May 12 Legislative Report

May 4, the Senate and House Republican leadership released a Joint Draft Budget Proposal. Unfortunately, it is worse than the previously updated budget and not acceptable for K-12 Education. At a minimum the proposed cuts to K-12 Education add up to 11.5%. Here is the math:

$ 98 million Fiscal Year 2009 lump sum budget cut continued
$175 million lump sum cut additional for Fiscal Year 2010
\+ $300 million cash balance sweep (more on this below)
$573 million total

Additional reductions to soft capital, new school construction, and building renewal, to name just a few, take the total much higher. Accompanying this report is a detailed accounting prepared by the Arizona Education Association.

The biggest difference in this latest proposal is the suggestion that $300 million be swept from school districts' cash carryover funds. Specifics are unknown, but what is widely understood is that this would punish the most responsible districts. These districts have prudently saved a small portion of their funds when planning ahead for large expenditures and unanticipated emergencies. Just one example are school districts that have been saving a small amount of money each year to prepare for the loss of excess utilities funding in 2010. Those funds would be swept.

Once again, this proposal relies entirely on budget cuts and does not include any revenue enhancements. Several groups have published well-reasoned reports on revenue generating options. We, as an education community, know that we must absorb some cuts, but this proposal is unacceptable. We need a balanced approach that explores ways to increase the state's revenues in addition to cuts.

Across Arizona in all school districts, cuts that have been made and those that are proposed in this budget will impact our children in their classrooms, even though our administrators and our governing board have been responsible, thoughtful, and transparent. Discussions of across-the-board salary cuts from 2% to as much as 6.2% for every district employee have begun.

Now is the time for you to contact the Governor and your elected representatives again. Ask that Republicans and Democrats work together with the Governor to craft a budget that reflects the values of most Arizonans. Please be concise and respectful, but be passionate. Share your own personal story of how budget cuts will affect your grandchildren. We do know that our efforts are making a difference!

Please email your legislator. Identify yourself as a voter. Be respectful.

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Horwin
AEA-Retired Legislative Chair