

September 5, 2007

Arizona School District Redistricting Commission
Arizona Department of Education
1535 W. Jefferson St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Members of the School District Redistricting Commission:

For nearly one year, the Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 Governing Board has been deeply involved in contemplating the theory and practicality of redistricting. We have conducted numerous study sessions, forums and community discussions which focused on the needs of our district in relation to redistricting options.

It is important for the Commission to know that this Board has remained open-minded and objective, and has weighed carefully the data, information and options which have been brought to our attention. It is with unanimous conviction that we provide to you the following comments for your consideration.

The overriding consideration of our Governing Board when evaluating redistricting options is our District's mission:

TO ASSURE THAT ALL STUDENTS REACH THEIR ACHIEVEMENT GOALS.

As we formed our individual and Board opinions, the paramount guiding principle was whether an option would best serve the imperative for all students to reach achievement goals.

In order to provide a better understanding of our Board comments and rationale, it needs to be pointed out that this district's core values state that we feel that the most critical components of student achievement are:

- Parent involvement,
- Service to all students and parent customers,
- Individualized intervention,
- Focus attention on students and families who are less advantaged,
- Small, safe, neighborhood schools,
- Our specific and unique Office of Civil Rights Agreement obligations,
- Numerous programs which meet the needs of our students who face the most challenges.

We understand that by definition, the Redistricting Commission has a default task of suggesting a change to district unification structures. Our Governing Board challenges you to reach beyond that path. We are asking that you exercise the option to not recommend a change to the current district status of Tempe Elementary School District as permitted by SB 1068. We understand that this would be bold and unexpected. But we urge, unanimously, that you take that action.

Tempe Elementary School District's Recommended Option:

Retain the Status Quo with Tempe Elementary School District being a separate organization educating students in grades K through 8.

Rationale:

This configuration serves well a community of interests that is comprised of 70% "Minority Students", with 25% of the students not English proficient, and almost 65% who are in the free and reduced lunch categories.

The current size of our district enables us to give attention to the needs of our students, many of whom face serious challenges. Research supports the premise that students who are needier do achieve better in smaller school districts. It makes common sense and is supported by research. You cannot disregard this fact when making your decision.

The Tempe Elementary School District community of interest has invested in small, safe, neighborhood schools which are the hallmark of the district. The size of Tempe Elementary School District provides the opportunity for individualized service to students and families. The wrap-around service and family atmosphere make Tempe Elementary a warm and successful educational entity. It is the District personality which local control has shaped over decades of governance.

In Tempe Elementary School District, parents have ready access to district leadership and services because of the manageable size of the district. Constituents feel well represented by the Governing Board because of the size of the district.

There has been much speculation that larger, unified districts provide a more consistent K-12 education for children. Although that's good theory, the excellent working relationship between Tempe Elementary and Tempe Union

High School District will stack up favorably with almost any unified district. People, not the organizational structure, make a difference. It is not a given, it is not automatic, that a unified district will have a better, more coordinated K-12 curriculum.

After much careful thought, it is the conclusion of our Governing Board that combining this district with another will be detrimental to student achievement. It is on that basis that we strongly urge you to not forward either redistricting plan for Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 to the Governor based on the option provided to you in Senate Bill 1068.

COMMENTS ON EAST VALLEY PLAN 1 AND EAST VALLEY PLAN 2:

We need to make it unequivocally clear that the Tempe Elementary School District Governing Board objects strenuously to both plans that unify Tempe Elementary School District with all or portions of Kyrene Elementary and Tempe Union High School Districts.

The most critical fact for you to consider is that there is no compelling research to indicate that student achievement will improve because a student is a member of a larger district. In fact, study after study shows that the type of student we predominately serve in Tempe Elementary School District achieves better in the smaller setting we now provide.

Proponents of gargantuan districts like to suggest that it is obvious that large districts have fewer administrators, more consolidation of services, better curriculum and an automatic flow of money into the classroom.

Please do not fall into the trap of accepting this assumption. Large districts require an abundance of administrators. Small districts already combine services to save money – they have to, to survive. The initial balloon investment needed to combine districts is staggering. It will take years before three districts combined into one will see the light of financial day and are able to redirect money into the classroom, if they ever do.

Consider the need for a large amalgamated district:

- to form equitable salary schedules,
- to combine personnel, payroll and student information systems,
- to combine infrastructure, leadership, operations in only seven months (It's doomed to failure),
- to provide similar and equitable textbooks and curriculum materials,

- to be technologically compatible,
- to reconfigure and relocate administrative personnel and functions,
- to combine the financial processes of bond issues, desegregation funds, Federal grants, override and real-estate holdings.

This list goes on and on, and we know you understand these realities.

The Tempe Elementary Governing Board suggests that you ask to see the data, facts and proof that a combined district will do all things people hope for them. Rather than strap districts such as ours with the burden to prove that the status quo is working – why not have those who support unification into large districts provide evidence that students in our district will achieve better under a redistricting plan.

Here is the most important bottom line: School districts are historically slowly formed over years from developing communities of interest made up of like-minded constituents, neighborhoods, business persons and community leaders. Districts thus formed flourish under local control which assures the retention of the character and culture formed by the communities of interest. Districts such as Tempe Elementary School District No. 3 are built over decades and become distinct in their ability to serve students and parents.

Combining districts will destroy local control, communities of interest and will not serve students, parents and achievement well.

We sincerely thank you for your service on this important Commission. It is our hope that you will take a brave and bold stand and not recommend a redistricting option for Tempe Elementary School District.

With Respect,

Rose Crutcher, President

Jim Lemmon, Vice President

Karen Arredondo, Member

Bill Munch, Member

Rochelle L. Wells, Member