



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: Thomas "T.J." Shope

Office Sought: State Representative

Legislative District (LD): LD8

Party Affiliation: Republican

E-Mail Address(es): tj@tjshope.com

Phone: (520) 251-5636

Alternate Campaign Contact: N/A

Campaign Website: www.tjshope.com

Education (Please note highest degree achieved): B.S. Political Science, Arizona State University 2008

Previous Elected Office(s) Held: Governing Board Member, Coolidge Unified School District 2009-Present - State Representative 2013-Present

Current Profession: Co-Owner, Shope's IGA Supermarket & State Representative LD8

Please describe why you are qualified for the office sought:

I believe that I am qualified to be re-elected because I have a record of standing up for the things I've run on, including but not limited to education and other issues dealing with children. Whether it's been fighting for more dollars at a state level, including but not limited to this year's 20x2020 plan or increasing teacher pay at a local school district level in Coolidge, I don't think my record can be questioned. I also sponsored legislation this year to make permanent a program for Arizona's most vulnerable children, those in Foster Care.

QUESTIONNAIRE

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

My top priorities for education are to keep the 20x2020 plan funded as well as to ensure that recent gains on test scores that compare us with other states nationally continue. We must continue to open up educational opportunities for all of our students whether it's in a district or charter setting and I'm fully supportive of a parent's freedom to choose the school of their choice, even though that often puts me at odds with my district governing board members.

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'm not sure I could answer this question with any amount of specificity other than to say that we need to do all we can to make sure that effective teachers are paired with students who need help in any school that their parents choose to enroll their youngsters in. Obviously, I'd look to STAND for specific policy advice in this area.

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

This is a great question that a lot of people often go back and forth on because of local control issues as well as the desire to have actual academic growth in all of Arizona's schools. While we have a grading system in Arizona for schools, I don't know that we use it to its best. We put the information out there but the parent still decides whether to send their children to that school or not. Should a school remain under the same leadership when it has performance issues and to what extent should the state wade in to that battle? I think more could be done but I'm unsure how that looks.



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?

Absolutely! In my local school district, these are items that we have made an investment in and I'm pleased to see that they appear to be working.

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 would not be opposed to the idea but won't commit to it until seeing some data. Some school districts already provide these types of things through their Title1 funding streams.

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?

I would be supportive.

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

I have never signed a pledge on any issue as a general rule since I decided to run for office in 2012 so my lack of signing shouldn't be viewed as a negative feeling toward the legislation but it's something I would be supportive of.

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

See Above...

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 am constantly arguing for increased funding to bring us more in line with the rest of the country but also know that our education outcomes outpace much of the country, even know we lag in funding. I believe we must at some point overhaul the entire funding system for K-12 education in our state in order to better address our deficiencies in certain areas.

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

Revenue due to our growing economy is coming in at a faster rate than we even anticipated. I believe much of this should be directed at education. As far as new revenue sources are concerned, I'd be a liar if I said we could just next year go in and figure it out and pass some sort of increase but I do think there are conversations to be had whether it's the taxation of medicinal marijuana or expanded gaming opportunities that will be helpful and things to consider.

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