



arizona business & education coalition

January 31, 2006

Governor Napolitano
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Ken Bennett
President
Arizona State Senate
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Jim Weiers
Speaker of the House
Arizona House of Representatives
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION OF FLORES / ELL ISSUE

Since our inception in 2002, the Arizona Business & Education Coalition (ABEC) has been a consistent advocate of finding consensus on education issues with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap for ALL Arizona students. As a collaboration of the Business and Education communities we take this mission seriously, and it is in that spirit we take the unusual step of communicating directly with you on this issue.

Simply, respectfully, our message is that resolution must occur expeditiously. With 150,000 ELL students in Arizona schools, the vast majority of whom are citizens, we have a civic and moral obligation to educate them to ensure their success and Arizona's prosperity. There comes a time when political and ideological considerations simply must yield to pragmatic reality. For many of our members this is a serious workforce development issue, but much more is at stake. Today's students are tomorrow's workers – and if they are unprepared to meet the challenges of global competition we will all suffer the consequences and regret these days of impasse.

We now fear that the consequences of this issue may soon transcend the workforce implications, as important as they may be. We have all born witness

to those painful times in our history when political events in Arizona rose to the level of national news and we believe this issue has all the elements to catapult our state into the national spotlight. If this happens it may take years to undo the negative impressions that may be created. Even today, economic developers will attest that Arizona still suffers from some of our past mistakes that escalated into national news. This impasse is bad for business, bad for education, and bad for Arizonans who have vested their futures here.

With this in mind our message is not one of “picking a side”, because this must not be about sides. If statesmanship and leadership cannot resolve this issue the courts will. To allow that to occur would be a tragic waste of time we do not have. It will also further disadvantage young minds by decreasing our ability to close the achievement gap while our counterparts in other states and countries continue to advance.

Advancing student achievement throughout Arizona’s K-12 public school system is ABEC’s foremost priority. We support effective remediation and strategies to assist students who do not meet standards, drop out, or fail to graduate. We urge you to:

- Fully and completely address all aspects of the judicial order.
- Put in place oversight by the State Board of Education, which is the body that has legal authority, and accountability standards that allow for tracking and reassessment that is quantifiable but not overly burdensome.
- Accept a stable, adequate per-pupil level of funding that will enable districts to implement research-based best practices that help close the achievement gap.
- Recognize that we need to remedy the problem and that any solution that supplants existing funds, such as Title I, will hamper meeting the serious needs of children in poverty and requirements of federal agreements as well as decrease the opportunity for quick solution.

To close, we believe that people who are truly committed to a resolution of this issue can find a solution based on the above suggestions. We reiterate that delay is dangerous, on multiple levels. We offer any resources we can provide to facilitate resolution of this issue.

Sincerely,

Barbara Clark
President

Susan Carlson
Executive Director

cc: Arizona Legislature