

Lead with Five

Public Statement of Support

2005

The Arizona Business & Education Coalition (ABEC) is a statewide organization of business and education leaders, committed to creating a sustained collaboration to advance and support a superior education and future for Arizona K-12 students. The organization recognizes the importance of linkages to pre-kindergarten and to higher education and workforce preparation.

The first strategy to achieve superior education for Arizona's students is the advocacy for sound accountability and increased student performance. To that end, ABEC advocates that children read on grade level by third grade; that 8th grade students demonstrate a readiness for high school; and that all students obtain a High School diploma, enrolling in academically challenging coursework that includes workplace skills, and that they graduate from high school prepared to enter the workforce or higher education.

In order to financially support these goals, ABEC's second strategy is to promote fiscal accountability in public education. To this end, ABEC endorsed and participated in the study that has resulted in *Lead with Five*. If we are to focus on increasing student achievement in an environment of making each dollar count, it is important to Arizona taxpayers that those dollars target strategies that are research-based and proven to make a difference. The goal of this study was exactly that: based on a review of practices, to identify those that are backed by research showing they can make a significant positive impact over time.

The five primary strategies cannot be achieved in the short-term, but only over time. This study lays out a map for looking at existing dollars and reallocating them to a higher purpose and for the appropriate allocation for any subsequent additional funding.

Aligned with ABEC's strategic beliefs, the study encourages spending tax dollars wisely, cautiously, and prudently. The study also encourages Arizona to increase funding, over time, on specific, research-based practices. Several of the recommendations are aligned with ABEC's

first strategy on student achievement and understanding that highly qualified teachers make a difference. Specifically, the report recommends:

- Voluntary all day kindergarten, increasing the capacity of young children to read on grade level by third grade;
- Smaller school size, which could mean schools within school, increasing adult to student ratios to enable relationships that ease transition between middle and high schools,
- Performance pay, rewarding teachers who are more effective in producing student learning gains in their classrooms.

The *Lead with Five* study has identified five specific strategies that Arizona should target over the long haul. The financial impact will be significant. However, consider the facts recently published in *How Arizona Compares, Real Numbers and Hot Topics*, from the Morrison Institute:

- In 2000, the state's average elementary class size was 24.5, compared to 21.2 nationally.
- In 2003, 51% of the state's K-12 public school students qualified for free and reduced lunch, a measure of disadvantage;
- In 2001-2002, Arizona ranked 47th in per-pupil spending on current operations, which does not include capital outlay, or funding for buildings.
- Though state-to-state comparisons are difficult, Arizona's dropout rate is simply too high.

Morrison advises "Arizona's educational system must respond to the market because education is synonymous with economic development, both in preparing the workforce and attracting and retaining the talented, creative people vital to a competitive knowledge industry." Further, "Education presents innumerable challenges; but, with more than 40% of Arizonans saying that our state's public schools are not as good as those in other states, efforts to improve make sense."

Lead with Five has identified several specific strategies to dramatically improve public education in Arizona, but the cornerstone strategy is a willingness among Arizonans to invest both more

and more wisely in our public school systems. ABEC strongly supports this objective.