**EDUCATION**

# Longtime Arizona education leader Kathy Wiebke dies at 67



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Arizona State Board of Education member and former Paradise Valley Unified School District leader Kathy Wiebke has died.

She was 67.

Wiebke was an Arizona native and spent more than 42 years in public education. She worked as an elementary school teacher and principal for Paradise Valley Unified School District for 18 years. She was then the deputy associate superintendent for highly qualified professionals at the Department of Education. She also served as the executive director of Northern Arizona University's K-12 Center for 18 years before retiring in 2023.

Wiebke's death was announced on Dec. 15 in a statement by State Board of Education President Katherine Haley.

Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne called Wiebke a good friend and said they had known each other for nearly 40 years.

Horne served on the Paradise Valley school board for 24 years, first beginning in 1979. Wiebke first started working for the district as a teacher in multiple grade levels in 1981 before becoming principal of Desert Trails Elementary School from 2001 to 2003, according to a statement from the district.

"She was willing to make a sacrifice to be the best teacher she could be, and she inspired other teachers in our school district to do the same. And that's what we need in education today," Horne said.

Horne hired her at the state Department of Education, where he served his first term as superintendent of public instruction in 2003. Wiebke served as the associate deputy superintendent.

"Her knowledge was highly respected. She was smart and her work was exemplary," Horne said.

Horne said Wiebke was dedicated to teaching and was a role model for other teachers. She was the first national board-certified teacher in Arizona, inspiring other teachers to also get their certifications.

In a statement, the Arizona K-12 Center said Wiebke was "tireless in her work to better education."

"She made it her life's work to ensure that educators had access to the highest quality professional learning and support for demonstrating their accomplished practice," the organization said in a statement.

Paradise Valley Unified School District also released a statement, saying that Wiebke left an "indelible mark on students throughout Paradise."

"Her commitment to students and educators will be remembered and cherished. We extend our deepest sympathies to her family and loved ones during this difficult time," the statement said.

Wiebke was appointed to the State Board of Education by Gov. Katie Hobbs in March 2025. Horne said he wrote to the Arizona Senate encouraging them to confirm Wiebke's appointment.

"She knew what she was talking about. There aren't that many people who know education in depth. She knew education in depth," Horne said.

Her term was set to expire in Jan. 2029.

All members of the State Board of Education, aside from the superintendent of public instruction, are appointed by the governor under Arizona state law. The Arizona Senate then has a year to confirm the appointment, Horne said.