Arizona Continues to Fall Behind in K-12 Education Funding – June 2020

Arizona’s Administration Spending Per Student Falls Far Below Average, FY 2018

Investing in Arizona’s public schools is an investment in Arizona’s future. Providing our public schools with the resources they need to hire and retain quality teachers, reduce class sizes, and provide students with the skills they will need to succeed in college and career will be critical to enabling Arizona to emerge from the COVID economic crisis stronger than before. During the Great Recession, the state legislature cut funding to K-12 education by one billion dollars. As revenue recovered, Arizona enacted massive permanent tax cuts instead of reinvesting in Arizona’s children and youth. Arizona cannot afford any more cuts to our public schools during the current state budget shortfall. According to the most recent available data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Arizona spent 35 percent or $4,375 less per student than the U.S. average in FY 2018. Ranking Arizona among the worst in the nation for per pupil spending.

Arizona Spends Less Per Student than the National Average in All Categories, FY 2018 (May 2020)

As Arizona’s school building have aged and deteriorated, the state has cut the funding needed to keep those buildings safe and adequate places to learn. The Students FIRST legislation created the Building Renewal Fund. Monies in the Building Renewal Fund were to be distributed to school districts based on a formula and were to be used to do preventative maintenance and repair and replace aging school buildings. However, the Building Renewal Fund received its last appropriation in 2008, and then was completely repealed by the legislature in 2013. While the legislature has appropriated money the past few years for a building renewal grant program, the amount appropriated is $3 billion less than what schools would have received through the Students FIRST legislation formula requirement. Today, building renewal funding is based on an inadequate grant program, where school districts can only apply for funding after something has failed or broke. In fiscal year 2020, school districts received less than one-third of the building renewal formula requirement.

Tax Dollars to Private Schools Are Skyrocketing

Tax credits claimed for private schools have grown far faster than state revenues or the state economy, yet they lack the basic accountability and control that school districts and state budgets are confined to. In 2020, Arizona’s tax credits diverted nearly $300 million public dollars to private schools.