



Congratulations on your candidacy for the Arizona State 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: Blake Sacha

Office Sought: House of Representatives Legislative District (LD): 12

Party Affiliation: Republican

E-Mail Address(es): blake@blakesachaforaz.com Phone: 602-418-5334

Alternate Campaign Contact: Chris Shipley 480-225-2621

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Education (Please note highest degree achieved): BScE University of Cincinnati, 1988, MA Education Central Michigan University, 2014

Previous Elected Office(s) Held: Appointed to Gilbert School Board in 2011

Current Profession: Adjunct instructor of Chemistry, Grand Canyon University

Please describe why you are qualified for the office sought:

I have a breadth and depth of experience which makes me uniquely qualified to lead the effort to solve some of Arizona's most difficult problems. As an experienced executive, I have successfully led small and large organizations, hired hundreds of people, managed multi-million dollar budgets and demonstrated the ability to build consensus and deliver results. I am a professional problem solver. I have a degree in chemical engineering, studied systems thinking at MIT and worked at Intel for 28 years solving complex problems. I have extensive experiencing using problem solving tools to solve difficult problems. I have a master's degree in education, taught hundreds of classes while at Intel and am currently an adjunct instructor at Grand Canyon University.

QUESTIONNAIRE

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

An excellent, highly qualified teacher in every classroom. This will require that we pay a competitive wage in order to attract and retain them.

Reduce classroom rules and restrictions in order to allow teachers to teach in the best manner for their students. This will improve learning and increase job satisfaction.

Arizona leaders need to establish new revenue streams to adequately fund education. This especially includes early education funding, including all day kindergarten and funding to catch up on school maintenance gaps. All options should be on the table, including reexamining gaming revenues, sales tax increase or lottery revenues. If the Legislature determines a tax increase is part of the equation, the public should have the option to vote up or down on any increase and the proposed increase should reflect only the necessary amount of money to fund our priorities.

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?

I support a public K-12 school funding model where all of the funding would come from the state. It would be distributed through a simplified funding formula on a per student basis and there would be no capital vs operations restrictions.

Open enrollment and school choice have provided excellent options for many students. However, there are still many students and parents that don't have or don't exercise these options.

We need to provide simple, measurable, transparent achievement data to enable parents to easily compare their options and take action.

We need to expand parental education programs to encourage them to take action on full-day kindergarten and understand the resources available to their students.

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

Provide a data based menu of assessments to evaluate growth and achievement.

Provide the infrastructure to allow parents easy access to this information in a way that facilitates comparison and decision making.

Utilize these growth and achievement metrics to reward high performing schools and identify and support low performing ones.

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 3rd 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 3rd 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?

Yes, these types of programs have demonstrated the ability to be successful and should be proliferated. Partnerships with local governments are one successful way to bring in additional funding and support for these types of programs and should be encouraged.

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, there is a significant positive return on the investment in early learning opportunities due to lower future costs.

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, I would support similar legislation in this case and more generally support local flexibility and increased accountability.

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

I support the specific idea and this legislation, but I am generally opposed to legislators taking pledges on any particular position.

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

I do support the policies called out in HB2435.

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?

It is critical that we establish a framework for education funding that is stable, sustainable and enables the high quality education needed for our future. This will require work on funding resources, funding formula and agreement on the expected outcome. This will take much longer than a single term, but we can make significant progress. Arizona leaders need to establish new revenue streams to adequately fund education. All options should be on the table, including reexamining gaming revenues, sales tax increase or lottery revenues. If the Legislature determines a tax increase is part of the equation, the public should have the option to vote up or down on any increase and the proposed increase should reflect only the necessary amount of money to fund our priorities. I support a public K-12 school funding model where all of the funding would come from the state. It would be distributed through a simplified funding formula on a per student basis and there would be no capital vs operations restrictions.

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

I support reducing funding restrictions to allow schools to more effectively spend their existing funding. This will allow the funds to be used for the highest leverage actions. We should explore ways to broaden our tax base to improve the reliability of school funding. I support a legislative referral of a Prop 301 increase to allow the voters of Arizona to vote on additional funding for education.



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

A strong education system is required for the future of Arizona. We must provide high quality education to enable students to be successful. Successful students will be a critical component of our future economic development.

As a former school board member, current teacher and professional problem solver, I have the knowledge and the skills to help solve some of the very difficult problems which we face in this space.