



Arizona Department of Education
Tom Horne, Superintendent of Public Instruction



CENTER FOR THE
FUTURE OF ARIZONA

NEWS RELEASE

ARIZONA ANNOUNCES PARTICIPATION IN “TOUGH CHOICES” COALITION TO OVERHAUL STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM WILL STUDY AND PILOT ELEMENTS OF WORLD’S MOST SUCCESSFUL SYSTEMS

PHOENIX (March 10, 2008) – Arizona has joined a national consortium of six states committed to significantly improving student achievement through a dramatic overhaul of state education systems. The announcement was made today at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Arizona joins Delaware, New Mexico, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Utah in supporting school reform recommendations contained in the “Tough Choices or Tough Times” research report. The study, released in 2006 by the *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*, provides a framework that incorporates many features of the world’s most successful education systems.

“I support ‘Tough Choices or Tough Times’ because its goals align with a number of our initiatives and accomplishments,” commented Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne who participated in the news conference via satellite.

Examples that Horne cited include: Alignment of high school math and science graduation requirements with university admission requirements; strengthening of career and technical education (CTE) academic content; initiation of Education and Career Action Plans to support student academic and career goals; and alignment of Arizona’s high school graduation rate to the National Governors Association recommendation.

“One of the benefits of belonging to this consortium of states is to be able to work with national experts who can assist in each area of the plan recommendations,” commented Sybil Francis, executive director of the Center for the Future of Arizona and leader of Arizona’s “Tough Choices or Tough Times” private stakeholder group. “The consortium will provide a forum for discussing how to apply the model in a way that is responsive to the requirements of individual states.”

Arizona representatives attending the D.C. event included the CFA’s Sybil Francis; Karen Butterfield, associate superintendent of academic achievement, Arizona Department of Education; Cheryl Lebo, associate superintendent for standards and assessment, Arizona Department of Education; John Wright, president, Arizona Education Association; Michael Crow, president, Arizona State University; and Susan Carlson, executive director, Arizona Business & Education Coalition.

(more)

Over the next year, the Arizona Department of Education and the National Center on Education and the Economy will work with the Center for the Future of Arizona and education stakeholders to establish pilot projects based on the “Tough Choices or Tough Times” model that will involve 5 percent or as many as 50,000 of Arizona’s K-12 students. “We will be reaching out to stakeholders throughout the state for their input and seeking volunteer schools and districts who want to participate in the pilot projects,” said Francis.

One of the recommendations the Arizona coalition could consider piloting would allow 16-year-olds to sit for examinations that, if passed, would allow them to go directly to college without remediation. Other elements of the “Tough Choices or Tough Times” model would involve changes in teacher recruitment, retention and compensation practices.

The Arizona Community Foundation has offered a challenge grant to support the Arizona “Tough Choices or Tough Times” initiative. The Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona has also pledged its support. Arizona State University Foundation and a grant from Helios Education Foundation currently support the Center for the Future of Arizona’s work on the initiative.

The Arizona Education Association and the National Education Association, the nation’s largest teachers’ union, have declared their support for the state affiliates’ involvement in the initiative.

“The ‘Tough Choices or Tough Times’ framework has the potential to significantly increase teacher empowerment and autonomy,” commented Arizona Education Association President John Wright. “This is very much aligned with the Arizona Education Association’s efforts towards enhancing the profession of teaching. We look forward to the collaborative work ahead and the opportunity to transform public education in Arizona.”

School districts that signed a letter of support for Arizona’s involvement in the consortium include Mesa Public Schools, Amphitheater Public Schools (Tucson), Grand Canyon Unified School District (Grand Canyon National Park area) and Flagstaff Unified School District. Arizona State University and the University of Arizona also expressed written support.

Arizona was selected to join the national consortium of states because it has advanced a number of significant policy and programmatic initiatives that correspond with the “Tough Choices or Tough Times” model. These include the state’s history of innovation in education, including its pioneering charter school laws and P–20 approach to meeting the needs of the 21st century workplace.

The state has been working to strengthen the alignment between high school and college-level learning and accelerate student progression into postsecondary pathways; has dedicated substantial new funding to early childhood education; and is examining ways to reform the state’s school finance model to facilitate all of these efforts.

“These efforts provide a solid foundation and position Arizona for a successful trial of a pilot program,” commented Marc Tucker, co-chair of implementation, *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*.

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