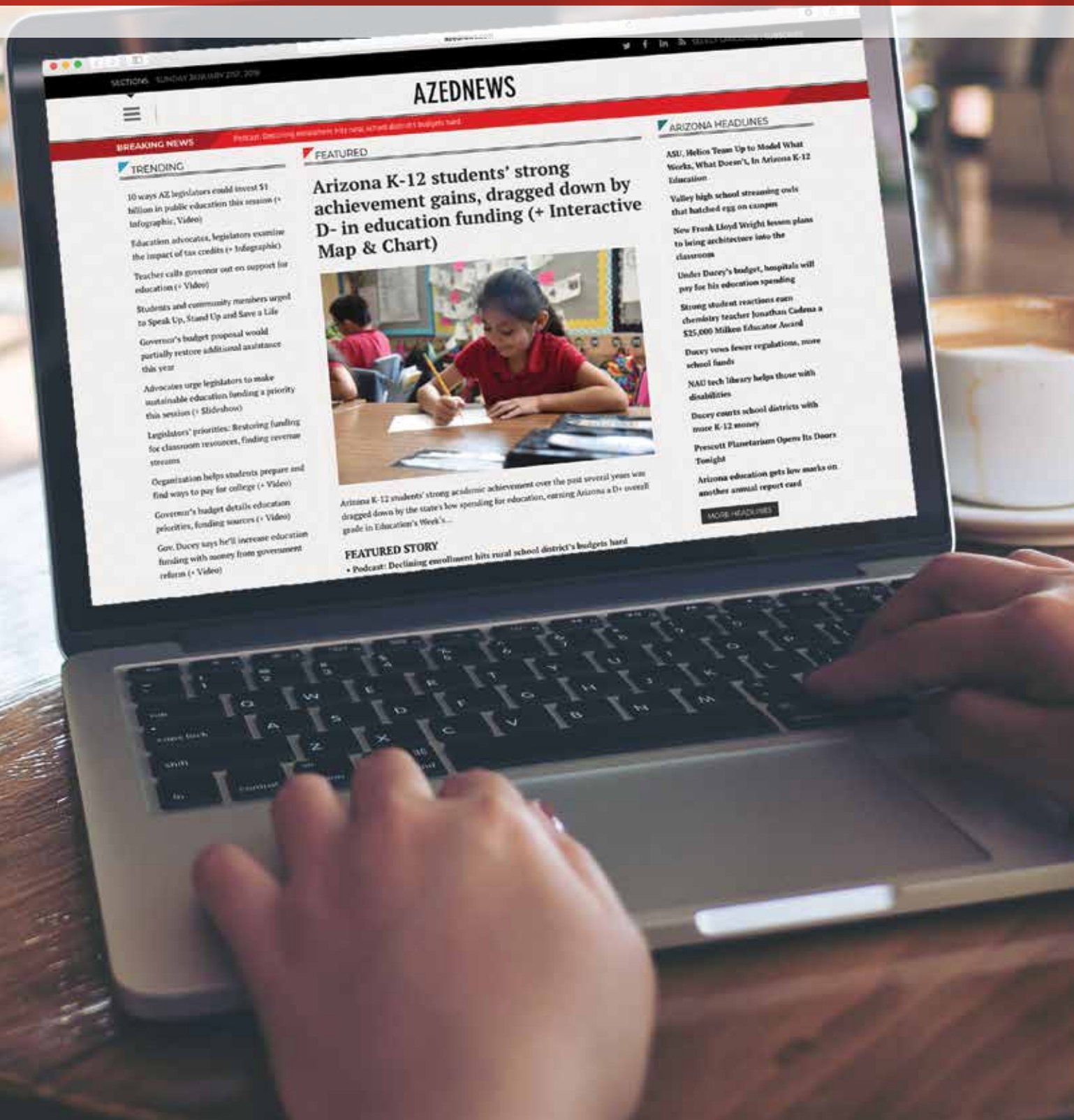


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District schools used majority of Prop. 123 money to pay teachers more, hire more teachers (+ Infographic)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 17, 2018

Arizona school districts are using the majority of dollars they received from the settlement of a lawsuit with the state to address the teacher shortage crisis by paying teachers more and hiring more teachers, according to a recent analysis.

Ninety percent of the funds districts have received as a result of the passage of Prop. 123 have gone to either teacher salaries and benefits or hiring teachers, said Dr. Anabel Aportela, director of research and analysis for Arizona Association of School Business Officials and Arizona School Boards Association.

Districts are employing “1,791 more teachers and the average salary has gone up by a little over \$2,000,” Aportela said.

Prop. 123 is the initiative approved by voters in a May 2016 special election that settled the inflation funding lawsuit between public education groups and the state over the state’s failure to provide inflation funding over a multi-year period.



OVER THE SUMMER, GLENDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT HIRED OVER 160 NEW TEACHERS. PHOTO COURTESY GLENDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

“We know that districts have hired additional teachers, because we do have some districts with some significant student growth and also overcrowded classrooms, and they use the dollars to alleviate some of that,” Aportela said.

Where the remainder went

The remaining 10 percent of the money generated by Prop. 123 for district schools was used to meet other specific local needs.

Some districts used it to cover the mandated increase in the state minimum wage required by Prop. 206, which impacted compensation for school staff such as crossing guards, food service workers, custodians, bus aides, and instructional and other aides, Aportela said.

“There was no additional funding to school districts to cover this mandated increase in the minimum wage, so that money, Prop. 123, helped cover that increase,” Aportela said.

“Teachers were not the only ones who had salary freezes during the recession and afterward,” so some districts also gave raises to employees in 22,000 instructional and teacher support positions, 2,100 principals and assistant principals, 700 district office directors and 304 superintendents and assistant superintendents, Aportela said.

The percentage of Prop. 123 funds that went toward teacher pay at charter schools is not known, Aportela said. Charter schools are not required to provide the same level of reporting on expenditures as school districts.

Prop. 123 has generated \$491.5 million in more funding for public K-12 district and charter schools since its passage, according to Aportela’s research.

District schools have received \$241.2 million, or 49 percent, while charter schools have received \$250.3 million, or 51 percent, Aportela said.

Charter schools received more funding because they have the largest number of weighted students in the state and the most growth in the number of students enrolled, Aportela said.



While Prop. 123 dollars are making an impact, reductions in other areas continue to stress district budgets.

When Prop. 123 took effect in fiscal year 2016, there were several other changes in public K-12 education funding that reduced the potential impact of Prop. 123 by at least \$175 million, Aportela said.

The cut in district additional assistance went from \$239 million the previous year to \$352 million in fiscal 2016, and the move to current year funding has cut money for district schools by \$30 million, Aportela said.

“Rural school districts are the ones that are losing the most enrollment as a percentage of their population, so they’re being hit hardest by current year funding,” Aportela said. “They’re also the ones least likely to pass a bond or an override, which is adding pressure to salaries in rural areas.”

“For districts that are not able to pass a bond, the capital needs are much greater than for a district that is able to pass a bond. That’s going to have an impact on what kind of salary increases districts can give to teachers and other staff,” Aportela said.

Teacher calls governor out on support for education (+ Video)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 8, 2018

Second-grade teacher Alexis Aguirre from the Osborn Elementary School District called Governor Doug Ducey out on his support for education at the AZSchools Now news conference on Thursday at the Arizona State Capitol.

“I decided to become a teacher because of the impact teachers made in my life,” said Aguirre, who teaches at Encanto Elementary School in Phoenix. “Our jobs are incredibly difficult. Our students suffer sometimes from homelessness or special needs that we have to address in the classroom, because we don’t have the support that our school wishes they could give us.”

If our school board had the money in the budget, they would pay teachers more, said Aguirre, who was honored as the 2017 Esperanza Latino Teacher Award by Chicanos Por La Causa for her impact on the future generation.

“If our principals had the money, they would hire more teachers aides, they would hire more bus drivers, they would hire more counselors, but the money’s just not there,” Aguirre said.

At the news conference, Aguirre held up her check from her school district with the 1.6 percent bonus for teachers that the governor and legislature approved last year.

“This is my check. So after years of not getting a significant raise, teachers were given a one-time stipend raise for the year. It’s \$402,” Aguirre said. “So obviously, this is not what the governor has been saying he’s going to do, supporting educational funding. This is not proof that he’s really taken into consideration what our kids need, what our teachers need, what our districts need. It’s not enough by any means.”

In contrast, the governor awarded raises of up to 20 percent to 44 of his staff members over that past two and a half years and the governor’s Department of Administration gave at least 245 employees pay raises that average 18 percent, according to an article in *The Arizona Republic*.

“Real educational funding is going to be long-term, it’s going to be sustainable, it’s going to go beyond us teachers to support staff, our students, our buildings. There’s so much that needs to be fixed in our state right now, and this is not, this is not it,” Aguirre said.



ALEXIS AGUIRRE, SECOND GRADE TEACHER SPEAKS OUT ON TEACHER CRISIS AND GOVERNOR’S FY19 BUDGET.

10 ways AZ legislators could invest \$1 billion in public education this session (+ Infographic, Video)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 4, 2018

Many Arizonans say the state’s public schools need increased funding, but few agree on where to find the money.

Arizona legislators and Gov. Doug Ducey could tap these 10 revenue sources to re-invest \$1 billion in sustainable, permanent and equitable funding for K-12 public schools, according to AZ Schools Now.

AZ Schools Now, a coalition of business, faith and education groups, presented these options that would also support Arizona Education Progress Meter goals to fuel students’ success and eliminate the teacher shortage crisis, during a news conference today at the Arizona State Capitol.

Eliminating tax credits for private and public schools, issuing bonds for new school construction instead of paying cash up front, redirecting results-based funding going to A-rated schools and halting individual and corporate tax cuts scheduled to take effect this year are some of the ideas presented by the coalition of 15 organizations focused on the next steps to invest in Arizona’s public schools.

This weekend, Senate President Steve Yarbrough, R-Chandler (District 17), who sponsored the law that lets corporations “give what they would otherwise owe the state in income taxes to organizations that provide scholarships for private schools,” said he’s willing to consider a cap now that the amount has topped \$74 million a year, according to a Capitol Media Services article.

Revenue from corporate taxes dropped from 8.3 percent of total revenue in fiscal year 2008 to 5.1 percent of total revenue in fiscal year 2018, according to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee’s Fiscal year 2018 appropriations report – FY 2008 to 2018 “Then and Now” Comparisons.

“There is \$500 million less in corporate income tax revenue in 2018 than was generated in 2008, and that definitely has a negative impact on the general fund,” said Dr. Anabel Aportela, director of research and analysis for Arizona Association of School Business Officials and Arizona School Boards Association.



PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCATES GATHERED AT THE CAPITOL DURING AZ SCHOOLS NOW PRESS CONFERENCE ASKING LEGISLATORS TO RE-INVEST \$1 BILLION DOLLARS INTO PERMANENT FUNDING FOR K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

However, that reduction in corporate income tax revenue is not all the result of tax cuts, because there are other reasons why a corporation would pay less in taxes, Aportela said.

“We can’t properly fund education (or any other program for that matter) if we continue to cut taxes for corporations and provide tax credits for the wealthy,” said Beth Simek, president of Arizona Parent Teacher Association.

Corporate tax cuts and Student Tuition Organization tax credits remove resources from the state general fund that could be used to help fund public schools, said Dawn Penich-Thacker, communications director for Save Our Schools Arizona.

“Private corporations worth billions of dollars pay zero property taxes in Arizona and special interests enjoy tax loopholes totaling millions of dollars each year. Yet, Gov. Ducey says the state can’t afford to pay teachers or fund classrooms, and that’s simply false,” Penich-Thacker said. “If corporations and special interests were made to pay even minimal taxes to the state the same way we regular people do, Arizona would not have the education funding crisis we face today.”

Education advocates, legislators examine the impact of tax credits (+ Infographic)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED DEC. 13, 2017

Public education advocates and legislators are looking closely at the impact that a host of state tax credits have on K-12 education funding as the next legislative session approaches.

While many districts rely on the dollars they collect annually from individual taxpayers through tax credit donations to their schools, advocates hope to one day eliminate the need for such a funding mechanism.

In fiscal year 2017, which ended in June, \$440 million in taxes owed by individuals and corporations that would have gone into the state general fund were not collected because of tax credit programs, said Richard Stavneak, director of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, a nonpartisan group that works for the Legislature. Stavneak spoke before a group of 300 public school leaders last month.

Between 2016 and 2017, tax credits grew by 10 percent, Stavneak said.

Public education advocates argue that tax credits impact the state budget by limiting revenues in the general fund, which directly affects the money available to fund public K-12 education and other priorities.

“Arizona lawmakers have cut taxes and/or increased tax credits every year but one since 1990, costing the general fund. At the same time, our public schools are receiving more than a billion dollars less per year than a decade ago,” said Julie Erfle, spokeswoman for AZ Schools Now.



CLOSEUP OF CALCULATOR, HAND, PEN AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT. PHOTO COURTESY DAVE DUGDALE FROM SUPERIOR, USA

The group represents volunteers, teachers, parents, school board members, faith-based leaders and children’s advocates who are focused on the next steps to reinvest in Arizona’s public schools.

“Continuing the status quo of additional tax cuts or credits is bad for Arizona students and our economic future,” Erfle said. “That is why AZ Schools Now has rejected all proposals to increase or expand tax cuts or credits and has advocated in favor of reforming and/or ending various tax credits.”

Legislators are pushing for change, as well.

“It’s a simple math problem. You can’t take away dollars and then expect to get more funding,” said Rep. Reginald Bolding, D-Phoenix (District 27), an advocate for increased funding for public schools.

Bolding was one of six Republican and Democrat legislators who spoke at the same gathering of education leaders last month.

Public schools received \$46 million through a tax credit program for individuals and married couples filing jointly last year; however, that amount represents only 10.5 percent of total tax credits. Corporate and personal tax credits for donations to private school tuition organizations represent the largest share, at \$161 million, or 36.6 percent. Corporate tax credits for research and development accounted for the second highest share at \$109 million, or 25 percent.

Tax credit donations are really important, and they are used to supplement many extracurricular programs for students, said Dr. Heather Cruz, assistant superintendent of Litchfield Elementary School District.

“Adjusting funding to not rely so heavily on tax credits – that would be amazing. Any money that goes to tax credits gets taken out of the general fund, so it’s a hard balance. If we would fund public schools appropriately, we wouldn’t have to have tax credits,” Dr. Cruz said.

“Tax credit donations help all our kids,” said Denise Guenther, president of the governing board of Florence Unified School District. “They really help fund some of the extracurricular activities that the district cannot fund at this time as much as we would like to.”

Read full article at www.azednews.com

Special education funding gap squeezes Arizona classrooms (+ Infographic)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 12, 2017

Underfunding of federally mandated special education services for public school students, coupled with a growing number of students with more severe disabilities, is straining general classroom spending in Arizona’s public schools.

The state’s formula funding for special education is now \$79 million less than what district and charter schools spend to provide the services required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, according to a recent analysis by Dr. Anabel Aportela, director of research for Arizona Association of School Business Officials and Arizona School Boards Association.

Statewide, special education expenditures exceed \$1 billion and have increased 8 percent since 2013, Aportela said.

Aportela’s analysis examined state maintenance and operations revenues and expenditures, the special education teacher portion of Classroom Site Fund expenditures and Federal IDEA revenues and expenditures, but excluded expenditures paid through other federal funds such as Impact Aid and special education transportation costs, which can be significant.

Not adequately funding special education forces districts to make cuts to general education programs, said Dr. Chuck Essigs, a former special education teacher who is director of governmental relations for Arizona Association of School Business Officials.

“Districts have no choice but to fund special education programs since they are mandated by state and federal law; therefore, the only place that districts can make cuts are in non-special education programs,” Essigs said.

That impacts classroom spending, because you have to come up with money that isn’t there to pay for therapists, or bus aides or school bus service for special education students, Aportela said.

“Where is that money going to come from? Your general operations, so you’re going to increase class sizes, you hire fewer teachers and you don’t have raises for teachers,” Aportela said.

The dollars in the classroom debate

Public education advocates contend that the underfunding of special education impacts all public school students and also creates public misconceptions about how schools are using their resources.



TEACHER APPRECIATION FEATURED PHOTO. PLACE UNKNOWN. A KINDERGARTEN OR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER INSTRUCTING A STUDENT. SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU FACTS FOR FEATURE PHOTOS

When the Arizona Auditor General’s report claimed classroom spending in Arizona decreased this year, its narrow focus did not take into account support services and legally-mandated special education that are key to students’ learning.

The auditor’s report, released March 1, focuses on spending on instruction as the barometer of support for Arizona students. A broader definition the governor, Legislature and Arizona public school leaders agreed upon in the 2015 budget includes instruction, instructional support and student support services.

That broader definition includes reading and math intervention specialists, media specialists, librarians, counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists and speech, occupational and physical therapists in that total.

Why and how are costs rising?

Another critical factor is the increase in state and local special education expenditures for services, which rose 32 percent from 2007 to 2015 for Arizona district and charter schools, according to data provided to the Arizona Department of Education.

While the number of Arizona district and charter school students enrolled in special education has remained flat at 11.5 percent since 2013, a change in the types of students’ disabilities may account for this increase in costs, Aportela said.

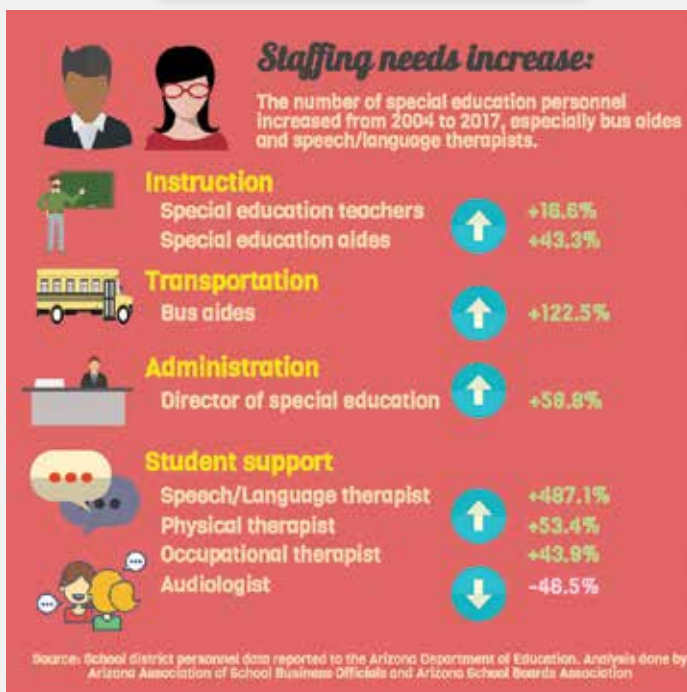
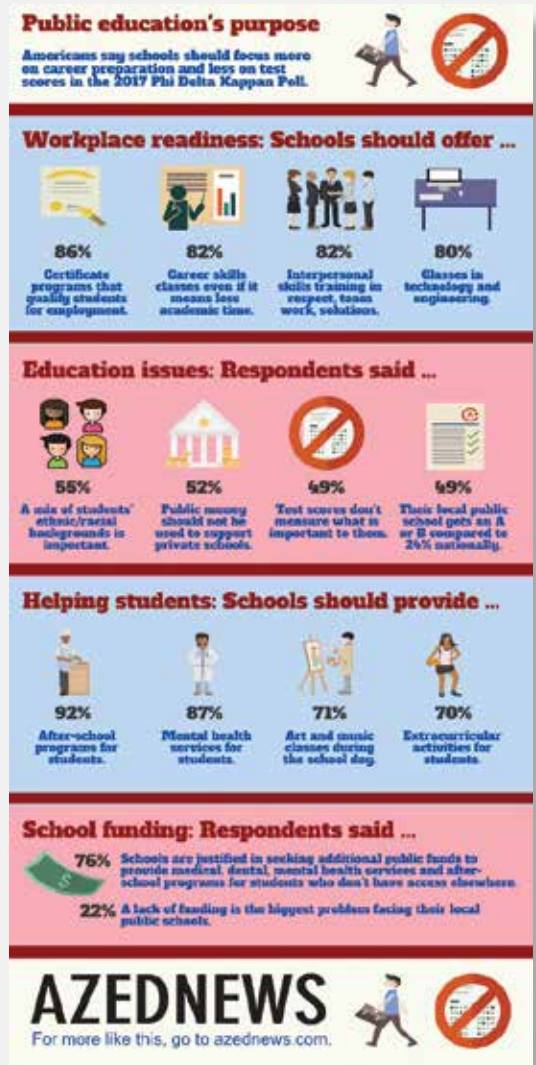
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GOVERNOR'S BUDGET DETAILS EDUCATION PRIORITIES, FUNDING SOURCES (+ VIDEO)

JANUARY 12, 2018



4:41 p.m. Matt Gress, director of the Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting, kicked off the Executive Budget Public Hearing with the details of Gov. Doug Ducey's fiscal year 2019 budget, saying that chief among the budget priorities was...

STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS URGED TO SPEAK UP, STAND UP AND SAVE A LIFE

DECEMBER 21, 2017



After bullying led Grace Martinez to cut herself, she said her family found her the help she needed so she could turn "a horrific situation around." Now, the high school student helps connect her peers to each other with compassion,...

WHAT WE'RE FOLLOWING: VOUCHERS DON'T COVER SPECIALIZED SCHOOL COSTS AND AZ NEEDS TO NEARLY DOUBLE EDUCATION FUNDING

JANUARY 12, 2018



The parents of a teenage boy who attends a private school for students with autism say U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos wrongly portrayed them as a school choice success story. The parents told Chalkbeat that the amount most voucher programs offer – around \$5,000 – wouldn't work for many families who have children with disabilities, because tuition at a specialized private school like the one their son attends can run up to \$70,000 a year and parents lose their right to challenge the services private schools are willing to provide for their student.

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JOSH MEIBOS IS NAMED ARIZONA TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2018 (+ VIDEO)

NOVEMBER 7, 2017



Josh Meibos said he initially was uneasy with the title Ambassadors for Excellence when he opened the email to learn he was one of the top five nominees for Arizona Teacher of the Year 2018. Meibos was named Arizona Teacher of the Year at Arizona Educational Foundation's Teacher of the Year Awards luncheon in Phoenix...

POLL: SCHOOLS SHOULD PREPARE STUDENTS FOR CAREERS, FOCUS LESS ON TESTING (+INFOGRAPHIC)

OCTOBER 18, 2017



Americans said schools should spend more time preparing students for careers and developing interpersonal skills they'll use in the workforce and less time on testing in the 49th Annual Phi Delta Kappan Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The national random phone survey...