

Issue: AZ Education

## K-12 Education Funding in Arizona

### The State of Arizona K-12 Education

#### A System in Disrepair: Low Teacher Pay and Per Pupil Spending

Arizona voters have long considered education funding to be the number one issue facing the state. Results of a November 2019 public opinion poll showed that for the fifth year in a row, voters ranked education funding above immigration, healthcare or the economy.<sup>1</sup> But the reality is that no other state has cut school funding more than Arizona. Between 2008 and 2015, legislators cut per-student funding by 36.6% and in 2017, by another 1.2%, according to a national analysis by the non-partisan Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.<sup>2</sup> During that same period, in addition to cuts in per-student funding, legislators made funding cuts totaling \$4.56 billion in the following categories:

- All-day kindergarten (eliminated in 2011)
- Capital Funding, or what the state calls “District Additional Assistance” (DAA), which pays for textbooks and technology, classroom furniture, school buses, and basic building repair and maintenance
- New building construction and major repairs
- Compensation and growth opportunities for outstanding teachers
- 9<sup>th</sup>-grade career and technical education courses
- Help with payment of rising utility costs – costs districts must pay.<sup>3</sup>

#### Tax Cuts and Credits vs. Education Spending

Since the mid-1990s, the loss of revenue for education spending has been the direct result of Arizona’s Republican lawmakers choosing to cut personal and corporate income taxes instead of investing in schools.<sup>4</sup> Tom Rex, an Arizona State University researcher, calculated that “if not for the cumulative effect of those tax cuts, the state general fund in 2016 would have totaled \$13.6 billion instead of \$9.5 billion, or more than 40 percent higher.”<sup>5</sup>

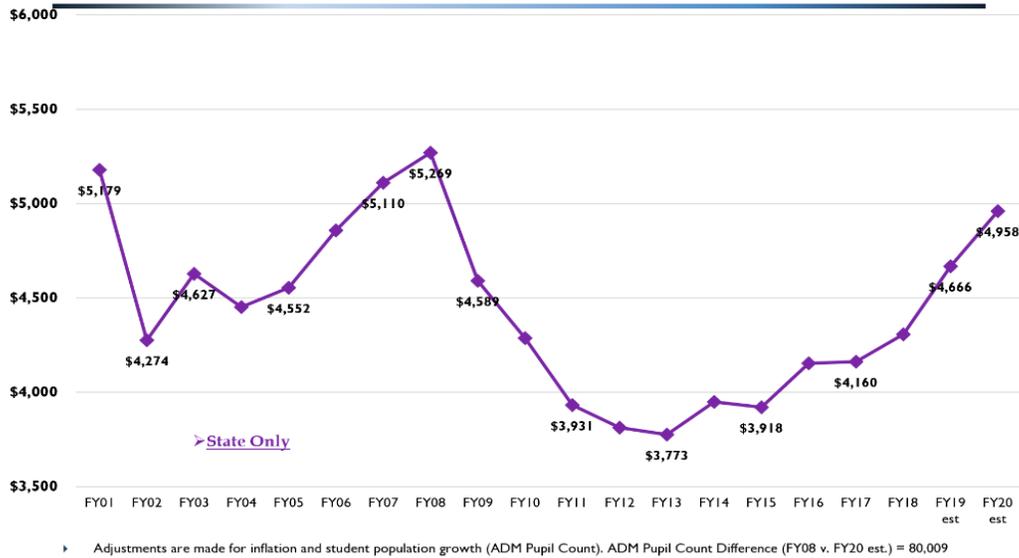
In March of this year, even after COVID-19 had begun to have a significant negative impact on Arizona’s economy, Governor Ducey and the Republican-controlled legislature continued to push for tax cuts.<sup>6</sup> The biggest part of HB 2778, as approved by the Ways and Means Committee on a party-line vote, includes yet another cut in individual income tax rates.<sup>7</sup> If the bill passes, it will reduce state revenues by \$100 million a year.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, over the last twenty years, the state has lost an estimated \$1 billion for its general fund and public schools as a result of the tuition tax credit program. The program gives individuals and corporations a dollar-for-dollar state tax credit for donations to non-profit school tuition organizations (STOs).<sup>9</sup> The STOs use the majority of the funds to award scholarships to students attending private schools, and they keep 10% for salaries and administrative costs.<sup>10</sup>

The failure to adequately fund education in the years since the 2008 recession means that per-pupil funding is the *second lowest* and teacher salaries the *third lowest in the country*.<sup>11</sup> In addition, at 905:1, the student to counselor ratio is twice the national average and four times the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.<sup>12</sup> Most school libraries have not had money to buy new books since 2008. Class size is over 30 in many elementary schools and over 40 in high schools.<sup>13</sup> Since FY2016, the legislature has underfunded DAA, which pays for textbooks, technology,

curriculum materials, and school buses, by \$1.5 billion, and the Building Renewal Grant Fund by \$1.2 billion.<sup>14</sup> As a result, teachers who earn so little that their children qualify for free or reduced lunch, spend their own money to buy paper, books, and mousetraps for their classrooms. They use textbooks that are older than they are. Their students sit at broken desks, using 22-year-old computers, “held together with duct tape, in rooms with leaky ceilings.”<sup>15</sup>

### K-12 Funding per Student – Still Below Funding from *12 Years Ago*



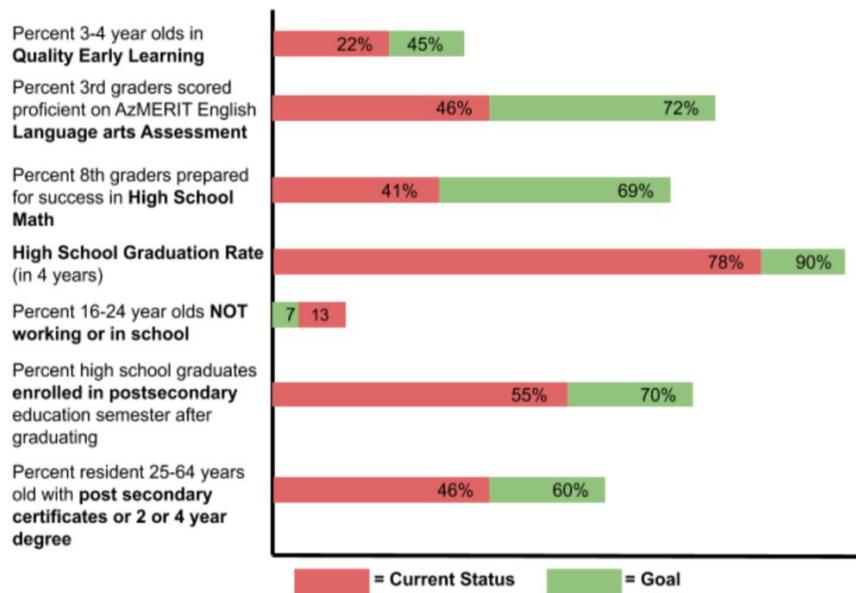
Source: Chart created by House Democratic Staff based on JLBC analysis of K-12 Funding, which includes maintenance and operations, capital and other funding to education. FY 2001 through FY 2020 estimate. <http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/allfunding2001.pdf>

### Low Teacher Pay and per Pupil Spending mean high student-to-counselor ratio and low high school graduation rates<sup>17</sup>

	AZ	National Average	National Ranking
Teacher Salary	\$44,284	\$58,230	48th
Per Pupil Spending	\$8,131	\$12,201	48th
Student to Counselor Ratio	905:1	482:1	50th
High School Graduation Rate	77.4%	84.6%	43rd

### Low Student Performance

Low salaries, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of resources have resulted in a poor learning environment and low achievement for Arizona’s students. This has a particularly strong impact on low-income students who, when they are able to attend better funded schools, “are more likely to complete high school and have higher earnings and lower poverty rates in adulthood.”<sup>18</sup>



Data Source: Arizona Education Progress Meter<sup>19</sup>

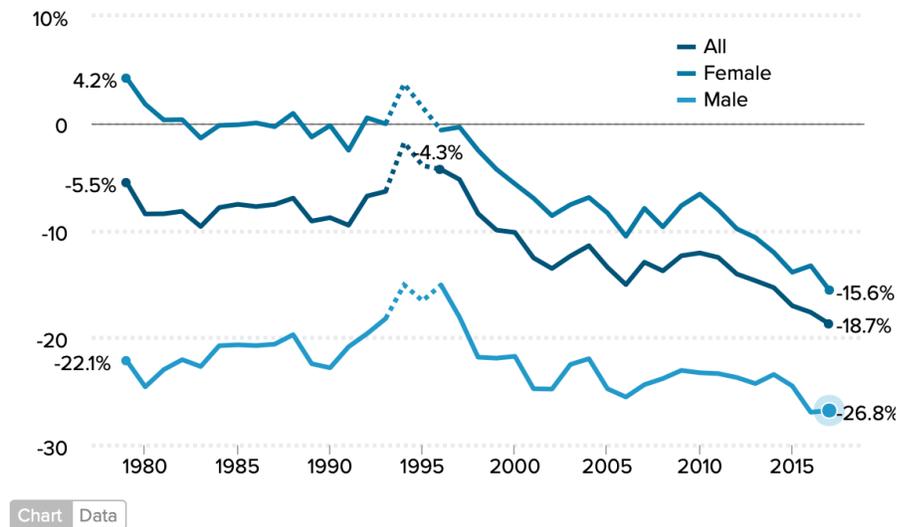
## High Teacher Vacancies

Teacher vacancies, resulting from low pay and the increasing costs of becoming a teacher, are another significant obstacle to student learning and achievement.<sup>20</sup> A 2015-16 Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association survey found that, a month into the school year, over 4,000 teaching positions were vacant or staffed with an underprepared teacher.<sup>21</sup> The most recent survey, conducted in December 2019, revealed that Arizona had 7,500 openings—almost a quarter of its teaching positions—with over half of the positions filled by individuals who did not meet standard teacher requirements. It is even harder to attract special education teachers, especially in rural districts in Gila, Navajo, and Apache counties where the special education populations are well above the 12% state average.<sup>22</sup>

## Low Teacher Pay

In a 2018 Economic Policy Institute paper on the teacher pay penalty—the percent by which public school teachers are paid less than comparable workers—authors Sylvia Allegretto and Lawrence Mishel maintain that “to ensure a high-quality teaching workforce, schools must retain experienced teachers and recruit high-quality students into the profession. Pay is an important component of retention and recruitment.”<sup>23</sup> But in 2018, Arizona’s teachers earned 18.7% less in wages than comparable workers.

Teacher wage gap—public school teacher wages relative to comparable workers, all and by gender, 1979–2017



**Note:** Figure shows regression-adjusted weekly wages of elementary, middle, and secondary public school teachers. Non-imputed data are not available for 1994 and 1995; data points for these years have been extrapolated and are represented by dotted lines (see Appendix A for more detail).

**Source:** Authors' analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data

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## Teachers Take Action

### 2018 #RedforEd Teacher Walkout

In the spring of 2018, Arizona's educators, fed up with low pay and a lack of opportunities for their students, decided to take action. On April 26, 2018, 75,000 Arizona teachers and educational support staff staged a walkout and took the following demands to the State Legislature:<sup>25</sup>

- 20% salary increase
- Restore education funding to 2008 levels
- Competitive pay for all education support staff
- Permanent salary structure, including annual raises
- No new tax cuts<sup>26</sup>

The large number of educators who participated in the walkout, combined with widespread public support, finally got the attention of Governor Ducey and the Republican-controlled legislature. The Governor and the legislature committed to investing in education and began by increasing teacher salaries by 20% over three years, or "20x2020."

## Legislature Meets Few Teacher Demands

Raising teacher salaries was the only demand that Governor Ducey and the Republican-controlled legislature met during the 2018 and 2019 legislative sessions (HB 2047/SB 1548), and the raises did not cover the majority of teachers and specialists who provide critical services to special education students.<sup>27</sup> Arizona's present formula for special education funding is 40 years old and does not meet the needs of today's students.<sup>28</sup>

According to Superintendent of Instruction, Kathy Hoffman, the legislature has not yet addressed other significant causes for the state's failure to recruit and retain qualified teachers. "Rising health care costs and insufficient benefits packages, as well as overcrowded classrooms that create high workloads, are all part of the problem."<sup>29</sup>

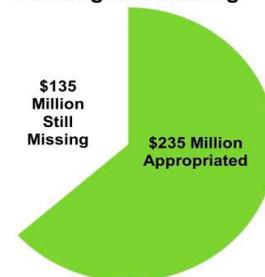
Also, during the 2019 legislative session, with a large budget surplus, lawmakers enacted nearly \$400 million in new tax cuts for the wealthy (HB 2757) instead of investing some of that surplus in Arizona's public schools. This policy decision contributed to education funding in most areas remaining below 2008 levels.<sup>30</sup>

Democratic legislators tried and failed to pass bills (HB 2562/SB 1344) that would have reduced Arizona's student-to-counselor ratio from 905:1 to 550:1 and would have created a grant program of \$100 million by 2023 to fund school counselors.<sup>31</sup>

In retaliation for the #RedForEd walkout, Republican legislators introduced bills that would have made teacher walkouts illegal (HB 2001/HB 2017). Although neither bill passed, they indicate a trend among Republican legislators.<sup>32</sup>

The 2019 K-12 Education Bill (HB 2749) underfunded District Additional Assistance (DAA) by \$135 million, and will not fully restore DAA until 2022. The bill also allocates \$68 million in funding to schools using a results-based formula, which ends up allocating most of the money to wealthier districts with higher test scores. The allocation results in less funding for three out of four Arizona schools.<sup>33</sup>

**"Additional Assistance" Classroom Funding Still Missing**



Source: <http://azchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Leg-Report-Card-FINAL.pdf>

## Invest in ED

In 2019, a year after the #RedforEd walkout, teachers were still leaving the profession, classrooms were still overcrowded, and students still needed nearly \$700 million in public education funding. "Arizona legislators had an opportunity to provide our students with the public education they deserve and, once again, they have failed to listen to their constituents," according to the Arizona Education Association's (AEA).<sup>34</sup>

Educators, frustrated over the state legislature's failure to fully fund education, wrote the Invest in Ed ballot initiative. The initiative, opposed by Governor Ducey, would have increased taxes on Arizonans earning more than \$250,000 a year, and generated an estimated

\$690 million annually in additional funding for teacher salaries and school operations. Supporters of the measure turned in nearly twice the number of signatures needed to have it certified for the general election ballot. But the state removed the initiative from the ballot after the Arizona Supreme Court, based on a technicality, determined that a description of the ballot proposal shared with voters when they signed petitions was misleading.<sup>35</sup>

This year's version of the Invest in Ed initiative, along with a Save Our Schools initiative to stop voucher expansion, may not reach voters either. While candidates for state office can gather nominating petition signatures online, initiative campaigns have to collect signatures in person, which is impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Republican-controlled legislature continues to pass increasingly tough laws that make it more difficult to get initiatives on the ballot.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the attorney for the Arizona Republican Party has claimed that allowing people to sign petitions online would make the process "highly susceptible to fraud," even though political candidates have used exactly the same process for several years.<sup>37</sup> Proponents of the two education initiatives, along with a number of others, are suing to force the state to permit them to collect signatures online using an online verification platform called E-Qual.<sup>38</sup>

## Governor Ducey's FY21 Proposed Budget

### Increased Education Funding

More than half of Governor Ducey's proposed \$12.3 billion pre-COVID-19 budget allocated funding to K-12 education. While educators see this as promising, they say it is still not nearly enough to make up for years of cuts. It still leaves Arizona near the bottom of national rankings according to Dawn Penich-Thacker, Communications Director for Save Our Schools Arizona. Penich-Thacker's group, as well as educators and Democratic legislators, are also unhappy with the results-based funding, tax cuts, and voucher expansion.<sup>39</sup>

## COVID-19 Impact on FY21 Education Funding

### State Faces Possible \$1.1 Billion Shortfall

It appears that Arizona could be facing a \$1.1 billion shortfall as a result of the economic impact of COVID-19. This would use up the Governor's entire rainy day fund. And, depending on how quickly the state's economy recovers, the number could be significantly higher than \$1.1 billion, according to Richard Stavneak, who heads the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.<sup>40</sup>

Legislators will also need to recognize that the state's revenue will be reduced by more than just economic losses due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Given early discussions about how to re-open schools in the fall and all of the physical, virtual, and schedule reconfigurations required to keep students safe post-COVID, looming costs could be significant and must be planned for accordingly.<sup>41</sup>

### Legislature Passes a "Skinny Budget" and Adjourns

The state legislature, after passing a "skinny budget," temporarily adjourned on March 23rd with the intention of reconvening when the Governor lifts the shelter-in-place order. Republican leaders left the annual legislative session ongoing to ensure that the hundreds of GOP-backed policy proposals were not killed. Instead, legislators will be able to take them up again when they return.<sup>42</sup>

The budget provides for \$11.8 billion in spending, about \$500 million less than Ducey's January plan of \$12.3 billion. It has been stripped of virtually all new spending, and while it does not fully restore some previous education cuts, it does include the last installment of the 20x2020 teacher pay raise and funds for K-12 operating expenses. It does not include the tax cuts many Republicans and Governor Ducey proposed.<sup>43</sup>

Emergency legislation on school closures (HB 2910) is also a part of the skinny budget. The approved bill "provides clarity on testing requirements, gives direction on make-up days, requires schools to continue to provide learning opportunities, and ensures teachers and staff see no disruption in pay as a result of COVID-19."<sup>44</sup> Although the bill passed unanimously,<sup>45</sup> a number of Democratic legislators felt it should have appropriated funds to support the transition to remote learning. Democratic Representative, Kirsten Engel, said "she has not seen any serious effort at the legislature to provide funding that would get all Arizona students online."<sup>46</sup>

## Transition to Remote Learning

Without additional funding, school districts have been struggling to set up virtual classrooms for Arizona's 1.1 million K-12 students. The need for this virtual access has been dramatically highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic where remote learning is one of the only options available to reach students statewide. Fifty education leaders signed an open letter in March 2020, asking the legislature to approve emergency funding to address the state's digital divide. The letter states that, "While many families have access to internet and devices, "low-income, urban and rural students, families, and communities are not so fortunate."<sup>47</sup> Currently, only 23% of Arizona school districts meet national affordability benchmarks for broadband access. In addition, many schools in the state's most rural areas, including Apache, Gila, and Navajo counties, lack high-speed internet access that is fast enough to support digital learning.<sup>48</sup>

Governor Ducey and Superintendent of Instruction Kathy Hoffman are looking for hot spots to distribute to students in rural Arizona. Also, the Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation is running a drive to acquire 100,000 laptops for low-income students.<sup>49</sup> For those students who don't have laptops or access to the internet, educational opportunities through television may be the only viable alternative. "Our hope is that this solution will bridge the gap for families and students who only have access over the air," said Kim Flack, Director of Education and Community Impact at Arizona PBS.<sup>50</sup>

Nationally, school leaders worry that disparities in income, race, and the education level of parents could widen the achievement gap between low-income students and students of privilege during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>51</sup> In Arizona, where a high school principal found three students huddled under a blanket in the rain trying to access Wi-Fi outside a closed school, it is a particular concern.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, a number of educators believe that this "crisis could be an opportunity to dramatically reduce the digital divide by solving the state's technology inequity."<sup>53</sup>

For now, the switch to online learning will be a challenge for both teachers and students. And not every student will be able to learn without one-on-one support. This will be particularly true for special education students. A bill which would add more than \$50 million in funding for special education passed the Senate but still needed a vote in the House when the legislature adjourned in March.<sup>54</sup> The emergency funding bill did not include a plan for remote learning for special education.

## Providing Quality Education for Arizona's Students

There is a stark disconnect in Arizona between the Republican-controlled legislature, which has consistently underfunded the state's schools, and the voting public who consider education funding to be the most important issue facing the state. As a result of years of tax cuts, Arizona's K-12 education system is in a sorry state of disrepair: low teacher pay, teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and poor resources all make it extremely difficult for many of Arizona's students to receive a quality education. This is especially true for low-income and special needs students.

Summing it up nicely in its consideration of the 2021 budget, the Arizona Education Association states that Governor Ducey "continues to build budgets that choose winners and losers, forcing students, teachers, and schools to compete for critical resources rather than ensuring our state meets its obligation to fully fund public education. There is much work to be done to guarantee students have equitable, sustainable, and dedicated revenue sources over the long term."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.expectmorearizona.org/blog/2020/01/03/education-top-issue-for-fifth-straight-year/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding>

<sup>3</sup> <https://azsba.org/arizonas-unrestored-budget-cuts/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/889.htm> "The #RedforEd Movement"

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/05/magazine/arizona-teachers-facebook-group-doug-ducey.html/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2020/03/09/tax-cut-still-in-play-as-covid-19-affects-economy-ducey-says/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2017/05/08/the-cost-of-cuts-arizona-tax-carve-outs-last-year-hit-13-7b/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://tucson.com/news/local/house-panel-oks-measure-to-cut-arizona-taxes-by-million/article\\_93df3943-f8c6-5e71-b8c2-988fba07f7d2.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/house-panel-oks-measure-to-cut-arizona-taxes-by-million/article_93df3943-f8c6-5e71-b8c2-988fba07f7d2.html)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/05/magazine/arizona-teachers-facebook-group-doug-ducey.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2019/03/27/arizona-tax-credits-private-schools-sto-public-schools/3278577002/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2018/05/15/states-paying-teachers-most-and-least/11/>

<sup>12</sup> [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/08/14/the-troubling-student-to-counselor-ratio-that-doesnt-add.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/08/14/the-troubling-student-to-counselor-ratio-that-doesnt-add.html)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/889.htm> "The #RedforEd Movement"

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/33.htm> 2021 Executive Budget Proposal

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/889.htm> "The #RedforEd Movement"

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/33.htm> 2021 Executive Budget Proposal

<sup>17</sup> <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2018/05/15/states-paying-teachers-most-and-least/11/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://azsba.org/arizonas-unrestored-budget-cuts/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.expectmorearizona.org/progress/?location=State::Arizona>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/?utm\\_source=Economic+Policy+Institute&utm\\_campaign=2f87f6f1cc-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_09\\_06\\_03\\_35&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_e7c5826c50-2f87f6f1cc-57966221&mc\\_cid=2f87f6f1cc&mc\\_eid=40fcbe7f77](https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/?utm_source=Economic+Policy+Institute&utm_campaign=2f87f6f1cc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_09_06_03_35&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e7c5826c50-2f87f6f1cc-57966221&mc_cid=2f87f6f1cc&mc_eid=40fcbe7f77)

<sup>21</sup> <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/uncertified-teachers-and-teacher-vacancies-state>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.wmicentral.com/news/latest\\_news/state-schools-chief-pleads-with-lawmakers-for-special-education-funding/article\\_7a0cffe8-f7ad-5b7b-b578-3e0f1bf89e9a.html](https://www.wmicentral.com/news/latest_news/state-schools-chief-pleads-with-lawmakers-for-special-education-funding/article_7a0cffe8-f7ad-5b7b-b578-3e0f1bf89e9a.html)

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/?utm\\_source=Economic+Policy+Institute&utm\\_campaign=2f87f6f1cc-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_09\\_06\\_03\\_35&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_e7c5826c50-2f87f6f1cc-57966221&mc\\_cid=2f87f6f1cc&mc\\_eid=40fcbe7f77](https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/?utm_source=Economic+Policy+Institute&utm_campaign=2f87f6f1cc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_09_06_03_35&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e7c5826c50-2f87f6f1cc-57966221&mc_cid=2f87f6f1cc&mc_eid=40fcbe7f77)

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- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2018/04/11/what-arizona-teachers-5-demands-redfored/506728002/>
- <sup>27</sup> [https://www.wmicentral.com/news/latest\\_news/state-schools-chief-pleads-with-lawmakers-for-special-education-funding/article\\_7a0cffe8-f7ad-5b7b-b578-3e0f1bf89e9a.html](https://www.wmicentral.com/news/latest_news/state-schools-chief-pleads-with-lawmakers-for-special-education-funding/article_7a0cffe8-f7ad-5b7b-b578-3e0f1bf89e9a.html)
- <sup>28</sup> <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2019/03/01/arizona-revamp-of-special-ed-funding-formula-goes-nowhere/>
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- <sup>33</sup> <http://azchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Leg-Report-Card-FINAL.pdf>
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.arizonaea.org/home/883.htm> “AEA Statement on FY20 K-12 Education Budget”
- <sup>35</sup> <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/29/invest-education-tax-measure-kicked-off-november-ballot-redfored/1140338002/>
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- <sup>43</sup> <https://ktar.com/story/3031812/arizona-legislature-rushing-coronavirus-help-for-schools-workers/>
- <sup>44</sup> <https://azgovernor.gov/governor/news/2020/03/governor-ducey-signs-legislation-support-schools-teachers-and-families>
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