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College of Doctoral Studies

**ADDRESSING A SHORTAGE OF HIGH  
QUALITY TEACHERS: AN ESCALATING  
DILEMMA FOR ARIZONA SCHOOLS**

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EDUCATION POLICY PAPER 1: GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY

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# ADDRESSING A SHORTAGE OF HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS: AN ESCALATING DILEMMA FOR ARIZONA SCHOOLS

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- **Arizona School Boards Association:**  
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## INTRODUCTION

Arizona's major education associations have determined that a high priority issue is the present and projected problem of the state's ability to recruit and retain high quality teachers for its schools. A recent survey of the state's superintendents confirmed that a number of vacancies presently exist in their respective districts, and they have serious concerns regarding the future potential to maintain a high quality teaching force.

It is becoming increasingly evident that there is a growing concern and intensified resolve in the state's school districts to elevate this "shortage" issue as an urgent consideration as the state moves forward in its continuing efforts to improve its public schools.

It is important to point out that state policy makers often put aside or minimize the existence of a quality teacher shortage. Their underestimation of this problem is reflected in a belief that there are large numbers of certified unemployed teachers available, alternate route teacher candidates abound and an assumption that anyone with a college degree can be recruited to teach. This type of belief system is flawed in that it places an ill-advised emphasis on simply insuring that degreed "warm bodies" are available to staff classrooms.

A broad body of educational research supports the reality that the most important component of impacting on student learning is the "quality" of the classroom teacher. All other school reform initiatives pale in comparison to this need. Linda Darling-Hammond, a nationally recognized authority on teacher quality has continually referenced the need for classrooms to be staffed by teachers who are exemplars of the teaching profession. Her succinct summary emphasizes this point:

"Studies at the state, district and individual level have found that teachers 'academic background, preparation for teaching, and certification status, as well as experience significantly affect their students' achievement. These findings extend around the world as well".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2010) Pg.43

## ARIZONA'S TEACHER SHORTAGE REALITY

Superintendents, across the state have, for several years, reported that approximately 30% of new teachers leave Arizona's school districts in their first three years, and 50% leave within five years. There is also a growing concern that a very high percentage of the state's young teachers leave, and will continue to leave, the teaching profession.

This latter concern becomes very evident in reviewing Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) data for the last five years. Initially it is important to point out that the retirement data is all-inclusive, representing all employees working in public schools, and who are members of the state retirement system. However, since teachers represent a very large part of this public school base, certain suppositions (approximations) can be made that underscore the exodus of young teachers in Arizona's schools.

In the last five year period, 13,350 public school staff, ages thirty years and younger, left their respective school districts, taking their refunds from the state retirement system. Teachers constitute a significant percentage of this exiting group; therefore it becomes a reality that Arizona's public schools are losing a treasure trove of young teaching talent.

It can be reasonably predicted that this exodus of young talent will continue—and possibly will dramatically increase—over the next five years. The present and projected departure of young teachers who were, and are, in the beginning stages of honing their pedagogical skills has roots in a number of causal factors including: low salaries, loss of benefits, lack of financial support in the classroom, ill-advised evaluations of their teacher performance and general disillusionment with their profession and working conditions.

The loss of teacher talent issue is further elevated by the ASRS projection that 25,500 public school staff will be eligible for “normal retirement” in 2018. Considering that a significant percentage of these retirees will be teachers further exacerbates the future difficulty of staffing Arizona classrooms. Also, consider that the “normal retirements” do not include the projected early departure of teachers in their first five years—elevating the crisis level for a teacher shortage in the state.

A survey conducted by the Arizona Association of School Superintendents (ASA), conducted in November 2013 offered additional disturbing findings that accentuate the reality that teaching vacancies

still exist several months after the opening of the school year. The survey was sent to all of the state's 227 superintendents, and had a 56% response rate.

The 127 superintendents responding reported that they had 79 teaching vacancies in their schools—largely due to a large number of certified teachers leaving their positions. The main reasons given for leaving are basically the same cited earlier for young teachers leaving their profession. The inherent consideration here is not the number of teacher vacancies, but rather the reality that quality certified teachers are apparently not available. In fact, several superintendents noted that they were employing full-time substitute teachers to address the classroom teacher vacancies.

It can be reasonably predicted that the number of existing vacancies presently existing in the state would be significantly increased if all of the state's superintendents had responded to the survey.

The existence of teaching vacancies—three months into a school year—and the exodus of certified teachers, should serve as a “wake-up call” to state legislators and policy makers as to the escalating reality of the state's teacher shortage, and the dissatisfaction of classroom teachers.

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The essential need to have high quality teachers in every classroom in Arizona is patently evident when taking into consideration the overall negative academic standing for a majority of the state's students, as evidenced on a number of important variables including: low national standings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), low average scores on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) and a record of high dropout rates. Additionally, in a recent report by the Educational Projects in Education Research Center, Arizona finished 44th among states earning grades of C to D- for K-12 achievement.<sup>2</sup> Also, significant achievement gaps exist between minority and non-minority students and between students from low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic communities.

Attention must also be directed to the significant achievement chasm which exists between White and Latino students, as reflected by the percentage of Latino students who meet or exceed standards on AIMS; averaging 21.2 points lower than for White students from third-grade math through high school science. Also, only one in ten Latinos has a college degree. This specific achievement gap should be alarming to

<sup>2</sup> Educational Projects in Education Research Center (EPI), “Report Awards Grades for Education Performance, Policy; Nation Earns a C, Maryland Ranks First for Fourth Straight Year”. Education Week. January 12, 2012

the state's citizens when it is considered that the Latino school age population is booming—and this year outnumbers White students by more than 17,000.<sup>3</sup>

Consideration must also be given to the state's very low college completion rates. This latter reality was recently brought into clear focus in a 2013 report issued by the Arizona Board of Regents.<sup>4</sup> The report looked at the graduating class of 2006 and their college completion rate six years later. The findings are very disquieting:

- 18.6% earned a college degree.
- 32.3% attended some college but did not graduate.
- 43.5% attended no college
- 50% of the state's high schools had 5% or fewer of their graduates from 2005-2006 earn four-year degrees.

It is also important to note 62% of the college degrees earned by the high school class of 2006 went to students from just 40 of the states 460 high schools. These 40 schools, were located in the state's more affluent communities, a finding that speak volumes to the significant achievement gap which exists between the state's rich and poor school districts.

These overall negative findings depict an unfavorable portrayal of the state's K-12 educational system, and should alert the state's policy makers as to the need to immediately address school improvement in the state. A necessary starting point is to insure the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers in every classroom.

## **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION INHIBITORS**

The “iconic moonwalk “of Michael Jackson portrays the illusionary onward movement, while sliding backward, of educational reform being perpetrated by federal state and local officials on our nation's educators. The reality is that legislative acts and school board policies under consideration, or enacted, represent giant steps backward in attracting and retaining a highly competent teacher workforce.

To teach or not to teach, or to remain in teaching, represent an important and timely question to consider in Arizona's continuing discourse on improving its schools? The answer to this question represents a seminal issue as to the quality of the individuals who will teach Arizona's children, and what level of

<sup>3</sup> Arizona Republic, “Commit, raise Latino student achievement”, December 5, 2013, Pg. B10

<sup>4</sup> Arizona Republic, “State's high schools show huge disparity in college grad rates”, Anne Ryman, December 13, 2013 Pg.1

long-term commitment these individuals will have to remaining in the state's teaching force. In making a decision to enter the teaching profession, or to consider remaining in teaching as a career in Arizona, several "inhibitors" exist. These serve to militate against the state's school districts' efforts to maintain a high quality teacher workforce. Certain of these inhibitors include:

### **TEACHER SALARIES**

Arizona has very low and non-competitive teacher salaries including an average starting salary of \$31,700, and an overall average salary of \$47,600—resulting in national rankings of 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> respectfully.

Consider that states, which are widely recognized for high student academic performance, compensate their teachers at levels commensurate with insuring their ability to foster pedagogical excellence in the classroom. Some examples of these average salaries include: New York (\$73,400), Massachusetts (\$71,700) and Connecticut (\$69,400).<sup>5</sup>

Also, consider that, on average, teachers in the United States earn about 70% of the salary of other college-educated workers.<sup>6</sup> Such disparities further exacerbate the difficulty of recruiting and retaining high quality individuals in teaching positions—especially at a time when the marketplace rewards college graduates in other career fields with much higher financial remuneration. It is also important to point out that the buying power of teachers has declined by 2.8% over a ten-year period (2002-2012).

In effect, depressed teacher salaries in Arizona, the accelerating professional job market competition for college educated individuals and depressed teacher buying power does not bode well for the state's efforts to be a "landing place" for high quality teachers.

### **SCHOOL FUNDING**

Arizona has a long history of underfunding its public schools. Consider that the United States average per-pupil expenditure for public elementary and secondary schools in 2012 was \$10,800, and that Arizona fell well below the national average at \$6,680 per-pupil—resulting in a national ranking for the state at 46<sup>th</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Only Utah, Nevada, Oklahoma and Idaho had a lower national ranking.

<sup>5</sup> National Education Association (NEA), Collective Member Advocacy Data Base, 2012

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Rampell, "Does It Pay to become a Teacher", EconomicsBlog.nytimes.com/2012/09/11

<sup>7</sup> National Education Association (NEA), Ranking of the States and Estimates of School Statistic, 2013 www.nea.org/54597.htm

It is also very disturbing to note that the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that Arizona, since 2008, has cut per-pupil funding to a greater degree than all but two states, Oklahoma and Alabama.<sup>8</sup>

While it can be argued that money alone is not a determinant of improved school performance, significant underfunding—which is the case in Arizona—should be recognized as a significant contributor to the state’s low academic performance and its diminishing ability to promote excellence in teaching.

Several states, which have long histories of academic excellence, have made significant commitments to adequately fund their public schools. Consider the average per pupil expenditures of New York (\$18,600), Vermont (\$18,500) and New Jersey (\$18,400).

The reality is that teachers need an abundance of resources to be effective in the classroom including: updated textbooks; technology upgrades; professional development opportunities and increased support services (i.e. social workers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, bilingual specialists, and health personnel).

Increased school funding is also necessary to fairly compensate teachers for their background, training and experience—and reward them for their hard work and dedication.

The impact of underfunding public schools has even greater consequences for those schools which are located in the state’s poorer communities, have a higher percentage of minority children and have substantial lower achievement levels. Students in these schools and their teachers, are in need of substantially more fiscal support and resource allocations, as there are a number of societal factors—over which the students and teachers have no control—which, in turn, impact on student achievement. Such factors include: the deleterious effect of poverty; family unemployment; inadequate housing; gang violence; single parent households; health related issues; domestic upheaval and language barriers.

Richard Rothstein, a nationally recognized authority in school policy has cogently captured the essence of this reality: “Each of these well-documented social class differences between middle-class and lower income students has a small effect on average performance, but their cumulative effect explains much of the achievement gap.”<sup>9</sup> Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers in schools with these encumbering characteristics, and with such low level financial support, represents a major challenge for the state’s poorer school districts.

<sup>8</sup> Center On Budget and Policy Priorities, “Most States Funding Schools Less Than Before the Recession.” Michael Leachman and Chris Mai. September 12, 2013

<sup>9</sup> “Misteaching History on Racial Segregation”. Richard Rothstein, *School Administrator*, American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Pg. 11, Vol. 70



Unless, and until, the state's policy makers make a significant commitment to increase funding for public education, it will be difficult to provide the learning environment and educational resource allocations to convince the "brightest and the best" individuals to teach in Arizona schools.

### ***"BASHING" OF THE TEACHER PROFESSION AND SCHOOLS***

Education consultant and public educator advocate Jamie Vollmer has referred to the increasing attacks on public schools as "the practice of bashing public schools as a blood sport." He likens this to engaging in a dangerous sport in which: "Sensational headlines publicize half-truths, statistics are used out of context, false comparisons are made between past and present, public versus private, and us versus them and test scores are reported in the worst possible light."

Vollmer admits "bashing" public schools has been going on for many years, but he offers a cautionary note that this time the attacks on public education are very different: "We are witnessing a campaign to annihilate the emotional and intellectual ties that bind the American people to their public schools."<sup>10</sup> It is against this debilitating backdrop that the critics of public education erroneously identify the classroom teacher as the main contributor to what they perceive as the malaise of public schools. It is this continued "bashing" of the teaching profession which has dramatically impacted on the psyche of teachers and caused them to seriously question the extent of public support for, and commitment to, their hard work and conscientious efforts. Decisions regarding becoming a teacher, or remaining in teaching as a profession, are diminished in such a climate.

At times, Arizona's news headlines, television commentary, legislative banter, and business/corporate frenzy—represent examples of "bashing" of the teacher profession and schools—and essentially reinforce Vollmer's forewarnings. Arizona's "headline producers" must step back and accept that a myriad of external factors can dramatically affect teacher effectiveness and efficacy, and student learning. Such factors are multifaceted, profound, and often intractable. Clearly, teachers have no control over these external realities, which a significant number of students bring with them to the classrooms daily and which, in turn, are inextricably linked to their academic performance. It is, and will be, very difficult for teachers to aspire to, and build a career, as successful professionals in such an environment.

<sup>10</sup> Jamie Vollmer, "Public School Bashing: A Dangerous Game", American Association of School Administrators, September 2010. [www.aasa.org/conte.aspx?id=16438](http://www.aasa.org/conte.aspx?id=16438)

The road to substantive and sustained school reform is extremely difficult to navigate in a climate, which is taking the very “soul” out of teaching. Arizona policy makers must realize that meaningful school reform—and the essential imperative of recruiting and retaining quality teachers—can only occur by working with teachers in a climate of trust, confidence, and support.

### **ALTERNATE CERTIFICATION FOR TEACHERS**

At times, legislators and policy makers, when confronted with a complex and continuing problem, seek expedient and less costly resolutions to the issue at hand. This is often the case when teacher recruitment and retention are under consideration. One such solution immediately comes to mind, and which is an available option in Arizona.

Many federal, state and local officials—along with corporate and foundation leaders, and “policy gurus”—often present different pathways to certification as the answer to addressing school improvement. They express a point of view that closing the achievement gap, staffing “turnaround schools,” filling teacher vacancies, and meeting the academic needs of low income students can be addressed by non-traditionally trained teachers.

Regrettably, this logic is often represented by Arizona’s leaders and policy makers in their support for alternate certification for teachers, essentially representing a short-termed solution to teacher recruitment in the state.

The “push” for more alternate routes to certification fails to take into account the quintessential nature of a teaching career: being conversant with both the art and science of teaching; understanding how children grow and develop; being cognizant of different learning modalities and possessing the requisite skill sets to address individual student needs.

Regrettably, the advocates of alternate certification seemingly reduce their basic conclusion regarding school reform and teacher engagement to a very simplistic question: “How do we recruit the brightest college graduates into teaching and then place them in our lowest performing schools, and with students who have the greatest academic deficits?” While this question initially appears to have a laudatory goal, other questions, exist which apparently are seldom on a radar screen. The answers to these other questions warrant deeper consideration of alternate certification for recruiting and retaining high quality teachers.

The questions follow:

- *How prepared are these alternately certified teachers to teach students with the greatest academic needs?*
- *Is it fair to students with significant academic deficiencies in low income urban areas to be served by alternately prepared certified teachers assigned to their schools simply because they have a degree?*
- *Is having a strong knowledge base in a particular academic subject area, which represents only one component of a fully prepared teacher's repertoire, sufficient to the task of teaching students with the greatest academic needs?*
- *Where does the long-term body of research and evaluation data reside, which supports the successes and accomplishments of alternatively certified teachers when compared to traditionally prepared teachers?*
- *Is there any other profession, which would allow individuals with alternate certificates to substitute as professionals in their disciplines? To further expand on this question, would anyone consider going to an alternatively certified: doctor to perform surgery, dentist to perform a root canal, architect to design a house, or lawyer to defend a lawsuit?*
- *Do the proponents of expanding alternate route certification really believe that anyone with a college or university degree can teach, and are they prepared to have this "anyone" teach their own children?*

Teach for America (TFA) is widely recognized as the premier alternate route to teacher certification, and is an initiative being utilized in Arizona's schools. Granted, these newly minted teacher recruits have strong academic backgrounds and certain subject matter expertise. Some graduates in Arizona have also become outstanding administrators and educational policy leaders. However, even when TFA graduates and other alternatively certified teachers demonstrate prowess in their teaching skills, the reality is that a significant percentage of them leave the teaching profession within 2-3 years. Diane Ravitch, a nationally recognized authority on educational policy, has pointed out this reality: "Most TFA teachers in urban communities leave after their two year commitment ends, and 80% or more are gone after their third or fourth years."<sup>11</sup>

All schools—especially low-performing schools—need the best teachers, with proven records of accomplishments to advance the educational progress of their students. Therefore, while alternatively certified teachers can be used to address persistent teacher shortages, a reliance on their continued use should not be seen as the answer to meeting the long-term needs of Arizona's students, especially those with significant academic deficiencies.

<sup>11</sup> Diane Ravitch, *Death and Life of the Great American School System*. (New York: Basic Books, 2010) Pg. 190

If Arizona is truly committed to improving student achievement, addressing the academic needs of disadvantaged students and closing the achievement gap—then it will need teachers who are committed for the long haul. Such an effort will require a teaching force ready to make an extensive time commitment to the teaching profession, and grasp the importance for students to have teacher continuity in their classrooms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Without question, a majority of these recommendations will necessitate significant financial commitments by the state. The impact of the cost implications can be justified if Arizona’s policy makers consider the state’s low student achievement levels, the inherent difficulty in recruiting and retaining a high quality teacher workforce and the long term impact of continued low student achievement on the state’s economic future.

### **1. INCREASE TEACHER SALARIES**

There are those who will question the wisdom of highlighting teacher salaries as the first recommendation to recruit and retain high quality teachers to Arizona. They believe that teacher compensation is a minor factor and, if raised at all as a consideration, should be included as a small part of any school reform consideration. The reality is that teachers, like any other profession requiring advanced college degree requirements, should be compensated commensurate with their training and expertise, dedication to their work and commitment to their students.

Marc Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, offers a vivid depiction of the substandard wages paid to teachers — a depiction which should resonate with Arizona’s policy makers:

“Not only do teachers make markedly less than other occupations requiring the same level of education, but census data shows that teachers have been falling further and further behind the average compensation for occupations requiring a college degree for 60 years.”<sup>12</sup> Tucker adds: “We do little or nothing about starting salaries that will not permit a young family to support a small family in the style to which college graduates are accustomed in this country. In most places, teaching continues to be a dead-end career, with no routes up except those that lead out of teaching.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tucker, Mark S. “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An Agenda for School Reform”, National center on Education and the Economy. 2008-2. Pg. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Tucker, Mark S. “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An Agenda for School Reform”, National center on Education and the Economy. 2008-2. Pg. 14.

Initially, in considering teacher salary increases in Arizona, it is important to reflect on a national perspective for addressing adequate remuneration for America's teachers. A study released in 2010 by the highly respected consulting firm of McKinsey & Co, offered a sobering conclusion which merits the attention of all legislators and policy makers: "The country could raise top-third new hires from 14% to 68% by paying new teachers at least \$65,000 and offering a maximum salary of \$150,000.<sup>14</sup>

Without question, considering such a recommendation—albeit well deserved by teachers—would be problematic among state's legislators and policy makers. Hence, it becomes responsible to consider a salary proposal, which takes into consideration the state's economic standing, cost-of-living considerations and sensible and realistic tax considerations.

***Recommendation: The Arizona legislature should consider supporting a dedicated fund, providing school districts with the financial resources to increase teacher salaries over a three -year period to achieve the national averages for beginning teachers and experienced teachers.***

A commitment of this type would send a message as to the legislature's commitment to its teachers, and its resolve to be competitive in recruiting and retaining an exemplary teacher workforce.

## **2. INCREASE PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURES**

Arizona has an ongoing distinction of continuously being ranked near the very bottom nationally on its financial support of its public schools. It is not a coincidence that, at the same time, the state's school fiscal challenges escalate. Arizona's student achievement levels are consistently near the bottom of national rankings.

Additionally, there exists a correlation between inadequate financial support and the ability to attract the "brightest and the best" to teach in the state's schools, and to retain high quality experienced teachers for its classrooms.

Arizona's leaders and policy makers must fully grasp that the future of the state's social fiber and its economic stability and prosperity are inextricably linked to the quality of its education system. In this context, it is imperative that all students are achieving at levels commensurate with realizing their personal life goals and being future contributors to the state's growth and development.

<sup>14</sup> "Closing the Achievement Gap: Attracting and Retaining Top Third Graduates in Teaching", McKenzie & Company Report. Cited in Gerald Tirozzi, *Stop the School Bus: Getting Education Reform Back On Track*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2012) Pg. 63

Arizona's leaders and policy makers must also comprehend that the long-standing abysmal financial track record of the state in funding its public schools represents a significant deterrent to teacher recruitment and retention. It can be predicted that unless greater financial support is provided in the future, the problem of insuring that exemplary teachers will staff Arizona classrooms will be exacerbated.

*Recommendation: The legislature should convene a “blue ribbon” School Finance Commission—represented by legislative leaders, education leadership associations, school board members, business/corporate leaders and parent representatives—to develop a new school funding formula, which provides significant additional financial support for the state’s schools.* Special consideration in these deliberations should be given to insuring that the state’s poorest school districts receive an additional level of funding commensurate with their meeting the multifaceted needs of their students and teachers. Additionally, the Commission should re-visit the state’s tax-refund program and propose ways by which a program of this type can provide greater funding equity between the state’s affluent and poor school districts.

### **3. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR FIRST YEAR TEACHERS**

The national attrition rate of beginning teachers has been rapidly increasing since 1994. Today, over 30% of newly minted teachers leave the profession and an even much higher percentage exit from urban and poor school districts. A majority of these teachers leave before they have adequate time to become proficient educators, honing their teaching skills and acumen. This staffing turnover affects just about every school district, and has its most concentrated impact on chronically underperforming schools, serving low-income children.

The magnitude of this reality is cogently reflected in a report issued by The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future:

“These schools rarely close the student achievement gap because they never close the teaching quality gap – they are constantly rebuilding their staff. Their students struggle year after year with a passing parade of inexperienced beginners, while students in high performing schools enjoy the support of teams of accomplished veterans who sustain a culture of success in their schools decade after decade”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Who will Teach? Experience Matters” (Washington D.C. January, 2010) Pg. 4

There are a variety of reasons for experiencing the significant departure of teacher talent in its formative years, several of which have already been referenced in this paper. They include: low salaries, inadequate per-pupil expenditures, low staff morale, “bashing” of the teacher profession and schools, and pursuing other professional opportunities.

Another underlying cause, which merits consideration, is the lack of professional support provided for beginning teachers, resulting in a sense of personal isolation in the classroom. It is often the case that new teachers are literally on their own, feeling a sense of being overwhelmed with their nascent responsibilities, and not having a support system at this critical induction period.

***Recommendation:*** The success of first year teachers is inextricably linked to the quality of the student teacher experiences that are available to them and represent harbingers predicting first year teacher success. ***The Arizona Department of Education should work closely with school districts to insure high quality and instructive student teaching experiences.***

In this effort, specific criteria should be in place to insure that being designated as a supervising teacher, to monitor the development of student teachers, and to provide the support and assistance necessary to enhance their development, requires a record of accomplished teaching. Regrettably, this isn't often the case. Indeed, there exists a long history in public schools of supervisory teachers being selected at random, with minimal attention paid to their ability to perform the necessary functions.

***It is further recommended that the state department of education work with local school district and university based teacher preparation programs to train and certify “master teachers,” those assigned to supervise student teachers***

This should include a rigorous selection process and an intensive summer training program. Special consideration should be given to providing state and/or district funded stipends to “master teachers,” based on the number of student teachers under their tutelage.

***Each first year teacher in the state should be assigned a mentor teacher, who is trained, and who possesses a state certification.***

The mentor teacher should also be a practicing classroom teacher, providing more credibility for the support and guidance provided—as well as allowing for the beginning teacher the opportunity to observe the mentor teacher in his/ her own classroom setting. The mentor teachers should be provided state and/or local funded stipends for providing their time and expertise.

The importance of having “teacher exemplars” available to first year teachers cannot be overstated. This type of sustained support is invaluable to novice teachers, and will serve to enhance their pedagogical skills, and their future commitment to the profession.

#### **4. PLACE A GREATER VALUE ON RETAINING EXPERIENCED TEACHERS.**

It is often the case that in addressing teacher shortages, an overreliance is placed on recruiting new teachers to the profession. Without question, bringing “new blood” into the teaching profession represents the infusion of new ideas and energies. However, placing an inordinate focus on the recruitment of “rookie teachers” overlooks the imperative of retaining veteran teachers whose extensive experience and commitment to the profession are difficult to replace. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future has noted that there is an emerging wisdom that in having a competent teacher workforce, “experience doesn’t matter.” They caution: “This is a belief that may add comfort to those who staff their schools year after year with inexperienced beginners, but we find little acceptance of this notion among school leaders in high-performing schools, who are committed to recruiting and retaining accomplished veterans.”<sup>16</sup>

Further, in their 2010 report, the Commission offered a finding that “we are now facing an unprecedented wave of retirements, on top of beginning teacher attrition, that has grown worse over the past 15 years”. They offer an alarming conclusion: “There is no way that current recruiting strategies—even in hyper drive—can meet this challenge.”<sup>17</sup>

To further reinforce this latter concern, it is important to consider that the relative odds of young teachers leaving are 184% higher than for middle age teachers.<sup>18</sup> The strong implication to consider is that the traditional practice of continually hiring new teachers does not provide a reliable solution to staffing challenges and it undermines efforts to improve teacher effectiveness.

16 National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Who will Teach? Experience Matters” (Washington D.C. January, 2010) Pg. 5

17 National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Who will Teach? Experience Matters” (Washington D.C. January, 2010) Pg. 5

18 National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Who will Teach? Experience Matters” (Washington D.C. January, 2010) Pg. 12



The importance of experience in the classroom cannot be overstated. Research has documented that with each year of experience, teachers improve their teaching and effectiveness during their first seven years. Further, “National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification demonstrates that many teachers are still gaining in proficiency and improving their effectiveness after 11 years of teaching.”<sup>19</sup>

Arizona’s policy makers and school district leaders should place an emphasis on efforts to elevate the status of veteran teachers by: dramatically increasing their salaries, providing public recognition for their commitment to the profession and affording opportunities for career growth and professional fulfillment.

***Recommendation: The state legislature should consider reinstating its commitment to career ladder-type opportunities for experienced teachers.*** The career ladder initiative that has been in place in the state has been well received in the state’s schools, and has provided professional growth opportunities for teachers. Regrettably, this initiative is being phased out, due largely to a lack of state funding.

In reconsidering the need to continue its support and funding for career ladders, the legislature should assess the reality that teaching as a profession is very limited in terms of having prospects for advancement, unless the teacher is prepared to leave the classroom and seek out an administrative type position. The impetus for such a change is generally precipitated by the need to increase one’s salary—reflecting the reality that teacher salary schedules are very stagnant, and take many years of service to realize a “decent” level of remuneration. Teacher salaries often allow no potential for their various skill sets to be recognized and rewarded.

To address this conundrum, there is a need to revisit teacher career ladders, providing teachers the opportunity to expand their roles outside the classroom in a variety of ways including: mentoring new teachers; functioning as curriculum specialists, leading professional development programs; serving as peer evaluators; coaching experienced teachers in need of assistance and providing assistance in various leadership roles.

The Arizona career ladder program has also afforded the opportunity for teachers to receive additional remuneration for their expanded roles. An important consideration in this type of “salary adjustment” is that the teacher is being rewarded for her/his skill sets. In effect, this does not fall under the heading of any type of pay-for-performance; rather teachers are compensated for their respective expertise, knowledge base and level of providing school-wide support.

<sup>19</sup> National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “Who will Teach? Experience Matters” (Washington D.C. January, 2010) Pg. 19

To this latter point, legislators should consider redirecting some level of funding being allocated for various “pay-for performance” initiatives, to continue funding for the state’s career ladders for teachers. In their consideration in this matter, legislators should confront the reality that no documented body of research exists to supports the contention that teacher “pay for performance” improves student achievement. Conversely, a wide body of research is available that validates the failed efforts to link teacher salaries to student outcomes.

The critical point for legislative deliberation is that state fiscal resources could be better served by providing funding for opportunities teacher growth and development, professional advancement, and personal self-actualization. All of these essential components are imbedded in providing career ladder opportunities for the state’s teaching force. It is also important to reflect on the reality that the state will be in a much stronger position to recruit and retain high quality teachers in a climate of professional support and recognition—rather than merely committing to compensating teachers for student academic gains.

***The state legislature should provide a dedicated fund to local school districts to plan and implement comprehensive and sustained professional development for teachers.***

On a national level, professional development for teachers historically has ranked at the very bottom for financial consideration. It has been reported that less than one-percent of school district budgets are dedicated to this important area. This level of funding pales in comparison to the significant financial commitment of the business/corporate sector in providing professional opportunities for their employees.

It is imperative that teachers have continuing opportunities to hone their instructional skills and enhance their career growth and development. Due to fiscal constraints, many of the state’s school districts expend minimal funds to augment the skill sets of their respective teaching staffs. The imperative to address this deficiency takes on a greater sense of urgency as the state implements its new College and Career Ready Standards—commonly referred to Common Core Standards in most other states. The new Arizona standards will necessitate that teachers be prepared to provide instruction in new and different ways, and insure alignment with the curricula and the pending rigorous assessments. Such preparation of teachers must be intensive and ongoing if the state’s students are to be successful in mastering the more rigorous and demanding standards.

In addition, teachers are more likely to continue their commitment to Arizona's schools if they feel that they are being provided the requisite resources, and a demonstrated commitment to their professional advancement.

***The legislature and the state department of education should increase support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) as a vehicle to advance veteran teacher growth and development.***

The NBPTS is a nationally recognized, long standing program to identify, and provide recognition to exemplars of the teaching profession. The national certification awarded is intended for experienced teachers, based on a lengthy and rigorous assessment process, and speaks volumes to the reality that accomplished teachers are eager to engage in professional challenges throughout their careers.

Since its inception, approximately 100,000 teachers nationally have received national board certification. In addition, several states have provided substantial remuneration for those teachers, in their respective states, who have achieved this standard of professional excellence.

Arizona can be proud of the fact that the state has 1,078 nationally board certified teachers, ranking 19th in the country. In effect, there exists an opportunity for the state to build on the expertise and commitment of these nationally recognized teachers to stimulate interest in other veteran teachers to pursue national board certification. This goal would be enhanced if intensive professional development opportunities were made available by the state department of education and local school districts to prepare teachers for the demanding certification process, and the legislature provide a dedicated fund for "bonus" remuneration to those teachers who become nationally board certified. A dedicated fund of this type would insure that all school districts would be able to compensate NBPTS teachers—not just a select few school districts who are now providing some level of compensation for this national recognition. Providing teachers with this type of professional growth and recognition, and monetary compensation, would greatly enhance the potential for the state's school districts in their teacher retention efforts.

Also, developing a growing core of teacher exemplars in the state would be "value added" as the expertise of this cadre of teachers could be utilized to support both beginning teachers and veteran teachers. Some examples of the type of assistance envisioned include the already referenced support systems including: serving as mentor to first year teachers, leading professional development learning

communities, developing and implementing curricula and technology innovation, proving classroom demonstration lessons and serving as “coaches” to other experienced teachers as deemed necessary.

Having Arizona recognized as a “bell weather” state for a commitment to dramatically increasing national board certification for its teachers would represent an advantage for the state’s school districts in their continued recruitment and retention of a high quality teaching workforce.

## **SUMMARY**

This policy paper is intended to bring into clear focus an emerging problem in Arizona’s schools—the critical shortage of high quality teachers for the state’s students. Fundamental to this problem is the escalating difficulty for school districts to be competitive in teacher recruitment and retention. Additionally, an emphasis is placed on the urgency to address this problem, emanating from the overall low academic standing of the state’s students.

Several underlying “inhibitors” are identified which militate against the efforts of school districts to recruit and retain a high quality teacher workforce. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations intended to provide a framework for the state’s policy makers and legislators, working in cooperation with local school district leaders, to position the state be more effective, in a highly competitive national marketplace for recruiting and retaining exemplary teachers.

Hopefully, each recommendation will receive serious consideration, and provide a launching pad for a statewide discourse as to the types of reform strategies, which can serve to propel the teaching profession in Arizona into a more positive and well-deserved future. In turn, realizing such a future portends well for improved student achievement and closing the academic gap.

Public education is at a critical crossroad in Arizona. A need exists to address the state’s very low overall student achievement levels, high dropout rates, depressed college/university completion rates, and significant achievement disparities between students in poor school districts and those in more affluent school districts. Additionally, the state must confront the achievement inequalities, which exist between minority and non-minority students.

Unless, and until, these substantial student achievement deficiencies are confronted, it is not unreasonable to assume that the state's future economic stability and growth could be negatively impacted, the social fiber of the state could weaken and community support for public education could rapidly erode.

While there are no simple solutions or “instant recipes” to apply to the underlying complex problems commensurate with improving student achievement, one essential component to advance student learning cannot be overlooked, *insuring high quality teaching in the classroom*. In effect, Arizona should build its school improvement foundation on the premise that *the teacher is the center of the education universe!* President Obama himself has expressed support for this conclusion: “I always have to remind people that biggest ingredient in school performance is the teacher. That's the biggest ingredient within a school”.<sup>20</sup>

The operative phrase in the President's observation, regarding the impact of the teacher in school improvement, is “*within a school.*” External and societal factors aside—over which teachers have no control— excellence in teaching is truly the greatest determinant to improved student learning.

The importance of addressing the current and projected teaching shortage in the state represents an urgent challenge to state leaders, parents and the greater Arizona community to focus their collective attention on the resolution of this problem.

***It would be a timely and appropriate step for the Governor's office, or the State Department of Education to convene and empower a broadly representative high-level Commission to have serious deliberations concerning the underlying considerations inherent in the state's teacher shortage— and to fashion a series of recommendations to address the problem.***

Expectantly, the series of recommendations imbedded in this policy paper can serve as a supporting structure to augment the work of the Commission.

Additionally, the teacher shortage issue can receive an added emphasis by involving the “Arizona Town Hall” which has a long and distinguished history that has served to guide the state's civic, political, business and community leaders in addressing a wide array of areas impacting on the state and its citizens.

<sup>20</sup> Barack Obama. Cited in Richard Rothstein, “How to Fix Our Schools”, Education Policy Institute, October 14, 2010. Pg. 1

***Subsequently, the “Arizona Town Hall” should become a significant resource to engage the people of Arizona in community forums designed to bring into clear focus the underlying problems inherent in recruiting and retaining a high quality-teaching workforce for the state.***

In conclusion, any, and all, attempts at school reform in Arizona will have little, if any, impact on improved student achievement unless the foundational piece of such effort is rooted in insuring the quality of the classroom teacher. To this end the state has an inherent moral and constitutional responsibility to provide its local school districts with the requisite fiscal support and level of resources to enhance their efforts to be competitive in recruiting “top notch” teachers—and elevating the potential for the retention of experienced teachers. The time is now for Arizona’s legislators, policy makers and community leaders to send a clear message as to its commitment to support its teachers, and to advance teaching as a profession.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Gerald N. Tirozzi served as an Executive Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) until July 1, 2011. Dr. Tirozzi has an extensive background in the educational field and is a nationally recognized leader in education reform. Prior to joining NASSP in March 1999, Dr. Tirozzi held a variety of positions in the field of education. These included: Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education...from 1996 to 1999; Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Connecticut from 1993 to 1995; President of Wheelock College from 1991 to 1993; Commissioner of Education in Connecticut from 1983 to 1991; Superintendent of New Haven (CT) Public Schools from 1977 to 1983. Early in his career, Tirozzi also served as science teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Dr. Tirozzi serves on a number of national educational advisory boards, task forces, and professional organizations. Some of these include: the Educational Research Service, the League, the Learning First Alliance, Pearson Education National Policy Board, the USA Today Education Advisory Panel, and the U.S. Department of State's Overseas Schools Advisory Council. Dr. Tirozzi is the author of numerous articles on educational topics that have been published in educational and scholarly journals. Some of these writings have been collected in the publication, *Reflections on School Leadership*. Dr. Tirozzi's public service and leadership have been recognized by a number of state and national organizations. Some of these include: the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, the Horace Mann League, the U.S. Department of Education, Michigan State University, and the Connecticut Legislature. Dr. Tirozzi holds a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Educational Administration and Higher Education from Michigan State University. He has a Sixth Year Certificate in Education Administration from Fairfield University in Connecticut. He received a Master of Arts Degree in Guidance and Counseling and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from Southern Connecticut State University.

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