



Congratulations on your candidacy for the Arizona Legislature. Stand for Children is a non-partisan, non-profit education advocacy organization. Our mission is to ensure all Arizona students graduate from high school prepared for, and with access to, college and career opportunities. We do this by educating and empowering community members, advocating for effective policies, ensuring strong policy implementation, and supporting courageous leaders at the ballot box.

In the 2018 election cycle, Stand for Children will consider endorsing candidates aligned with our mission and current policy priorities. In the questionnaire below please provide responses indicating your position on our key focus areas. Please limit your overall responses to 6 pages. Thank you for your willingness to share your perspectives and preferences regarding public education.

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Candidate's Name: Alma Hernandez

Office Sought: State House

Legislative District (LD): LD3

Party Affiliation: Democrat

E-Mail Address(es): alma@almaforarizona.org

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Alternate Campaign Contact: Consuelo Hernandez [consuelo@almaforarizona.org](mailto:consuelo@almaforarizona.org)

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Education (Please note highest degree achieved): Master's in Public Health, (MPH)

University of Arizona, Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health - December, 2017

Previous Elected Office(s) Held: None

Current Profession: Public Health professional - currently running a health care coalition

Please describe why you are qualified for the office sought:

I was born and raised in the south part of Tucson where I was exposed to the criminal justice system at the young age of 14. Even after all of the barriers I faced I was able to graduate from Sunnyside High School go on to The University of Arizona where I received my Bachelor's of Science and my Masters in Public Health. Education and civic engagement changed my life and opened doors I never once thought imaginable. I understand the challenges of our community because I have lived here my entire life and everything I have done has been focused on improving the area where I grew up and the life outcomes for those in our community.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are your top three priorities for public education in Arizona?

Education is one of the most significant policy issues affecting our state at the moment. Adequately funding our education system would be the first step. When it comes to funding and standards for public education, we are always competing for last place. We have further widened the gap of children who are disproportionately affected in our communities and it is wrong to be in that position. It is unfortunate we have made it more difficult for children who are poor and disadvantaged to receive services at their school and education they need. More budget cuts made every year, more programs affected, more opportunities lost, and they have only affected those who are already suffering. In regard to policies, I will work hard to advocate to restore funding to our public schools and I will not allow vouchers to take away from our public education system. I will also oppose any legislation or bills that undermine our teachers. If we don't fix our educational system, we will never attract the major companies or individuals to move here and start a family.

2. What state policy change(s) do you believe could allow more Arizona children attend a quality school, be taught by an effective teacher and be provided with opportunities to succeed?

Personally, I don't feel that our teachers or staff are the real problem in our State; the real problem is those who benefit and make a profit from draining our public education system. What we need to do is support educators who are currently there and provide them with the necessary tools they need to help their students succeed also, in order for us to retain quality teachers we need to pay them a salary they can survive on. Adequately funding the public education system and increasing the funding per student will make a significant difference.

3. What role should the state play in holding schools accountable for student academic growth and achievement?

I strongly feel that it's our states duty to ensure all children have access to quality education, however I do not feel schools and educators should be penalized if a student is not performing where they need to be. Every child is different, and every child needs different things to succeed, there is no perfect solution, and often, some children need more support than others to succeed. What we should be doing is working with them to ensure they do have what they need and deserve.

Currently, Stand for Children Arizona is focused on several policy areas: Early Literacy and Grade-Level Reading, English Language Instruction and School Finance. The following questions address those priorities.

### Early Literacy & Grade-Level Reading

Based on the Spring 2017 statewide assessment, 56% of Arizona students cannot read on grade-level by the end of third grade, meaning only 44% of students are reading on grade-level. Scores have improved overall, but with the statewide goal of 72% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders reading on grade-level by 2030, we have a long way to go. When looking at the data by school and region, it shows the improvement is concentrated in a small percentage of schools while many Arizona schools struggle to increase students' reading ability (see attached data sheet). Reading proficiency at this point in a student's academic career is vitally important. Research shows failure to read proficiently by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is linked to ongoing academic struggles, failure to graduate high school on time, and it dramatically reduces and creates barriers to entry into a postsecondary institution or career opportunities.

4. Would you support providing targeted funding and evidence-based programs, such as reading coaches and summer school, to improve the reading proficiency of Arizona students?

Absolutely! As a public health professional and someone who has worked with teens and children, I know the only way for us to support them in their academic journey is by investing in programs like these. Evidence-based research is something I take very seriously and something I relied on while doing my own research. I was an ESL student and always needed the extra help up until 5th grade, many students take longer than others, but ultimately, I was able to succeed, and I know others from my community will support these types of programs.

5. Would you support state funding for early learning opportunities such as full-day kindergarten or quality pre-school for 3 and 4-year olds?

Yes, we all know pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are some of the most important years of a child's life that will determine many outcomes. As someone who depended on preschool, so I could catch up to my peers who spoke English, and as someone who attended full-day kinder I know how it positively impacted my life and will impact others. Investing in children is crucial but most importantly investing in them from the very beginning will make the difference. There is no reason why any child should be at home when they could be learning.

## English Language Learners (ELL)

Current state policies regarding ELL students were adopted in response to a lawsuit and limited by voter-protected requirements. They have been in place for 12 years. These policies use a one-size fits all approach, unlike any other education policy. During the 2018 legislative session, Stand moved H.B. 2435 through the process. The bill allowed for flexibility at the local level while preserving voter mandates and it provided for needed transparency and accountability. HB 2435 passed unanimously out of the House and Senate Education committees. Unfortunately, the bill failed to get a final vote in the last days of the session as time ran out.

6. Would you support legislation similar to HB 2435 to change current ELL instructional requirements in order to provide local flexibility, increased accountability and transparency and more efficient use of funds?

Yes, as previously mentioned, I was one of these students. My siblings and I struggled tremendously when the state changed the law and for some time I personally fell behind. It was not easy to adjust and being that we live in such a diverse state we cannot hold every child to a set mold. As I previously mentioned we are all extremely different and we need to do our best to help children succeed not hold them back and fail them because of the lack of understanding from our legislators.

7. Would you sign a pledge to support similar legislation, if elected?

Yes, On day one. There is not a single reason for me not to support a piece of legislation which would help children who are in the shoes I once was in.

8. If not, what policies would you support to improve ELL instruction?

N/A

## School Finance

Arizona's current school finance system is over 30 years old. It was designed to support local school districts funded by their taxpayers with the state providing what could not be raised locally. Since that time, Arizona's public-school system has expanded to include a myriad of choices: open enrollment, charter schools and Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs); many students don't attend their local community school. The current system is outdated and continues to increase reliance on state funding. State policies which continue to limit the ability to raise revenue have resulted in the chronic underfunding of public schools. Short-term solutions and targeted investments fail to address the underlying problem. Stand for Children advocates for sufficient funding for all Arizona students, regardless of where they live or what type of school they attend.

9. What would you do or support to increase public school funding to at least the national average?

If there's one thing I enjoy working on, is a budget. As my graduate degree is in health service administration, I studied every type of budgeting and I know what it takes to adequately fund our education system as we are far behind. This is a top priority of mine. We cannot continue to rely on potential revenue growth to support education or continue to make over-rosy predictions on our budgets leaving us in a bigger mess than we have now. For years our state continued to cut funding to public schools. This is unacceptable and utterly wrong. We need to adequately fund public education, in an equitable manner without burdening specific communities. I hope to find solutions we can all agree on to help us close some unnecessary loopholes for companies and corporations receiving tax breaks they do not need; until we close loopholes and everyone pays their fair share then we will be unable to get on the path to a healthy economy.

10. How do you plan to grow state revenue, establish new revenue sources and provide additional resources for education?

The first step would be closing unnecessary loopholes as mentioned above, ensuring we receive a return on investment from corporations and companies who received breaks because, if not, we should go back and see how to make it really work. There are many companies looking to support JTED and CTE programs to help our students succeed and prepare for the workforce, we need to go to those companies and see how we can work together to expand these opportunities. The most important part to all of this is having individuals who are willing to work across the aisle and get things done, as education should not be a partisan issue.

Below, please include any additional information you believe Stand for Children should know about your priorities:

I am a product of public education and I would not be where I am in life today if it was not for the teachers and faculty who worked with me along the way. I was never the smartest kid in school, but I was always hard working and I knew no matter what obstacles I faced I had the teachers in my classes to help me every step of the way. From Mrs. Garcia, who drove the bus that picked me up from home every day to get me to school; to Mr. Freddy, the older man who for years made sure I made it across safely; to the amazing lunch ladies who became my friends when I didn't have any: they were ALL a part of my success. No one should go unnoticed in our schools and for that reason, as a legislator, I will do everything I can to protect and fight for the rights of all teachers, aids and workers in our public education system. The war on poor people and the war on public education has got to stop. I went into public health for one reason, and that was to help better our community. I owe everything I have to my public education and I will always be proud to have gone through public schools all the way through graduate school. I come from a family that values education, my parents always told us education was the key to everything and no matter how poor or how much we didn't have, no one, absolutely no one, could take what we learned away from us. All kids deserve the right to a quality education regardless of zip code and I will fight for it once elected.