

## **Increase education funding: Quad-city residents' message to Secretary of State loud and clear**

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By Lisa Irish

Three-hundred Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley and Dewey-Humboldt residents told Arizona Secretary of State Ken Bennett that Arizona must start adequately funding education during a meeting Tuesday at Abia Judd Elementary School in Prescott.

"Over the last five years, cuts in funding have been imposed by the state in addition to the cuts from declining enrollments," said Wendy Madsen, a parent of a student at Taylor Hicks Elementary School in Prescott. "Our districts together have been forced to cut over \$25 million."

Arizona has provided no funds statewide for school building repair since 2009 or for textbooks since in 2008. The state cut full-day kindergarten funding in half, and has kept salaries and benefits flat. As a result, districts statewide have cut staff and programs.

Despite a recovering economy, funding remains below 2007 levels.

"I'm embarrassed and frustrated that Arizona is in this situation," Bennett said. "We cannot afford to continue to keep school funding at present levels."

At the Northern Arizona Interfaith Council's Tri-District meeting, parents, businesses, nonprofits and educators expressed "common concerns about how reduced state education funding impacts children's opportunities, experiences and future," [Humboldt Unified School District](#) Superintendent Paul Stanton said.

Businesses and community members can find ways to help and are encouraged to urge legislators to find a solution, Abia Judd Principal Rosemary Agneessens said.

"We're part of a statewide effort," Agneessens said. "Our goal is to have a larger meeting with legislators in the fall."

Bennett said he'd encourage legislators to increase funding.

"I'd like to see us get to the point where districts don't have to rely so much on overrides and bonding," Bennett said. "I believe the best way to get more money into education in Arizona is to get our economy to grow."

Stanton said, "We in education do not have the same clout when talking to legislators as a parent who talks about how funding cuts impact their child's classroom."

When Cheryl Fernandez, parent of a Prescott High School student, learned math textbooks hadn't been replaced since 2001, she and other parents organized a fundraiser that brought in \$16,400 for textbooks and technology.

"When we are millions of dollars behind, this is only a small dent in what we really need," Fernandez said. "Fundraisers should not be filling in gaps the state has created."

Laura Markey, parent of a Lincoln Elementary student who injects insulin at school, said nursing cuts put children in life-threatening situations and increase district liability.

[Chino Valley Unified School District](#) Superintendent Duane Howard said buses in the district's fleet are on average 16 years old, class sizes grew from 25 students to 32, the district used its own funds to replace 10-year-old textbooks and CVUSD is \$1.5 million behind in deferred maintenance.

"I am asking you and others in leadership to remember the sacrifices made by our children, their teachers, and all our employees, and not only restore money to public education, but increase it to hasten and strengthen the Arizona Public Education System," Howard said.

Everyone needs to focus on education funding now, Bennett agreed.

"We need to look at the restructuring of our tax policy in Arizona so that we aren't subject to a 30 percent decline in state general fund revenues when we have an economic downturn," Bennett said.

John Amos, a Yavapai Regional Medical Center administrator, said when he recruits medical staff he often hears they love the area but schools underperform.

"We need state support to bring Arizona education up to compete at the national level," Amos said.