

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

It is a great pleasure to be back at the House Education Committee. Some years ago, I was Vice Chair of this Committee.

My primary job is helping schools increase academic outcomes, and I will be talking about that as I have done in previous years.

But first I want to talk with you about the main theme of my talk today: students cannot achieve academically if they are not safe. Parents expect schools to be safe and positive environments for their children to learn.

As you know, this year we are requesting an increase in the appropriation for police officers in the schools. Here are some important facts.

According to the Arizona Republic dated April 15, 2024, schools are calling law enforcement in response to students making gun threats an average of over 500 times per year. In schools without police officers, we are playing Russian roulette with a catastrophe waiting to happen.

They gave some examples:

A student brought the components of an AR-15 to campus.

A preschool student carried a loaded gun in a backpack.

Two students were arrested after one had an unloaded handgun in his backpack, and the other carried the bullets for him in his backpack.

An eight-year-old student brought a gun to school and was showing it to friends on campus.

A student had a gun in his backpack that discharged as he was leaving the campus.

These examples illustrate the need to have police officers in our schools to protect students and staff.

I first served as Superintendent from 2003 to 2011 and then was elected to become Attorney General. When I was elected again to this office in 2023, my biggest nightmare was that a maniac would invade a school and kill 20 students as has happened in other states and could happen here. The students would be gone and the parents would never recover. I know that because I lost a daughter.

So I made it a high priority to increase the number of police officers in schools to make them safe from deadly invasions. There are no massacres in police stations because they can defend themselves. We owe it to our students and staffs to defend them. During the last three years, we have increased the number of police officers in schools from 190 to 565.

My actions were vindicated when a maniac invaded a Charter School in Tucson. He was in a room that happened to have 20 students. He had a gun and a knife and said he was going to kill the students to make them famous. A police officer who was experienced and brave did not wait for back up but immediately arrested him. This saved the lives of 20 students and saved the state from a major catastrophe.

So far we have not denied any requests for police officers from schools. But we are facing a huge increase in demand for police officers for next year. Five districts and counties have

already indicated to us that they will be asking for police when requests open up in February. Washington School District alone will need 22 additional police officers.

As you know, we have requested an increase in funding. If there is no increase in funding and one of the districts or counties that asked for new police officers did not get them had a preventable incident at one of its campuses that would be a real tragedy.

Just as parents want schools to be safe and positive experiences so that their children can learn, they want the best possible academic education for their children. For that reason, 90% of my time and effort, and that of the Department, is devoted to doing everything we can to help schools improve academics. So ... now let's talk about academics.

I would like to share several things we are doing to help schools improve academic outcomes for students.

First, I would like to talk to you about a program called Project Momentum. This has proven by data to be the best method for helping schools improve test scores. It was first sponsored by Governor Ducey. His successor unbelievably eliminated it. We in the Department of Education took it over. Schools using Project Momentum show double the progress of the state average in reading, and three times the progress of the state average in math. There is a special category for schools in the bottom 5% of the state. After we worked with schools in that category using Project Momentum, 80% of those schools are no longer in the bottom 5%.

Another project we did involved adopting a school called the Wilson School in a neighborhood near our office. As you know, it is a lower income area. People from our office

went to that school weekly to help teachers with their teaching techniques, and to teach some classes themselves. Their math scores went up 27%.

During COVID the federal government made funds available to overcome learning loss. My predecessor allocated some of those funds to projects that would not have any academic result. We clawed back those funds and devoted them to free tutoring for any students whose parents asked for it. Over 17% of those students made six months of progress in one 6 week tutoring period.

We are also emphasizing the importance of maximizing classroom time by increasing attendance.

There was a professor in the Midwest who conducted a federally funded time on task study. He concluded that the more time students spent learning something, the more of it they learned. His mother said to him “you needed a federally funded study to tell you that?” Maximizing classroom time on academics is the key to success.

My heroes are science teachers who love science, history teachers who love history, and so on, and who want to teach their subjects bell to bell. After I was elected but before I took office this term, some of these teachers complained to me that under the social emotional learning doctrine of my predecessor, they were forced by administrators to play what they described as dumb games with the students when they wanted to be teaching their subjects. We have adopted the philosophy that every instructional minute is precious. While we do not have the authority to force schools to have their teachers teach their subjects bell to bell, we have attempted to influence them in that direction.

This involves eliminating distractions like critical race theory, DEI, age-inappropriate sexual lessons, and so on. On our website where we report the A through F grade schools achieve, we have reported to parents which schools have adopted this philosophy and which schools have not. I proposed to the State Board that they open the teaching standards to eliminate DEI requirements. This passed the Board with zero no votes. If the change is ultimately passed, it will protect us from threatened cutoff of federal funds, which for our state is over \$800 million.

When I took office this term, I was upset about very low proficiency rates in predominantly native American districts. We worked with the Office of Indian Education to put more focus on helping those districts improve academic outcomes. Ganado, Red Mesa, Baboquivari, Kayenta, Sacaton, and Tuba City, all more than doubled their math proficiency rates. Chinle had two schools that exceeded the state average in both math and reading.

Schools around the state are showing that when they focus on academics, students from all backgrounds succeed.

Success stories such as the great results in Native American schools, the Wilson Lab School and the work of Project Momentum show that when schools use every precious instructional minute to focus on teaching academics, student achievement rises rapidly. ANY school in ANY neighborhood in ANY part of the state can do this and these success stories prove it can happen quickly.

I want to thank you for passing the bill to keep cell phones out of classrooms. I proposed this in 2024, and you passed it, but the governor vetoed it. I proposed it again last year and you passed it again. This time the governor signed it. This will be a great benefit for academic

progress, as you can imagine what it would be like to try to teach a class while students were scrolling on their cell phones.

Our main job is to prepare students to be successful in college. But not all students will be going to college. Some will need meaningful employment to help pay for college. So we started the student industry partnership, or SIP, to greatly expand career and technical education and to prepare students to have the skills to earn good incomes after high school.

Arizona is lucky to have great companies. CEOs have complained to me that there is a shortage of skilled labor. So I made a deal with them. We have access to 1,200,000 students and we can provide them with the skilled labor that they need.

In return, they are to provide our career technical education teachers and administrators with knowledge about what skills the students need to learn in order to get well paying jobs after high school.

We divided the state into 11 location sites, and had a traveling road show with a conference in each location site. Companies who wanted to hire from that area of the state met with career technical education administrators and others to let them know what skills the students need to get well paying jobs with their companies after high school. Our goal is that every student, without exception, graduates college or career ready.

I have always been an advocate for parental choice of schools, including when I was in this body. In the last three years while I have been Superintendent, we have increased the number of participants in ESA from 11,000 to over 100,000.

We have a family with three children. Two of the children are doing just fine in district schools. The third child's needs are not being met. Now, the parents can find another school that meets the child's needs. I do not understand how anyone can say the parents do not have a right to find a school that meets their child's needs, unless people are so immersed in ideology that they lose sight of what is the best for students.

This is the deadline year for renewing Proposition 123. The land trust has plenty of money, and I urge you, as I have done in prior years, to devote a significant amount of money from the land trust, without the need to increase taxes, to go **directly** to teachers to give them a pay raise. Classroom teachers deserve a pay raise and to go to them directly and not through districts. Currently we are losing more teachers than are coming into the profession. That is a true emergency.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have ... as long as it is about education.

Thank you.