



**Arizona Department of Education
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal**

For Immediate Release

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**ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PARTNERS WITH EDUCATION AGENCIES TO
IMPROVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

(Coolidge and San Tan Valley, Ariz. – July 25, 2014) On July 24, 2014, at the Back to School Night for Heartland Ranch Elementary School and the San Tan Heights Elementary School, banners displayed the words, “Schools, Families, Community...Working together for Student Achievement.” This message was evident as hundreds of students, families, and education leaders gathered to kick off the school year by emphasizing the importance of schools, families, and community working together to improve student achievement.

Through the Arizona Department of Education’s (ADE) Family Engagement Project, and in partnership with other education agencies, ADE will provide additional support and added resources to enhance family engagement activities at both Heartland Ranch and San Tan Heights, which are both in the Coolidge Unified School District.

ADE’s Family Engagement Initiative began in June 2012; with program specialists working to combine expertise and resources to build and sustain cross-division collaboration around family engagement. ADE conducted an internal survey in 2013 to determine whether local education agencies (LEAs) utilize programs to evaluate their family engagement activities. The responses indicated that many LEAs did not follow a particular program or utilize evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of the activities being implemented.

Research shows that evidence-based family engagement practices positively enhance student success in school *and* after graduation, positively influence student grades, attendance and social skills, and strengthens a school’s climate and reputation within the community.

Through the Family Engagement Project, ADE will provide a support team to these two schools, clearly demonstrating the initiative’s response to meet its vision that “All families are engaged in their child’s education to enhance student achievement.” The Family Engagement Project is looking to implement the evidence based National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) model as a framework and will ensure that activities are structured and aligned to meet school improvement goals.

In addition to receiving assistance from ADE, Heartland Ranch and San Tan Heights Elementary School will implement the nationally recognized Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) model. Dr. Maria Paredes and WestEd consultants have instructed school staff on how to link school and home learning by giving families strategies to support children’s academic goals. Results from this model show the impact of establishing parent-teacher conferences in a way that involves families as active team members in their child’s education.

Currently, First Things First and ASU's University Service-Learning have collaborated with ADE on this project. Over the next three years, the multi-member team will advise each school's action team on their family engagement activities.

"It is evident that family engagement is an important link to a child's academic achievement," stated Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal. "The ADE is excited to partner with education groups around the state to greatly benefit Arizona's youth by providing the necessary resources and tools to improve family and community involvement."

"ADE's Family Engagement Project is working diligently to enhance and sustain local family engagement efforts within the Coolidge Unified School District," said ADE Associate Superintendent of Highly Effective Schools Bob Gold. "Our invested commitment will positively influence school improvement outcomes, and strengthen family, school, and community partnerships."

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About Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) at WestEd

To communicate and interact successfully, families and schools must share a strong sense of common purpose. The Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) model of family engagement provides schools with a developmental and collaborative process to build effective partnerships. In APTT classrooms, teachers meet with families quarterly. These meetings include three 75-minute team sessions, with all the parents together, and one individual 30-minute session with each student and his or her family. During APTT team meetings families receive concrete information about the academic skills their children need to master during the course of the school year, and the teacher shares data about student progress on those skills. The teacher also models and provides materials for learning activities that families can engage in at home to support their student's learning. At the team meetings, families practice the activities with other parents in the class. Then teachers guide parents in setting learning goals for their child. During the individual session, the teacher, the student, and the student's family focus on academic progress updates and collaborate on a plan of action for continued student support. This structured and systematic collaboration process develops mutual trust and reinforces the concept of shared responsibility for student achievement.

About ASU's University Service Learning

ASU's University Service-Learning immerses ASU students in the community and provides them with real-world experiences that cultivate socially responsible citizens, build professional skills and connect to each student's major and career goals. Students enrolled in service-learning courses complete an in-depth study of civic engagement and community issues while providing 70-100 hours of direct service in Title I schools and nonprofit agencies. Complete details and the brief online application form to host ASU University Service-Learning Interns can be found at <http://servicelearning.asu.edu/community>.