



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: Christopher L. Gilfillan

Office Sought: House of Representatives

Legislative District (LD): 20

Party Affiliation: Democratic Party

E-Mail Address(es): ChrisForAZ@gmail.com

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Alternate Campaign Contact: Blake Lister, (623) 810-0950

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Education (Please note highest degree achieved): Law Degree, J.D.

Previous Elected Office(s) Held: N/A

Current Profession: Manager, D. French Advisors – contract

Please describe why you are qualified for the office sought:

Throughout my career and life, I have been focused on public service. While a newspaper editor, I worked the education beat and held local politicians accountable to the public. In that spirit I went to law school, eventually clerking for a lawyer who helped restore rural Mississippians' oil rights and serving on our school's Bar Association. Since I have worked on

every education initiative I could find, from South Phoenix to Glendale, and worked for candidates who were strong on education – like Dr. Eric Meyer and Kelli Butler in LD 28. Even in 2013, I was a member of Stand for Children, and my wife got her start with Stand For Children.

In 2016, I also was a candidate and came within 3 percent of the vote. Since then, we have continued to build support within the community and now we have a large team behind us.

QUESTIONNAIRE

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

- Statewide Financial Accountability Standards and Enforcement Mechanisms

The imposition of statewide financial accountability standards that provide oversight of taxpayer funding and apply equally to traditional and charter public schools to prevent self-dealing financial arrangements and financial sustainability. This must include serious enforcement mechanisms.

- School Safety

There must be funding to provide additional teacher training to identify and support at-risk students, to provide greater access to mental health professionals in schools, to retrofit buildings to meet more rigorous safety standards so that classrooms cannot be easily breached, and a statewide review of district safety policies for emergency situations that include hostile intruders.

- A Designated School Funding Source

There must be a dedicated school funding source to adequately meet personnel, curriculum and facilities' needs. We do not need short-term fixes, we need sustainable education funding for the future.

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?
- Implement full-day kindergarten and expand pre-K programming, especially for schools in low-income areas.
 - Provide competitive teacher pay coupled with more, rather than less, rigorous requirements for teacher certification. Teachers who are ineffective are often not replaced because there is no one to fill their position. Competitive salaries will help increase the pool of available teachers and enable principals to keep those who are most effective.
 - Ensure that basic facilities standards are fully and sustainably funded.
 - There must be curriculum review and replacement on a scheduled basis determined by need, rather than on a “when funding is available basis”.
 - A full and transparent audit and review of the current corporate tax credits for STOs and the voucher system must be completed. The combination of the two policies currently drains needed funding from the state budget and affects funding for the traditional and charter public schools that the vast majority of students attend.
 - The Charter School Oversight Board must have the authority to hold charter schools to financial and academic standards through serious enforcement mechanisms.
3. What role should the state play in holding schools accountable for student academic growth and achievement?

Removing funding from already struggling schools is not a solution. A collaboration of the School Boards Association, select superintendents, principals and teachers to develop a framework of steps ranging from targeted teacher training coupled with increased supervision, reduced class size, and even teacher/administrative removal or transfer would be a good first step. It would be up to individual school boards to develop their own protocols based on the recommendations. The state would provide the resources to implement approved plans.

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! It is critical that struggling students in particular continue to have access to reading materials and evidence-based programs year-round. Funding should include provision of transportation.

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?

I support full-day kindergarten for all students and quality pre-school for low-income students in particular.

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. The original legislation isolated ELLs for 4 hours a day and so severely constrained instructional practice, that students were often unable to participate in Social Studies, Science, and fine arts instruction.

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

Yes.

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

The increased flexibility permitted by H.B. 2435 is a good start. It should be passed and the results of implementation evaluated per the terms of the bill.

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?

I support a designated funding source for education. I believe that an increase in the sales tax alone is too regressive. A combination of a progressive increase in the income tax, perhaps a small increase in the sales tax, and reduction of some of the upcoming state corporate tax cuts (given the size of the federal corporate tax cuts) would be a fair way to start thinking about ways to raise the revenue.

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

Support for small business, the economic mainstay of Arizona's economy, is the most important way to increase state revenue. We already provide a business-friendly climate and should continue to encourage relocation of businesses from other states.

Demonstrating a commitment to support the quality of education in Arizona is one of the most important strategies we can use to attract new businesses, especially with some of the businesses Arizona wants to attract like tech entrepreneurs and aerospace businesses.

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