

An Urgent Message Regarding Your Schools

I am writing you because I know you care about your child's school. You understand how important education is and what it means to your child, your family and indeed, to our society as a whole. You "get it." Over the last several years, however, I have come to believe that many in our state government who represent you, your child, and our larger society do not get it. My concern in this regard is so great that I felt compelled to take this opportunity to ensure that you, your family, and all of our community understand what is happening to our schools -- what our elected officials have already done to our schools and are about to do again.

Mark Twain said that no one is safe when the legislature is in session. That has certainly been true with respect to Arizona's schools. Over the last 7 years, the Arizona State Legislature has cut more than \$56.3 million from our Amphitheater schools; in just the current year alone, they took more than \$9 million from our district schools. These were funds we should have been able to use to purchase new classroom computers and other technology, purchase textbooks and school equipment, fix our roofs and plumbing, replace air conditioners and fire alarms, and otherwise improve our classrooms and other school facilities.

Statewide, more than \$1 billion has been taken from schools by the legislature in the last 7 years. That shocking figure is on top of more than \$1.2 billion in Proposition 301 funding that the legislature has failed to give to schools -- a repeated denial of funding which the Arizona courts have already ruled was in clear violation of law. And still, the legislature keeps cutting.

Now, our new Governor is proposing that the legislature cut another 5% from our budget for next year, which would mean the loss of an additional \$1.7 to \$1.9 million in Amphitheater School District. This time, the proposed cut is disguised in a manner that can appeal to many voters, because the Governor has said that the cut must be made in "non-classroom" spending. Such a disguise is meant to suggest that the additional cut won't hurt our classrooms, teachers, or students, but it will. "Non-classroom spending" includes a lot more than just administration, as some people claim.

"Administrative costs" have been buzz words in public education for years. It's naturally appealing to talk about cutting them, but any conversation about such matters should also consider some facts. Administrative costs in Arizona schools are 50th in the nation -- *the lowest in the nation* -- and in the Amphitheater District administrative costs are 17% below the Arizona state average, according to the Arizona Auditor General. That literally means that our District has one of the lowest administrative budgets in the entire country.

So what else counts as non-classroom spending in Arizona? You might be surprised. Just some of the things the Governor would have us cut include:

"Non-Classroom" Spending	
• Principals	• Central office staff
• Counselors	• Nurses and Health Aides
• School Bus Drivers	• Custodians and Grounds
• Librarians	• Secretaries
• Health Clerks	• Crossing Guards
• Speech Pathologists	• Attendance Clerks
• Cafeteria workers	• School maintenance and repair
• Social workers	• Playground Monitors
• Instructional support	• Audiologists

I have spent more than 40 years of my life doing everything I can to put students and classrooms first, and I learned way back in that very first year, and in every year since, that you cannot operate a classroom, much less provide a solid education to students, without the functions and people you see listed in that table above. I cannot and do not want to imagine what schools and education would look like without these necessary services for students and schools.

To further justify more cuts to our schools, some legislators will actually tell you that state spending on education has increased in Arizona, but that's simply not accurate. To come up with the claim that state spending on education has increased in recent years, the state had to include all of the funding that local communities have approved through school bonds and budget overrides. For example, if the voters of the Amphitheater School District approve bonds for school improvements or approve a budget override for certain limited purposes, the state counts those locally spent dollars, *paid for by local taxpayers*, that benefit only local schools, as "state spending" on education.

When the Governor claims that his budget will put more dollars in the classroom that is not accurate. The Governor's proposed budget does not add a single dime to classroom spending. It simply cuts the other side of the equation (the "non-classroom spending" as I've already described) so it just *looks like* classroom spending has increased.

Enough is enough. The state legislature and Governor's office have played games for far too long with our students and our schools, but the games continue – harming every student and school in the process. So, if you have never contacted your legislators or governor to let them know how you feel about school budget cuts, your schools could really use your help right now. Be a voice for our students, our schools, and for your child. Visit our website, www.amphi.com and click on "Concerns About State Education Budget" to find contact information for your state legislators and the Governor's office, as well as information on how our legislators have voted on education issues in the past. Contact them and let them know that Arizona's students and schools must come first. School budgets should not be cut any more. Thank you for your continued support of our schools and our district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick Nelson
Superintendent
Amphitheater School District