

# AZ Superintendents Speak Out

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CITIZENS OF ARIZONA

March 13, 2014

“An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is therefore imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education be provided for all its citizens.” — Thomas Jefferson

If Thomas Jefferson were leading our country today, he would share the concern by parents, educators and leaders in schools and districts across Arizona regarding the blatant lack of support for public education. Given his strong stance on education for all, our esteemed historian and one of the Founding Fathers would use both his position of responsibility and his authority to vocalize a call to action for the future of American public education.

We, the school district leaders in Arizona, are troubled that some of our current elected and appointed state leadership seem unwilling to provide a quality education for all of Arizona’s children. Recent advocacy efforts by elected officials to grow the privatization of education in Arizona compel us to speak out. It appears that the goal of the current education reform movement is to move designated “tax money” out of the public sector and transfer it into private hands. This transfer of funds known as Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs), vouchers or tax credits is designed to subsidize students to attend private schools rather than using these desperately needed funds for the public schools.

Severe budget cuts in programs, personnel and materials have become the norm in our state in recent years. The attack on public education has been disguised as a desire to improve “failing schools,” but there is a more insidious intent, to draw off taxpayer money to private sources with little or no accountability. This wave of reform has led to a systematic campaign to convince Arizona’s citizens that our public schools are failing them. This campaign threatens to dismantle our local public schools, endanger the health of our communities and diminish decision making at the local level all the while undermining the fabric of our democracy.

The vast majority of Arizona’s families with school-aged children are invested in local public schools, funded by taxpayer dollars. In order to preserve the sentiments of Thomas Jefferson, Arizona’s public education system must remain public. Public tax dollars should never be siphoned off to private, for-profit education entities. Our strong and vibrant public education system thrives when:

- We provide equal opportunities that are equitably funded.
- We focus on student wellness and academic fairness.
- We focus on student preparation for college and career readiness.
- We provide choices and alternatives within our public schools.
- We exercise local control in partnership with each unique community.

We are ready to stand up with education supporters to improve education in the state and we will not stand by idly watching others try to dismantle it. Every child deserves a comprehensive, well-rounded education and to this end, we are ready, willing and able to work with others who believe that public education is at the core of democracy and represents the achievable American Dream. Our “suitable” public education cannot be achieved without everyone’s full support. The spirit of Thomas Jefferson gives us strength to continue our vital work on behalf of the nearly one million Arizona public school students, neighborhoods and communities we serve.

— Submitted by the Arizona School Administrators.

The opinions represent the views of more than 230 public school district superintendents and leaders.