



arizona business & education coalition

2411 W. 14th Street • Tempe, AZ 85281 • 602.659.7741 • www.azbec.org

March 2, 2006

Governor Janet 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 / ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER ISSUE

Once again, ABEC writes to plead wise settlement of this ELL impasse. As we stated before, this impasse is bad for business, bad for education, and bad for Arizonans who have vested their futures here.

Business case: There is a compelling business case for closing the achievement gap with this goal in mind: Language acquisition and proficiency is *not* the ultimate goal. It is an interim step toward *students achieving at the highest level possible*. We must set high expectations for all students, including English Language Learners.

Arizona businesses, from construction trades to technology, have a growing and serious need for employees, both entry level and supervisory levels. This is not an issue of “language for language sake” – but an issue of language for high performance and there is a very big difference. Our employers need entry-level and apprentice- level employees who can contribute; who can grow themselves, their skills and their companies. It costs business money they cannot recoup by doing remedial training for entry-level employees. Basic literacy may not even exist in the primary language and cultural differences are very real in the workplace.

The need for employees with capacity to contribute is great and urgent.

Authority and oversight: The authority for ELL policy and decision making should be the Board of Education, with access to experts, research, and models using best practices, based on research. It is the *Board of Education* tasked, by law, with these policy decisions – where these discussions are open to the public, consider public comment, and available to public review.

Research: Any interim solution should focus on continuous improvement and contain direction and funding to build a research framework within which to identify models and strategies that produce results. Modification of this interim solution can then be informed by this data and available to public review and discussion by the *Board of Education*.

Professional development: The teacher is critical. We should reward and recruit effective teachers – and we should provide effective, results-based, flexible training from pre-service through experienced teachers. It should be individualized, based on outcomes of success, with evidence of performance over time.

Supplanting federal funds: Funds used for children in poverty and established programs that support needy students should not be withdrawn from these important requirements and redirected. State funding should not supplant federal funds.

Again, this is not about “picking a side”. We repeat that delay and shortchanging resources will decrease ability to close the achievement gap while our counterparts in other states and countries continue to advance.

Again, 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.
- Agree upon a *stable*, adequate per-pupil level of funding that will enable districts to implement research-based best practices that will produce desired results.
- 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.

Sincerely,

Barbara Clark
President

Susan Carlson
Executive Director

cc: Arizona Legislators

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