

District Budget and You

Background for Mesa School Employees



Number 3 ♦ January 26, 2009

Arizona's state budget deficit, as a percentage of its total budget, is the worst budget deficit in the country. The shortfall for fiscal year 2009 – the year we're in now – is at least \$1.5 billion. For next fiscal year, the prediction is in the range of \$2 to \$3 billion. Education makes up a large percentage of the state's budget. Education-friendly Governor Napolitano is no longer with us. Politics at the Capitol may determine whether or not you have a job next year.

This bulletin will describe some of the budget options being considered. On the back, we have steps that we want you to take.

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Cut Taxes Again. Since the state is in a deep financial hole – what's the first thing that the Legislature wants to do? Repeal the school property tax and take another \$250 to \$300 million off the table! A big reason we're in this crisis is that the Legislature has spent the last decade cutting taxes. Our revenue system is heavily weighted toward sales taxes and the current recession has put consumer spending in the tank. So, of course – repeal the property tax. What a good idea that is!

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Cut School Budgets this year. It is likely that the state will limit district spending during the current budget year – by reducing “soft capital” expenditures (text books, furniture, etc.) and simply taking back a percentage of each district's revenue. The Mesa district has been careful this year by limiting capital spending and implementing a hiring freeze. But cutting the total budget with only a few months left could be very difficult.

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Next year? Massive Cuts. The Chairs of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees (John Kavanagh and Russell Pearce) are recommending major cuts to K-12 public education. If these go through for the 2009-10 school year, we will see a big impact on class size, student services, jobs, and paychecks. Here is some of what they have on the table:

- Phase out Career Ladder
- Phase out Teacher Experience Index (the extra funding for districts with more experienced teachers)
- Eliminate full-day Kindergarten and early Kindergarten (How many jobs will that be?)
- Stop new school construction and school building renewal funding
- Across-the-board reduction of basic state aid – to the tune of \$220 million

In total, for Mesa, we're talking about upwards of \$60 million in state support being cut from the budget this year and next year. That's on top of cuts due to enrollment reductions.

On the back – What You Can Do



MESPA

Mesa Education Association ♦ Mesa Education Support Personnel Association
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What You Can Do

We must flood key legislators with our message – starting right now. Our AEA lobbying team can't do this alone. Our strength comes from thousands of educator-voters in the legislative districts, people like YOU.

1. Be a Cyber Lobbyist. If you haven't already done so, send your name and your home email address to the MEA-MESPA Office. Or give that information to your MEA or MESPA Rep. We will sign you up to get the regular AEA Legislative Reports and calls-to-action. The reports are timely and helpful. They make it easy to fire off an email message to key legislators.

2. Contact these Legislators now. Below are the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of six key legislators. Send an email or leave a telephone message. Tell them who you are and where you work. **Use your home phone or home email.** Do it today.

Here's the message: We cannot deliver quality education if the state makes such drastic cuts to our funding. In times like these, do not repeal the state school tax. *(Consider the budget cuts we went through last year, imagine multiplying that four or five times, and tell them what that will mean to you and to your students.)*

Senator **Bob Burns**, President of the Senate, rburns@azleg.gov, 602-926-5993

Senator **John Huppenthal**, Education Committee, jhuppenthal@azleg.gov, 602-926-5261

Senator **Russell Pearce**, Appropriations Committee, rpearce@azleg.gov, 602-926-5760

Rep. **Kirk Adams**, Speaker of the House, kadams@azleg.gov, 602-926-5495

Rep. **Rich Crandall**, Education Committee, rcrandall@azleg.gov, 602-926-3020

Rep. **John Kavanagh**, Appropriations Committee, jkavanagh@azleg.gov, 602-926-5170

Again – use your home phone or home email. Don't do this from school!

3. Sign up to go to the Capitol.

- **Shadow Day.** We will soon be asking for teams of educators to go to the Capitol to “shadow” our AEA lobbyists, meeting with key legislators. If you can give up a personal leave day, talk to your MEA or MESPA rep about helping us with this activity.
- **AEA Day at the Capitol.** On Wednesday, **March 4**, we will organize hundreds of educators and friends of education to converge on the Capitol. Again, contact your MEA or MESPA rep if you would like to participate in this exciting event.



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