



GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10

DATE OF MEETING: September 24, 2024

TITLE: Study: Public Meeting Pursuant to A.R.S. 15-481(Y) to Provide Update on Programs Financed through the 10% Maintenance and Operations Override and the 3.5% K-3 Special Programs Override

BACKGROUND:

A.R.S. § 15-481(Y) mandates school districts with a voter-approved budget override in place hold an annual public meeting to enable public comment concerning the override. Amphitheater Public Schools is fortunate to have two budget overrides in place at this time: (1) a 10% maintenance and operations (“M&O”) budget override, and (2) a 3.5% K-3 special programs budget override. This agenda item is offered to permit the Governing Board to hold its annual public meeting for these overrides.

I. Law Governing Annual Public Meeting for Overrides

A.R.S. § 15-481(Y) states:

Each school district that currently increases its budget pursuant to this section is required to hold a public meeting each year at which an update of the programs or capital improvements financed through the override is discussed and at which the public is permitted an opportunity to comment and:

...

2. *If the increase is pursuant to subsection E, F, I or J of this section, the update shall include at a minimum the amount expended in the previous fiscal year and the amount included in the current budget for each of the purposes listed in the informational pamphlet prescribed by subsection B of this section.*

Consistent with these requirements, this agenda item also provides the Board with an update about the programs financed through each of the District’s overrides.

II. Significant Benefits of the Voter-Approved Overrides

On May 23, 2022, Cronkite News reported, “Arizona was again among the worst states in the nation for per pupil spending on K-12 education in 2020, a ranking that advocates said was embarrassing but not surprising.”¹ According to the article, the Census Bureau report for this year says:

“Arizona spent \$8,785 per pupil in 2020, ahead of only Utah and Idaho that year. And it was dead last – 51st among states and the District of Columbia – when it came to the amount spent on actual instruction, at \$4,801 per pupil.

¹ Morgan Fischer/Cronkite News, Arizona Mirror May 23. “Arizona Again near Bottom of States for per Pupil Spending, Census Says.” *Arizona Mirror*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.azmirror.com/2022/05/23/arizona-again-near-bottom-of-states-for-per-pupil-spending-census-says/> (Nov. 8, 2022).

Both were well below the national average of \$13,494 overall and \$8,176 on instruction per pupil for that year.”

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Arizona has not funded its public schools at the national state average since the 1980s.² Arizona has “slipped to ‘bad’ and then to ‘worse’, becoming one of the lowest funded public education systems in the country, on a per-pupil basis,” and unfortunately, that is the reality that Arizona school districts face today.

With this in mind, Amphitheater Public Schools asked voters to approve a general M&O override after significant study and a community survey of the District’s electors. In 2005, the voters of the Amphitheater Unified School District put a 10% M&O override in place to enable students who attend Amphitheater’s schools greater opportunities than those provided generally by the State of Arizona. The Amphitheater community renewed the override in 2009, in 2014, and again in 2019. In 2019, the Amphitheater community also approved a 3.5% special programs override specifically for the benefit of the District’s Kindergarten through Third Grade program.

Both overrides are seven-year overrides. This means that the voters approved putting a budget override in place to allow the Amphitheater District to exceed the standard Revenue Control Limit (the amount that Arizona authorizes each school district to spend to educate the students of that district) by 10% for seven years. Similarly, the K-3 special programs override authorizes the District to exceed its K-3 budget by 3.5% during that same time. Both overrides are in place for their full percentage amounts for school years (“SY”) 2020-2021 through 2024-2025 and then will begin to phase out over a two-year period.

Although the State of Arizona began increasing its education spending in 2019 for the first time in a decade, the minimal increase provided does not even make a dent in the amount needed to promote Arizona from its rank as the lowest per pupil spending state. Today, Arizona remains well below average in funding of public education, and Arizona school districts continue to struggle from the consistent and substantial annual budgetary cuts that the Arizona legislature made to public education between 2009 – 2018. Fortunately, the 10% M&O budget override that the Amphitheater voters put in place helped Amphitheater Public Schools to be able to continue to provide consistent benefits for its students despite the significant budget cuts experienced by Arizona school districts. Through the assistance of our voters, students who attend Amphitheater Public Schools had and continue to have experiences that other school districts were unable to provide for nearly a decade.

III. Funds Provided through the Budget Overrides

The amount provided through the voter-approved overrides changes annually depending on the amount of the District’s budget. A school district’s M&O budget is largely determined by its student enrollment so budget overrides can change annually when enrollment changes occur. While the District has seen a declining student enrollment trend for several years, this is largely due to natural changes in the birth cohort.

1. 10% Budget Override

Last year, Amphitheater reported receiving an additional \$8,623,074 in its M&O budget through the 10% override. The amount provided through the override this year is \$8,683,233.

2. 3.5% K-3 Override

Last year, the funds provided through the voter-approved 3.5% K-3 special programs override were an additional \$2,610,148 specifically for K-3 education in Amphitheater Public Schools. The amount provided this year is more, at a total of \$3,039,132.

² ARIZONA RANKS 49TH IN EDUCATION FUNDING – HOW DID WE GET HERE? (2019, May 22). Retrieved from <https://azcharters.org/arizona-ranks-49th-in-education-funding-how-did-we-get-here/> (Nov. 8, 2022).

IV. Programs Financed by the 10% M&O Budget Override

1. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach Art in Elementary Schools

The M&O override also continues to permit the District to provide a certificated art teacher at every one of its elementary schools. Like with class size reduction, the M&O budget only affords a partial contract for art at the elementary schools, but funding from the 10% M&O override enables art teachers to expand the amount of time that students have in art class each week. This year, the number of art teachers at each of the District's eleven (11) elementary schools and two (2) K-8 schools remained consistent with prior years during which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

2. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach Music in Elementary Schools

Similarly, the M&O override continues to enable dedicated certificated music teachers to offer expanded music classes at every one of the District's elementary and K-8 schools. This year, the number of elementary music teachers remained consistent with prior years in which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

3. Dedicated Certificated Teachers to Teach PE in Elementary Schools

The same is true for certificated physical education teachers who continue to provide expanded physical education offerings at each elementary and K-8 school in the District as well. This year, the number of elementary physical education teachers in the District's elementary and K-8 schools remained consistent with prior years in which the 10% M&O budget override has been in place.

4. Choice Middle School Elective Classes, Math Labs, and Writing Labs

Through the 10% M&O override this year, advanced learning and elective courses continue to be made available to middle school students at every middle school and K-8 school. These elective course offerings include career exploration, drama, dance, MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), science, programming and technology. In addition, the override also continues to add math and writing labs for middle school students.

5. High School Technology, Science and Fine Arts Classes

Moreover, the 10% M&O override likewise continues to fund additional technology, science and fine arts electives in all three high schools. The additional courses provided through the override include specialized elective offerings in the areas of art, music, computer science, modern languages, and advanced placement courses.

6. Tutoring and Intervention Programs

Since 2020, the District has been fortunate to be able to apply federal ESSER dollars toward tutoring and intervention services for students this year; however, the conclusion of ESSER funds, the programs funded through ESSER will be entirely reliant upon funding provided by the 10% M&O override. Despite the ending of ESSER funds, the 10% M&O override funds will continue to fund tutoring and other intervention programs to serve and benefit our students throughout the school year and into the summer, consistent with prior years in which the override has been in place.

7. Amphitheater Public School Employee Compensation Enhancement

The override also continues to provide additional funding to enhance compensation for certificated and classified personnel in the District so that District wages remain competitive to hire the best educators for our students. This benefit provided by the current override is important for the District to compete against private employers and charter schools to obtain trained professional staff. Currently, all staff continue to receive an increase of approximately three percent (3%) to their base salaries through the funding provided by the general 10% M&O override.

8. Added Technology Positions to Remain Current with Technology Changes

The override has also made possible hiring of added positions in our Facilities and Technology Departments, to better enable the District to maintain facilities and our growing technology demands. The following positions continue to be funded through the override: two Maintenance Tech II positions in the Facilities Department, and one Programmer Analyst in the Technology Department.

9. Class Size Reduction

Before voters put the override in place, class sizes at the elementary level were routinely at or over 30 students, and middle and high school classes in areas like English, math or science ranged upwards of 35-38 students. The current 10% M&O override continues to permit the District to add additional staff in schools where class sizes are larger, particularly in the core content areas that every student in the grade level must take, by adding another teacher when necessary and thereby reducing the number of students in a class at that grade level.

This year, the funding provided through the override provided additional classroom teachers.

V. Programs Funded through the 3.5% K-3 Special Programs Override

The 3.5% special programs override for Kindergarten through Third Grade programs are being used specifically to benefit Kindergarten through Third Grade programs in all District elementary and K-8 schools in the following ways.

1. Free Full-Day Kindergarten

The 3.5% special program override funds free full-day kindergarten at all of Amphitheater's elementary and K-8 schools. Prior to the K-3 special programs override being approved by the voters, Amphitheater Public Schools only offered free all-day Kindergarten to children attending schools that qualify for Title I funds given the ability to use Title I funds for this purpose. Schools that did not qualify for Title I offered half-day Kindergarten and parents who wanted their students to attend the full-day had to subsidize the second half of the Kindergarten day. Now, Kindergarten is offered for the full-day at no cost throughout the District. This has freed-up those Title I funds previously dedicated to pay for Kindergarten for use in Title I schools to benefit students at those schools in alternative ways.

2. Additional Class-Size Reduction in Kindergarten – Third Grades

The special program override also funds additional teachers for Kindergarten to Third Grade classrooms to further reduce class size for the youngest learners in the District. Through the funding provided by this special programs override, the District has been able to reduce class sizes in Kindergarten through Third Grades with goals of class maximum student numbers of:

- Kindergarten - 25 students
- First Grade - 25 students
- Second Grade - 26 students
- Third Grade - 27 students

This is a substantial decrease from classes that used to exceed 30. Research has established that smaller class size is an important determinant of academic and social student outcomes due to increasing the time available to the teacher to better tailor their instruction to meet individual student needs. Therefore, the changes provided to the youngest learners of the District through the 3.5% special programs override are helping these students through increased student engagement, small group learning, focused instruction, and decreased time spent by the teacher on classroom management.

VI. Renewal of 10% M&O Override and 3.5% K-3 Special Programs Override

At the conclusion of the 2024-2025 school year, both the 10% M&O Override and 3.5% K-3 Override, will end. Recognizing the extraordinary value both overrides have provided to students and the staff that support students throughout the District, the District is currently seeking voter approval for a new override that combines both the 10% M&O Override and 3.5% K-3 Special Programs Override.

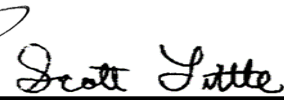
VII. Conclusion

Amphitheater Public Schools appreciates the confidence of its electors in the approval of the 10% M&O override and 3.5% K-3 special programs override, both of which greatly benefit the students of this District. The two budget overrides have provided critical programs that are necessary for students to continue to receive a high-quality education and develop the Portrait of a Graduate skills that Amphitheater strives for each student to attain before graduating from the District. With other states in the United States dedicating nearly triple the amount that Arizona provides for per-pupil public education funding, the programs that Amphitheater Public Schools is able to provide through these voter-approved budget overrides and the approval of the proposed, combined override item, will ensure our students remain competitive as they prepare for their post-high school colleges or careers in the rapidly changing world.

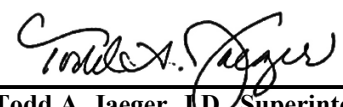
RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for the Governing Board to comply with the requirements of A.R.S. § 15-481(Y) by holding a public meeting for Administration to provide an update of the programs financed through the 10% M&O override and the 3.5% K-3 Special Programs override, and to permit public comment during the public meeting.

INITIATED BY:

  
Tassi Call,
Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education
Matt Munger,
Associate Superintendent for Secondary Education
and
Scott Little,
Chief Financial Officer

Date: September 18, 2024


Todd A. Jaeger, J.D., Superintendent