A teacher shortage is hitting Arizona hard, with 62 percent of public schools reporting unfilled teaching positions in September 2014, according to an Arizona Department of Education survey. To make matters worse, 23 percent of Arizona educators will be eligible to retire in the next four years, according to the Arizona State Retirement System’s October 2014 Fact Sheet.

“Arizona is facing a crisis in education right now,” said Kristie Martorelli, Arizona Educational Foundation’s 2012 Teacher of the Year. “We have hundreds of unfilled teaching positions in districts and schools all around our state.”

Teacher preparation programs say fewer students are enrolling, said Martorelli, professional development coordinator at Dysart Unified School District. “The teachers who are coming into our profession are not staying, and those who have been here for many years are choosing to leave early,” Martorelli said. “This poses a tremendous challenge for our students, teachers and districts.”

The National Council on Teacher Quality has cited Arizona State University’s student teaching program, iTeachAZ, as exemplary among 2,420 teacher preparation programs it evaluated nationwide. The recent Educator Retention and Recruitment Report recommends ways for policy makers, local education agencies and the Arizona Department of Education to help Arizona schools attract new teachers and keep effective ones.

“Our legislators can help education by seeking advice and recommendations from education professionals working in the industry – not just college professors,” said Dr. Christopher Bonn, superintendent/principal of Sonoita Elementary School District in Elgin, a small town along the Babocomari River in Santa Cruz County.

If the teacher shortage continues, “Arizona will not be able to ensure economic prosperity for its citizens and create the workforce of tomorrow,” according to the report by the Arizona Department of Education’s Educator

Continued on page 4
In January, AZEDNews reached its one-year anniversary. In April we were honored with an Award of Excellence by the Arizona School Public Relations Association for our commitment to providing accurate news focused on legislative, legal and policy issues and action related to K-12 education.

We are proud of the accomplishments that AZEDNews has achieved so far in its infancy stage, and can’t wait to see what the year ahead has in store for us.

Best regards,
Tracey Benson
DIRECTOR, ARIZONA EDUCATION NEWS
SERVICE ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARIZONA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

AZEDNews original articles featured in this issue were reported and written by ASBA education reporter Lisa Irish (lirish@azsba.org). Intern Caitlin Bohrer also contributed to AZEdNews reporting.
As Arizona students begin to take AzMERIT for the first time, teachers and administrators describe how they’ve prepared for the new assessment and parents and students voice their concerns. Beginning this week, students throughout Arizona will take AzMERIT (Arizona’s Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching), which measures their mastery of Arizona’s College and Career Ready Standards in math and English/Language Arts.

AzMERIT replaces AIMS (Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards), which measured students’ proficiency with the previous standards through 10th grade. Students in fourth- and eighth- grades and high school will continue to take the AIMS Science test until a new assessment is developed.

In response to requests from the education community to give students, teachers and schools time to adapt to the new test, Gov. Doug Ducey recently signed a bill that will delay application of the test results to school and district letter grades, students’ grades and teacher evaluations for this year. In December, the Arizona State Board of Education decided to suspend school A-F letter grades for a year as schools get used to the new test. School letter grades are partially based on students’ scores on a statewide assessment.

Preparing for a new test can be a difficult, especially with a limited amount of time to expose students to the new format and potential questions. Student practice tests were released to the public on February 20 and can be found on AzMERIT’s information portal where other resources for students, parents and educators are located.

Stanfield Elementary students have been doing daily review questions on high-priority skills, said Pamela Houston, a third-grade teacher at the school in Pinal County. “This daily review is for reading, grammar and math,” Houston said. “It provides much needed spiral review for the skills third-graders have learned over the course of the school year.”

Some teachers at Mingus Union High School in Yavapai County said students have been doing practice tests to become more familiar with content and format. Others say they’ve kept students focused on learning the content through rigorous lessons. All teachers at the Cottonwood school agree that preparing for the assessment goes beyond practice tests.

“My preparation for any exam – whether it’s an exit exam, benchmark, or content test – is to teach students to read closely and think critically,” said one Mingus teacher. “My students read, discuss, analyze and write about (or from) a wide range of literature and functional texts, using evidence from the texts to support what they think or say. I believe following best practices of teaching utilizing the ACCRS standards is the best way to prepare students for any exam.” The students are preparing for state testing even if they don’t realize it, another teacher said, noting that “vocabulary building is an ongoing preparation for the test – and for life.”

At Higley Unified’s Power Ranch Elementary School, faculty concentrate on teaching to the new standards, which has helped prepare students for AzMERIT, said Sherry Richards, principal.

Read full article at www.azednews.com to find out the lingering concerns some parents, students and teachers had about the new assessment.
Arizona legislature passes budget; Districts release their responses

*Originally published March 17, 2015*

The Arizona Legislature passed a $9.1 billion budget early Saturday morning over the objections of some lawmakers and many community members, parents, school leaders and school advocates. Since then, 15 school districts around the state have passed resolutions or released letters to community members about the budget, including Sunnyside, Paradise Valley, Vail and Tolleson Union districts.

Sunnyside Unified School District Governing Board’s resolution stated that “The school year 2016 budget adversely affects business, the local and state economy, our ability to compete as a state against other states, and will affect household income today, tomorrow and for generations to come.” Sunnyside said the budget will cut $2.1 million from its maintenance and operations budget and cut $574,000 from the JTED.

“Representatives of the Tucson Metro Chamber and Southern Arizona business community have recently stated they support a stronger base for education and feel that the State’s budget legislation is disappointing at best and devastating at worst,” stated the Sunnyside resolution. The budget was moved rapidly through the process, despite initial opposition from some Republican lawmakers, but Democrats said the way it was done prevented transparency and oversight, according to the Associated Press.

Vail Superintendent Calvin Baker noted in a letter to the community that the actual budget reduces funding $27 per student, cuts district-sponsored charter schools funding by half, and decreases funding for students taking Joint Technical Education District classes by $400 per student. “Overall, the district’s strained budget will be strained further,” Baker wrote. “The general impact of the budget that passed will require reduction of staff and programs beginning July 1st. Included in those reductions will be full-day kindergarten programs at two schools. While the cuts in the actual budget are not as devastating as they would have been with the proposed budget, the cuts are still going to be substantial and painful,” Baker said.

Many rank and file lawmakers threatened to vote against the budget unless there were serious changes made to the proposal’s deep cuts to higher education. In the end, however, they only got slight reductions to the governor’s proposed cuts, along with a series of minor changes to policies and bottom lines in the 13-bill budget package, according to the Arizona Capitol Times. The Senate and House approved the budget by thin margins. In the Senate, five of the budget bills required the vote of a sole Democrat, Sen. Carlyle Begay, along with 15 Republicans, to send the measures to the governor’s desk, according to the Arizona Capitol Times.

On a 16-13-1 vote, the GOP Senate voted for a plan (SB1469) that cut university budgets by $99 million instead of the proposed $104 million and restored state support for rural community colleges, according to The Arizona Republic. The House of Representatives passed the main budget bill (SB1476) on a 32-27-1 vote, according to The Arizona Republic.

Read full article at www.azednews.com to learn what was identified as one of the biggest sticking points related to K-12 funding

Where have our teachers gone? – continued

Retention and Recruitment Task Force.

“Regardless of the standards, assessment, curriculum or any other factor we might put in place in education, our students will continue to struggle without a high-quality, caring and committed teacher in every classroom in Arizona,” Martorelli said. The shortage of highly-qualified teachers for the past few years has led many Arizona public school leaders to seek candidates from other states and in some cases from other countries. Right now, all Arizona school districts are currently in a desperate struggle to find qualified teachers for next year, and most new teachers come from out-of-state, said Dr. Frank Davidson, superintendent of Casa Grande Elementary School District.

Read full article at www.azednews.com to find out how school districts are finding teachers and keeping them, and which school districts have the highest unfilled teaching positions.
Have you ever washed a rental car? Had its oil changed? Or given it a tune-up? Most people would say no, because they don’t have the desire to take care of a car that they don’t own. Jeff Fuller, superintendent of Whiteriver Unified School District, says he often uses this analogy to explain why some kids in his district struggle in taking pride in their education. They don’t own their “car.” “We want the kids to own what their success is going to be,” he said.

Whiteriver Unified School District is located on the Fort Apache Reservation in parts of Navajo, Gila and Apache counties in Arizona and serves the White Mountain Apache Tribe. It consists of about 2,300 students across five traditional schools and one alternative high school. Violent crime, suicide, depression and high unemployment rate are issues that people of the White Mountain Apache community deal with regularly.

About five years ago, Whiteriver Unified conducted research and talked to parents and students in an attempt to raise test scores. What the district learned was that what administrators thought was important didn’t match up with what families and students thought was important.

“Is a single test really the best indicator of student success? Could it be that I am asking them to take care of a car that they don’t own?” Fuller asked. “How do you get them to have a car that they own, that they want to take care of and want to take ownership in, rather than us telling them what is important?”

Educators should “look at tribal values and academic values and find ways to bridge those together to help students succeed,” said Theresa Price, director of Native American education programs for Mesa Public Schools and the Phoenix Indian Center’s 2014 Woman of the Year. Price is Hopi and Navajo.

“Each child has a significant background of tribal history, tribal ceremonies and tribal teachings that they come to school with,” Price said. “Students are living in two worlds – their cultural world and society. It’s a challenge sometimes to bring together these two worlds.”

The answer that Fuller and Whiteriver Unified came up with was to instill a sense of hope and optimism into the students through the Kids at Hope program. Whiteriver is the first reservation school district in the United States to adopt the Phoenix-based non-profit organization’s program that connects children with caring adults who believe in them to help them draw a road map to reach the future they want.

According to its website, Kids at Hope inspires, empowers, and transforms families, youth serving organizations (schools, parks and recreation departments, police and fire departments, etc.) and entire communities to create an environment where all children experience success, no exceptions! “It is not so much a program as it is a philosophy,” Fuller said. “If you have hope for your future, all of a sudden there are things that you are doing towards that hope that become relevant to you and school can be a part of that.”

Read full article at www.azednews.com to find out how Kids at Hope helped Whiteriver Unified students increase achievement and confidence by changing its culture.
Arizona K-12 district classroom spending has held steady at 53.8 percent for the past two years, and Arizona continues to spend less than the national average on administration, according to a report released today by the State of Arizona Office of the Auditor General. Arizona’s spending on instruction is lower than the national average of 60.9 percent in part to Arizona’s larger class sizes, according to the Arizona School District Spending (Classroom Dollars) Fiscal Year 2014 report.

Arizona averaged 18.6 students per teacher compared to the national average of 16 students per teacher. All of the state’s 236 school district were included in calculating the 2014 statewide classroom spending percentage. Still, a number of Arizona school districts spent more in the classroom than the national average, including Gilbert Unified, Chandler Unified, Safford Unified, Pima Unified, Red Rock Elementary, Blue Elementary, Hillside Elementary, Aguila Elementary, Double Adobe Elementary, Bonita Elementary and Pima Accommodation School District. Crown King Elementary School District met the national average.

“We need to get away from comparing Arizona to the national average and decide in Arizona what we want classroom spending to be and develop a plan to do that,” said Chuck Essigs, director of governmental relations for Arizona Association of School Business Officials. The percentage of classroom spending has declined 1.2 percent nationally in the past 13 years and decreased by 3.9 percent in Arizona during the same time frame, Essigs said.

“This report points to Arizona’s urgent need to start putting classrooms first and direct more dollars where the learning happens,” said Governor Doug Ducey. “We cannot be content with the status quo when we continue to spend significantly less than the national average in the classroom. We owe it to Arizona students and teachers to ensure more money gets to our classrooms so we can be successful in the mission at-hand – improving education results for all Arizona students.”

Superintendent of Public Education Diane Douglas said she appreciates the work of Arizona’s public district and charter schools. “It is time to stop looking at percentages when we evaluate our schools and their spending. Schools spend dollars, not percentages,” Douglas said. Douglas noted that the Arizona numbers are based on 2014, while the most current national numbers are from 2012.

“If you take into account the increases made by other states during the last two years, there is an even more stark contrast,” Douglas said. “For instance, Arizona is a large state so transportation costs per pupil are much higher than in Rhode Island, Massachusetts or other more compact regions.”

Read full article at www.azednews.com to understand why Arizona focused more money to support students and instruction as a whole, compared to the national average.
Two hundred fifty public education, business, non-profit, civic and government leaders examined crucial leadership strategies and promising practices and gathered resources to close gaps in opportunity that are keeping thousands of Arizona students from achieving at high levels during The Equity Event April 9 through 10 in Phoenix.

The event, a first-of-its-kind undertaking, was hosted by Arizona School Boards Association in partnership with the Helios Education Foundation and WestEd and with support from the national Minority Student Achievement Network.

Equity means that every student has the opportunity he or she needs to graduate ready for college, career and life regardless of factors such as family income, where they live, their race or ethnicity, culture or physical or mental ability. For education to be equitable, all students, whether they attend a school with high or low rates of poverty, should have access to the services they need, experienced teachers, rigorous curriculum and up-to-date learning resources, technology, facilities.

“Over the decade, I’ve read studies on the education achievement gap, between minorities and whites, between low-income and high-income students, we’re not going to beat that again with a stick,” said Kim Covington, former 12 News anchor and School Solutions reporter at the event. “We’re going to talk about solutions.” Covington introduced a panel of students, each who had overcome significant challenges, who talked about their goals, the educational opportunities at their public schools that had supported those goals and their ideas to help other students.

At The Equity Event, Dunn and Dr. David Schauer, superintendent of the Kyrene Elementary School District, discussed how Kyrene district leaders and educators are benefitting from an equity inquiry process that is now underway in the 17,774-student district. “The equity inquiry process is a way to examine your data through an equity lens to help you look at what the equity issues are in your district, their possible root causes and ultimately some strategies to help you address those issues,” Dunn said.

After identifying students’ opportunity gaps or needs, schools should invest in community and government partnerships to provide services that students need, said Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, who was the event’s opening speaker. “The solutions emerge as more cost-effective, more politically palatable, with no doubt a greater possibility of improving results,” Carvalho said.

Read full article at www.azednews.com to learn what challenges Arizona children face in schools and in their communities plus view a video discussing the importance of equity by ASBA Executive Director Dr. Timothy Ogle.

“Equity means that every student has the opportunity he or she needs to graduate ready for college, career and life regardless of factors such as family income, where they live, their race or ethnicity, culture or physical or mental ability.”
A recent national survey ranked communication top on the list of skills needed for students to succeed in today’s world, followed by reading, math and then teamwork, and Arizona education leaders aren’t surprised. In fact, they have been developing and enhancing classroom strategies for building these skills in students over the past five years, and say the state math and language arts standards that have been in place since 2010 reinforce the need to do so.

“These skills are important factors in student success in the workplace, college and life,” said Sara Martinez Crawford, technology project director at AZ K12 Center. “For example, companies such as Intel, informed participants that they do not assess content knowledge of interviewees until they have determined that the candidate will fit into the culture of the company,” Crawford said.

In the past five years, Arizona teachers have increased the time K-12 students spend developing these soft skills as well as professionalism, intergenerational and cross-cultural competence and legal, ethical and financial best practices. Those efforts are part of the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards and the Arizona Workplace Employability Skills created by Arizona business and industry leaders along with educators in 2010. The Pew Research Center survey of randomly selected adults which was released earlier this month showed communication and collaboration ranking above science, athletic, music and art skills.

“The premise that soft skills are more important than even the technical and general education backgrounds of workers has been confirmed by not only multiple research projects, but also the daily experiences of teachers, counselors and job placement professionals working with youth and others who are entering the workforce for the first time,” writes Lee Bruno in the American Institutes for Research.

Read full article at www.azednews.com to find out why are soft skills so important plus watch a video by the Arizona K-12 Center that teachers can use to bring real work relevance into the classroom.

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Alberto Carvalho: Opportunity is key to achievement

The leader of America’s fourth largest school district – and one of its most diverse – urged Arizona public education and community leaders to invest in providing equitable education opportunities like pre-school, mentoring and high quality magnet programs. (Published April 16, 2015)

Arizona education leaders: Best and worst outcomes this legislative session

After the Arizona State Legislature wrapped up, education leaders weighed in on the best and worst outcomes for K-12 public education this session. (Published April 8, 2015)

Workshop helps girls move past bullying to become leaders

Girls will have the opportunity to build self-confidence, character and become a leader all while helping eradicate their vulnerability to bullying in a free all-day workshop to empower young women to stop being victims of bullying and instead become leaders in their community and own life. (Published March 16, 2015)

School breakfast grows to boost learning, attendance

More Arizona students are preparing to learn with a good breakfast served not at home, but in the school cafeteria or right in the classroom. The increase is being driven by strategic state and community efforts to improve student achievement and spurred by research that shows hungry students don’t learn as well as nourished students. (Published March 12, 2015)

Proposed state budgets could penalize districts providing extra student support

When Osborn Elementary School District received a major grant to put counselors in all their schools, they thought it was good news. But if either of the two current state budget proposals goes through, that grant could put more stress on teachers and students because the funds fall outside the classroom. (Published March 5, 2015)

Arizonans protest proposed education budget cuts

Arizonans are telling legislators what they think of Gov. Doug Ducey’s proposed education funding cuts in a series of events this week at the Arizona State Capitol. (Published February 25, 2015)

Camelback students surprised with super bowl tickets

When Camelback High School applied for a grant to participate in Verizon’s Innovation through Design Thinking (iDT) Program, the school had no idea that being a grant recipient would provide one of the biggest opportunities of a lifetime: Super Bowl tickets. (Published February 23, 2015)

Education central to attracting jobs to Arizona

Arizona business leaders say it’s time to start spotlighting the successes of the state’s K-12 public schools and higher education system to business leaders considering relocating or expanding here. (Published February 11, 2015)

Read these stories at www.azednews.com
What’s driving the growth in career and technical education?

An increase in the access to career and technical education courses is making it possible for thousands of Arizona high school students to graduate with the knowledge and skills they need to land jobs that will establish their careers or help them pay their way through college. (Published February 4, 2015)

Groups multiplying efforts to help students, parents with new math standards

While Arizona students’ math achievement levels are lower than the national average, groups training teachers in the latest strategies and developing quality curriculum around the new standards are working to change that. (Published January 30, 2015)

Where Arizona students learn and what is spent on them

Arizona’s K-12 students have remained around a million for the past 10 years, and where they attend school has shifted only slightly over that time, according to the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction’s recently released Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013-2014. (Published January 21, 2015)

Report: Arizona posts strong achievement gains, gets F in per-student funding

Arizona K-12 students’ achievement gains in math and reading over the past 10 years rank among the top in the nation, according to a recent national report. (Published January 15, 2015)

Arizona scores high on early education enrollment

An increasing number of Arizona three and four year old children have enrolled in preschool in the past five years and over half attend full-day programs, according to a recent national report on early childhood education. (Published January 14, 2015)

Achieving faster, engaged better: More Arizona schools use blended learning

When eighth-graders in Nancy Foote’s science class at Sossaman Middle School need to learn a concept or work on an assignment, they just need access to her instructional videos on YouTube and their classroom account on Edmodo. (Published January 8, 2015)

Arizona’s top superintendent on success after K-12, what makes an “A” school

When Denton Santarelli, Ed. D., speaks, people listen. Not only is he American Association of School Administrators’ Arizona Superintendent of the Year, but his district also boasts the highest graduation rate in the state. (Published January 7, 2015)

Public education advocate Diane Ravitch on testing, school choice and teaching

Public education is a civic responsibility not a consumer good, said Diane Ravitch, a research professor of education at New York University, to a recent gathering of Arizona educators and school board members. (Published December 17, 2014)
AZ teacher of the year on building connections, attracting teachers

Arizona Educational Foundation’s 2015 Arizona Teacher of the Year, John-David Bowman, says students and teachers are the backbone of education and more people need to advocate for them. (Published December 10, 2014)

ACT report: Arizona students’ interest in STEM careers remains steady

About 48 percent of Arizona’s 2014 high school graduates are interested in careers in science, technology, engineering and math, and that percentage has remained relatively steady over the past four years. (Published December 9, 2014)
What’s Your Story?

ASBA’s Arizona Education News Service wants to promote all the great things happening in school districts throughout Arizona. Submit your stories by going to www.azednews.com and clicking on “Stories by you” under the News tab.

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