

June 1, 2005

Dear Mr. Pullen,

On behalf of the Arizona Business & Education Coalition, we thank you for the time you took to meet with us and explain First Class Education. Because in your initial remarks, you described this as an effort of the Republican Party, you should be aware that ABEC is a non-partisan organization. Our discussions are for the purpose of finding common ground on complex educational issues. Our focus is K-12 education, with linkages to pre kindergarten and higher education. Our concern is that Arizona students benefit from a strong K-12 system, because we know that a good school system and its graduates are an important foundation to economic development.

Increasing student achievement for all students is the focus of our organization.

In summer and early fall, each year, ABEC members from across the state work to develop principles upon which we all agree. They guide us as we look at legislative issues. They also guide us in the discussion on the First Class Education plan. As you review the Principles of Agreement which follow, you will see why ABEC cannot support First Class Education.

Key position statements fall in the areas of student achievement, accountability and teacher quality.

- Our focus is student outcomes. “All statewide education policy should pursue the ultimate goal of high student achievement of rigorous, challenging academic standards as measured by trusted, reliable, and valid assessments.” not as measured by the “dollars in the classroom”.
- Creating an accountable system incurs costs in staff development and leadership training: “The goal of an accountability system is to ensure that quality learning is occurring within a system of publicly-funded schools. Accountability encompasses a systemic approach to education that requires the responsible, transparent use and measure of:
 - Inputs: Highly qualified teachers and administrators, financial resources, and facilities;
 - Process: Curriculum and instructional delivery aligned with Arizona academic standards, with assessments used as an indicator of the acquisition of knowledge;
 - Outputs: Student achievement, as defined by the Arizona academic standards.”
- We know from the research that underpins the report “Lead with Five” that effective professional development is a key element in producing quality teachers. “Teacher quality is the most critical factor outside of the influence of the home on student achievement. ABEC believes that teacher quality will flourish when the proper conditions exist in the state and the education system focuses on

recruitment, development and retention at all levels.” As you know, funds for professional development are accounted for in the “out of the classroom” expenditure.

These are important issues for ABEC. While we support more of Arizona tax dollars directed at areas that improve school performance directly, we do not believe the concept, as presented, is sufficient in the definition of the appropriate expenditures. It creates a one-size-fits-all situation that will have little success in view of the diversity that exists in the state.

The Board of Directors does not believe the initiative will impact the outcomes as outlined above in our Principles of Agreement. We believe that this initiative, in fact, could have harmful unintended consequences. One size simply cannot fit all.

Thank you again for attending ABEC to review the effort and have dialogue on the topic. However, we will likely oppose this concept and discourage citizens and businesses from funding such an initiative.

Sincerely,

Barbara Clark, President
Principles of Agreement, attached

Susan Carlson, Executive Director