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February 17, 2009

Dear Parents:

The current economic crisis looms large for all of us. It is inescapable. At this point, very few could say that they or their loved ones have not yet been affected by it. In our schools, we see evidence of this every day, as families and employees alike struggle to cope. Through it all, however, I am continually encouraged and heartened by the spirit of our community which is expressed in so many ways within our schools. Whether it be the unfaltering dedication of our employees to students, the continuing efforts of our volunteer parents and others, or the youthful optimism of our students, there is evidence everywhere that Amphitheater remains strong.

I must be frank with you and tell you that we will need this collective strength in the weeks and months to come. As I hope you are aware, the Arizona legislature recently cut our district's current year budget by approximately \$2,100,000. Because of the timing of this cut – more than 60% of the way through the current school year – it has the effect of a 6-8% cut and will be very difficult for our district to absorb.

We are doing our best to implement this year's cut in funding as far away from the classroom as possible. When so much of our budget is tied directly to our schools, however, this level of funding loss will inevitably affect our schools in some way. For example, you may have already found that your child's school is already reducing its use of paper or supplies with so many school days still remaining. Another example of the effect for this year will be our inability to fully clean our schools this summer so that they are properly prepared for the return of students in the fall.

The hurdles our schools and district will face from this year's budget cut are nothing compared to that which will result if the Arizona Legislature imposes the cuts which have been announced for next year (2009-2010). If enacted, those cuts would tear away another \$15,000,000, or 20 to 22% of our programs and services, resulting in the loss of at least 200 jobs in our District. I do not exaggerate to tell you that this would be catastrophic for our schools and community.

Beyond the devastation of our school programs, the legislature's proposed cuts for next year would accumulate with those in other districts across our community and state to generate an economic snowball of monstrous proportions, which would only deepen our state's great economic chasm. The people of Arizona and certainly our children don't deserve that.

The future of this State and its ability to rise from the difficult circumstances which now face it depend upon our children, who will forge that future from the legacy that we leave them. How can we, as a state, tear the promise of the future from our children? Do they deserve any less an opportunity for learning and success than the generations who preceded them? With the stakes as high as they are in the world today, do our children not need *more* opportunity, rather than less?

Many in our current legislature will tell you that they want more opportunity for our students, but yet they still seemed resigned that all they can do in the current economy is slash away at our education budget. We can certainly respect that the work our legislators have before them is daunting, but that work can be done and should be done with courage and grace, rather than with a sense of defeat and resignation. There are solutions other than gutting our schools – which is no solution at all.

Consider, for example, the county equalization fund. This source of taxes exists for the specific purpose of supporting schools – the money it raises goes to our schools. And yet, the legislative leadership of this state is proposing to permanently repeal this fund this year. If they left the fund in place, however, it would generate \$250,000,000 for schools, making much of their proposed cuts for next year unnecessary.

Remember also, that time and time again, when presented with a choice to support our schools or not, our voters have made their voices clear. With Proposition 301, for example, voters approved a small increase in our sales taxes which has generated millions of dollars for schools statewide. Similarly, many districts across the state, including our own, have received the support of their local voters in bond or budget override elections – each such election representing a reaffirmation of our collective commitment to education.

We need you to once again support your child's school as you have in the past. We need your continued and renewed commitment. Your support has never been more important. Here is what you can, indeed what you must do:

- 1. Be informed. Know how the legislature is affecting your child's future.**
- 2. Insist on being represented. As a parent in this state, you matter; your child matters – as much as anyone.**
- 3. Contact your legislators. Their information is enclosed. Call. Write. E-mail. Tell them your concerns. Tell them about your child's need for a quality education. Ask your friends and family to do the same.**
- 4. Ask your legislators for their commitment not to cut our school budgets any more and ask them not to eliminate the County Equalization Tax at this crucial time.**
- 5. Tell them you want them to consider choices other than cuts as solutions for next year's projected budget shortfall.**

Parents, I have worked in our public schools for more than 30 years. It has been one of my greatest joys in life to feel that I have made a difference in the lives of children. Our legislators will make a difference in the lives of children for years to come by what they do in this current crisis. The question is whether they will do great harm or great good. For me, in all those many years, this has never been a choice, but instead a single imperative: **to a child, only do good.**

Let those who represent you know there can be no choice but doing good for your child.

Sincerely,



Vicki Balentine, Ph. D.
Superintendent