Information System (SAIS), and our State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). At ADE we have over **150** IT systems that provide important services and supports to our schools.

Unfortunately, these very IT programs are tremendously burdening our schools because these important IT programs have not been maintained. These IT programs are not user-friendly. These 150 IT programs require duplicative, costly manual entry into systems by thousands of school administrators.

Our education IT system has been in serious neglect for many years.

When it comes to improving our IT system, we have lived up to the trust you placed in us this past year. With your help we have stopped the major bleeding in the body of our IT system. We replaced the hardware, we replaced the operating system and we reprogrammed over 600 sections of code.

But our IT system is still in intensive care. Without continued, focused care our IT system will continue to linger on life support, and it is our teachers, administrators and students who will suffer.

It is a mark of shame for me that I was Chairman of Education and on the Appropriations Committees for so many years and this situation was allowed to deteriorate to this extent.

It will be **a mark of shame on all of us** if we are still in this same situation *8 years from now.*

I can only wish someone had honestly outlined how dire the situation was, and grabbed me by the lapels and said, with force, "If you have any pride you will take control of this situation and fix it." That's what I am doing right now.



I'm grabbing you all by the lapels, and saying, to *anyone who has pride in having a great education culture*, "This situation is intolerable."

Until our IT system is fully fixed, it imposes **extraordinary** administrative costs on our schools.

It **denies** principals the information they need to lead their schools;

It **denies** teachers the information they need to educate their students;

And it **denies** parents the guidance they need to make informed school choice decisions.

It not only denies them, but it **creates chaos** in the system, distracting valuable leadership time from the mission of empowering our children to succeed.

I've been in this business for a long time, and I've been in your shoes. I know how difficult it is to get a dime out of this process, much less fix a problem of this magnitude.

But I also know that, without this, schools won't be able to reduce their administrative costs, teachers won't have the information they need, and we cannot *even begin* to compete on a national or international level. I wouldn't be fulfilling my responsibilities as the elected leader of our schools if I did not make clear the gravity of this situation.

It is one of my top three priorities to build a high quality IT system to service the needs of our education community. Schools, districts and charters need it for effective budgeting, tracking students, paying schools, and driving both education improvement and cost savings to the state.

We are asking you to continue to partner with us in developing the IT programs needed to improve our state's education system and to allow us to seek all avenues of funding.

Last week, Chairman Crandall heard our bill, SB1455, which would create one possible funding infrastructure to provide additional resources to improve our statewide data systems.

We are equally committed to finding innovative methods that will transform our 200-year-old model and dramatically move student achievement forward.

While the legislative reforms I've already talked about hold out the promise of greater accountability, improving the quality of our teachers, and principals, and raising our education standards to increase student achievement, I'm convinced new technologies and better, more effective teaching methods will ultimately provide the breakthrough we need to truly transform our classrooms into world-class learning environments.

We need to move from our archaic one size- fits-all-all classroom model, to a model that differentiates learning; assesses our students on a real time basis, and maximizes their intrinsic motivation.

Now I'd like to share with you an exciting and promising classroom redesign program we are piloting with hundreds of students in several schools, with the promise of over 8,000 students in one school



district alone. While still early in the process, our pilot program, *Freethrows*, is beginning to show enormous promise for significantly improving elementary math achievement, basic math fluency and student engagement.

We also have the opportunity to develop a *Freethrows* program for language arts and phonics. Our expectation is that *Freethrows Language Arts* will substantially increase student literacy and help all students excel under “Move on When Reading.” We are committed to having every child reach proficiency in reading by 3rd grade.

Reading proficiency is the cornerstone to future academic success; we cannot leave one child behind. We are asking you to follow our math program’s progress in the Yuma Elementary School District. If we can continue to produce the excellent results in student math growth that we have initially observed, we expect that you will want us to develop a *Freethrows* environment to produce the same great results in reading proficiency.

I’d like to conclude my presentation today with a short video that shows what’s possible when we transcend the outdated classroom model.

Again, thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts on education, our need for transformative education reform in Arizona and our many education initiatives at the Department. I look forward to partnering with you in the days, months and years to come as we all endeavor to create a better future for Arizona’s education system and, most importantly, for Arizona’s children.

Thank you and I welcome any questions you may have.

