



Pima County School Retirees' Association

November, 2017

We welcome all retired school employees



President's Desk

~ Steve Poe



It's Time to Start Looking Out for the Less Fortunate, Each Other, and All School Retirees

We have two very important messages to relay at this time of year. One is the great need in our community to help those less fortunate. The other is our responsibility to school retirees across Arizona. There are many things to be thankful for, and giving back of our time and money is the key.

As we approach the holiday season for another year, let me remind you of the reason for the founding of our organization which has become PCSRA. Back in the 1950s, the pensions for retired educators had been stuck at \$50 per month since around the time we became a state in 1912. Some retired teachers held the first meeting of the Southern Arizona Retired Teachers Association (SARTA) in Tucson exactly 67 years ago this month. These retirees, followed by some Maricopa County area retirees, decided it was time to help school retirees from falling further into poverty.

Later, these groups decided to form a state-wide organization to promote a real retirement system for Arizona retirees, which is now known as AASRA. Pima County School Retirees Association is the local branch of AASRA. In the succeeding years, these citizen lobbyists were able to do wondrous things at the Arizona State Legislature for all school retirees, including forming the constitutional protections that now prevent employee/employer contributions from being "robbed" to help out the state general fund. These constitutional protections are constantly under siege by those who want to destroy our defined benefit system. Frankly, we CAN'T let them do that.

As we protect our retirements, we must also help those who are not lucky enough to have these kinds of protections or retirement income. Therefore, your PCSRA has taken on two tasks for the holidays.

First, we will take a collection in December to provide much-needed support to the Tucson Food Bank.

Second, at our December luncheon, we plan to collect items needed by Sister Jose Women's Center, a local homeless women's shelter. See page 3 to find out what items to bring.

We will do both of these things INSTEAD of sharing gifts with each other at our holiday gathering. Anyway, most of us, by this stage in life, are trying to lessen the number of "things" we bring into our homes. There are far too many Tucson area residents in need of the services of the food banks and domestic abuse shelters. Your PCSRA executive board urges you to help to the extent that you are comfortable. Thank you and have a great holiday season.

~ ~ Steve



October Report

PCSRA Membership is currently 197.

AASRA (state) membership is 98.

Scholarship Fund: \$1,082.93

Scholarship Goal: \$2,000

December 14th Luncheon at Viscount Suites Rincon University High School Choraleers

\$19.00 members, \$23.00 nonmembers

Postmark by Dec. 8 to:

PCSRA Reservations, 4315 E. Seneca St., 85712.

Traditional Turkey Meal with Pumpkin Pie

Name _____

Guest _____



Holiday Luncheon to Feature Rincon/University Choraleers

The Rincon/University High School Choir consists of about 100 students under the direction of Mareena Boosamra Ball. They will perform at the December PCSRA luncheon, presenting a wide-ranging repertoire, including classical works by masters such as Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart in addition to modern and folk music.

Two years ago, the RUHS Concert Choir received an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Donations from PCSRA members helped make the trip a reality for the choir. This year they are fundraising for a trip to sing at the International Festival of the Aegean in Syros, Greece, in July 2018. This trip, priced at \$3700-\$3800 per participant, presents a wonderful opportunity for the students.

AZ Tax Credit Donations can be made on-line via their web-page, ruhschoir.weebly.com/fundraising, or by sending checks made out to Rincon/University High School with "choir" written on the memo line. The mailing address is 421 N. Arcadia Ave., Tucson, AZ, 85711. An individual can donate \$200 (\$400 per married couple) as a dollar for dollar tax credit on Arizona state returns. You can go to the RUHS website at www.ruhschoir@weebly.com, click on the donation button, and use your credit card. Let's see if PCSRA members can help the choir go to Greece!

Mark your calendars! The RUHS choir will perform for free at their Rincon H.S. Winter Concert on Wed., Dec. 6, at 6:30 and again at their Spring Concert on March 8 at 6:30 PM.

They are also presenting a Madrigal Dinner and Concert starting at 6:00 PM on Dec. 15 and Dec. 16. The RUHS cafeteria is transformed into an English Castle and the choir appears in Renaissance costumes. The audience is seated at tables of eight. Tickets are \$30 with a choice of a chicken or vegetarian dinner. This event sells out quickly.

If you are interested, write a check to Terry Bagwell by Friday Nov 17. She will write one check and get the tickets. Contact Terry by phone 748-1720, cell 331-1715, or email at tbasketcase@cox.net.

PCSRA's Pete Bourret Wins National Award for His Poetry

Each year the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary jointly sponsor a National Veterans Creative Art Competition with categories ranging from visual arts and performance arts to creative writing. Entries are judged on a national basis and awards are presented at the annual festival. The 2017 Festival was held in late October in Buffalo, New York.



Pete Bourret

Peter Bourret won a first-place medal in one of the three poetry categories. He was one of 140 veterans who received an invitation to participate in the Festival this year. Pete shared his award-winning poem entitled "Burn't Baby Blues." This is the third year

his creative writing has been honored by the National Creative Arts Festival. Congratulations, Pete!



YOUTH ON THEIR OWN™

Educating Homeless Teens...
Investing in Arizona's Future!

PCSRA Reaches Out to YOTO

PCSRA members filled up two tables and the back of Stewart Bagwell's pick-up truck with food and household items for homeless teens at the October luncheon. These items will make a big difference in their lives. We recently received a

Dear Members,

Thank you so much for your recent donation of food, hygiene and household items to Youth On Their Own! Without your support, we would not be able to fulfill our mission of providing assistance to students seeking to complete their education,

Because of your generosity, they are able to realize their dream of staying in school and graduating. Thank you!

Sincerely,

*Joan
YOTO Volunteer*

PCSRA BOOK CLUB

We had a great discussion in October that started with a review of Giant of the Senate, and then moved on to other related U.S. Senate topics. It was another winner of a book and a great conversation.

Our selection for November is Rules of Magic by Alice Hoffman. "For the Owens family, love is a curse that began in 1620, when Maria Owens was charged with witchery for loving the wrong man.

Hundreds of years later, in New York City at the cusp of the sixties, when the whole world is about to change, Susanna Owens knows her three children are dangerously unique. Difficult Franny, with skin as pale as milk and blood red hair, shy and beautiful Jet, who can read other people's thoughts, and charismatic Vincent, who began looking for trouble on the day he could walk.

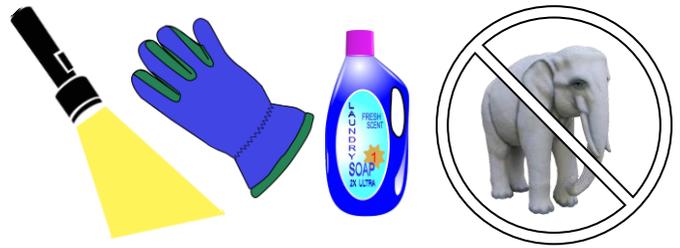
From the start Susanna sets down rules for her children: No walking in the moonlight, no red shoes, no wearing black, no cats, no crows, no candles, and no books about magic. And most importantly, never, ever, fall in love.

But when her children visit their Aunt Isabelle, in the small Massachusetts town where the Owens family has been blamed for everything that has ever gone wrong, they uncover family secrets and begin to understand the truth of who they are. Back in New York City, each begins a risky journey as they try to escape the family curse.

Thrilling and exquisite, real and fantastical, The Rules of Magic is a story about the power of love reminding us that the only remedy for being human is to be true to yourself. *Find your magic.*"

Meet us at Steve Poe's home, 3331 E. Waverly St. (east of Country Club) between Pima and Grant on Nov. 30 at 1 p.m. See you there.

Jim Marr 520-977-9438 jbm500@cox.net



Useful Gifts to Our Homeless Sisters Replace White Elephants

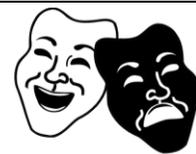
Tucson's Sister Jose Women's Center, SJWC, serves homeless women of all ages, races, and religions. The center, which opened in 2010 at 1050 S. Park Ave., provides a safe anchor for women to rebuild their lives by providing counseling, support, education, food and a safe place to sleep. SJWC serves about 100 women a day and has beds for 50 women to spend the night. For more information, contact the center by phone at 909-3905 or visit their website atbwww.srjosewomensshelter.org.

PCSRA members are encouraged to donate items to the Sister Jose Women's Center at the December Luncheon. This year, instead of giving gifts to each other, PCSRA members will give gifts to homeless women. The center asks that gifts be unwrapped. Please do not include food (other than what is on the list), sugary treats, or Christmas stockings. This is a wish list of items the women would like. Thanks ahead of time for your generous support. Let's make the holidays brighter for women who need our help.

Peanut butter crackers	
Prepared chicken/tuna salad to go	
Women's cotton panties in all sizes and colors	
Gloves, no hats or scarfs	Women's socks
Laundry detergent	Flashlights
Twin cotton sheet sets	Pillows
Blankets for twin beds	Lap blankets
Sleeping bags	Backpacks

PCSRA Scholarship Fundraiser a Real Gas

Plan to attend "The Lone Stranger" with 53 of your best friends from PCSRA on Feb. 18, 2018 at 3:00 pm. Judy Hokett has reserved 54 seats, including a row for those who are mobility challenged. Tickets are \$27, sold in advance only, with \$21.67 going to The Gaslight and the other \$5.33 going to the PCSRA Scholarship Fund. \$5.33 is tax-deductible. Tickets will be available for sale at the November luncheon and until we sell out. They make great Christmas presents. If you want to be sure to have one or more tickets, please notify Terry Bagwell or another board member to get your name on the list and pay your \$27! It's not highbrow, but it's FUN!



What's AZ's Formula for Funding Schools?

The formula that AZ uses to fund public schools was set in 1980. The formula is based on the idea that a certain percentage of each school will be composed of children with special needs and assumes that those children will be **evenly distributed** among all schools. That was before charter schools and open enrollment changed the landscape of education in AZ. Charter schools and district schools are mandated to provide appropriate services to those children, regardless of what percentage those students make up out of the school's general population.

Funding Special Needs Services

Extra services are funded at two levels depending on the needs of the child. Group A includes children with specific learning disabilities, speech impairments, emotional disabilities, gifted children, etc. Group B students--those with multiple disabilities, autism, or visual / hearing impairments--receive a much higher level of service and are allotted more funding.

The allocations are based on the number of students in a district with over 1000 students. A district with 20,000 students may receive an additional \$250 for each of those students to cover Group A students. The formula ignores how many students actually require additional services.

Unintended Consequences

The formula was designed to deter districts from over identifying students with special needs. That has led to a disparity. Certain schools have a higher level of students with special needs while other schools have fewer. Two schools the same size will receive equal funding regardless of the number of Group A students in the school. Often district schools have a higher percentage of special needs students than do charter schools. In the case of Group B children, the funding follows the student.

What about the Feds?

In the underfunded Arizona educational system, these issues are exacerbated by the fact the federal government is not living up to its obligations. Approximately 40% of the funding of special needs students is supposed to come from the federal government. In fact, the feds are only supplying about one-half of that amount, leaving the state to pick up the rest.



Education News

~ Jerry Holmes



Unseen Caveats in Funding Reports

Since special needs services are mandated, parents and special interest groups are quick to point out deficiencies in such services. Lawsuits against school districts for insufficient services for special needs students are common.

Since there are no mandates for general education funding or services, those funds are targeted for transfer to other needs. As a result, funding is often pulled from regular education in order to cover special needs service compliance. In a state which ranks at the bottom for per-student funding, there is often less money available than what is reported.

It Was a Great Idea in Theory

In 1994, as a result of a 1991 suit, funding for education in AZ changed. Prior to 1994, schools had to get money for new facilities and the maintenance of existing facilities from the taxpayers in their districts. Bond elections were used to raise money to build new schools and upgrade existing facilities and services such as transportation. The 1991 lawsuit alleged that poorer districts could not keep pace with wealthier districts and as a result the legislature was not meeting their constitutional duty of maintaining a "general and uniform" school system throughout the state. The AZ Supreme Court ultimately agreed.

So the legislature created a School Facilities Board (SFB) which was supposed to finance new schools and provide adequate funds for upgrades and maintenance to existing facilities. However, since its inception the legislature has not fully funded the SFB. Once again districts are relying on voters to approve bonds and overrides to fund their needs.

What about Prop 301 Funding?

The head of Governor Ducey's Classroom First Initiative Council wants to renew Prop 301, the 0.6% sales tax for education that was first passed in 2000. Jim Swanson has called for adding an additional 1% sales tax beyond the 0.6% that currently exists. Gov. Ducey does not support raising the tax and it is unclear if he supports the renewal of the 0.6% tax.

AZ Legislature Still Battling the Courts

In September I wrote about a suit filed this summer against the AZ legislature by school districts, claiming the legislature has not adequately funded facilities and maintenance in schools. The claims from the districts say the state has under-funded them by about \$300 million a year for a total of over \$2 billion.

The state has argued that the courts do not have the authority to tell the legislature how much money must be allocated to schools. Brett Johnson, representing the state, said, “The question of how much should be appropriated for any particular item in a given year is clearly committed by our Constitution to those acting in a legislative capacity.”

Mary O’Grady, representing the plaintiff school districts, said that it is within the power of the courts to determine if lawmakers are meeting their constitutional obligations to provide ‘adequate’ facilities and demand that they fix the problem. Full arguments in the case should occur in the next few months.

Footnote to Funding Woes

Arizona Schools Now (ASN) reports that Arizona education spending has been slashed by \$1.5 billion since 2008 due to recessionary measures taken by the state legislature. They report Prop 123 only restores 18% of that funding. One effect of the cuts is that AZ teacher pay has **declined** by about 11% since 2008. That figure helps to explain the critical teacher shortage that Arizona faces. ASN reports that AZ schools receive about 31% less per pupil than the national average. Coupled with some of the highest childhood poverty in the country, the spending cuts are a double whammy for Arizona students. Read the report at <https://azschoolsnow.org/strong-schools/schools-more-than-1-billion-short-of-pre-recessionary-spending/>.

Funding Change Ups the Antes for Schools

The letter grading system utilized to grade public schools is multi-faceted. K-8 schools’ grades depend on student proficiency (30%), student growth (50%), English Language Learners’ growth and proficiency (10%), and acceleration and readiness measures (10%).

High school grades are based on student proficiency (30%), student growth (20%), ELL growth and proficiency (10%), graduation rates (20%), and college and career readiness (20%).

Letter Grades for Schools

The State Dept. of Educ. compiles school grades after the end of each school year and the State Board of Educ. distributes them to districts in September. Usually the grades are released to the public within a few days of the schools’ receiving their scores. The time between when schools receive scores and public release is called the “embargo period.”

During the embargo period schools can appeal their letter grades for “exceptional circumstances beyond the school’s control,” i.e. flooding during testing. Those schools that appeal will not have a grade published at the time of public release. The Board of Educ. extended the embargo period this year, delaying the release of grades until Oct. 9th.

Grades to Be Linked to Funding

Parents use these letter grades to decide which school best suits the needs of their children. Schools can use the grades to improve. Next year the scores will, in part, determine funding. Ducey urged the legislature to set up a new evaluation system with additional funding to highly-performing schools.

Results-based funding will be critical to the thousands of schools in AZ (2,267 in 2013.) So, when the grades were finally released to the public this year, shockwaves were felt around the state. Over 500 schools received an A under the old system, but only 258 earned an A in the new system. Just over 1,000 schools received a B or C. 165 schools received a D and 35 earned an F. One of those failing schools was George Washington Academy in Snowflake which was founded and is operated by Sen. Sylvia Allen, a major proponent of school choice in the Arizona legislature.

Appeals Abound

Appeals of grades were higher than normal with 170 schools filing an appeal. Many of the appeals cite problems with the evaluation system not giving enough credit for programs implemented by the schools or not sufficiently taking into account students’ family income levels. The issues are so numerous that the potential errors associated with performance based funding are already being brought up. The State Department of Education is reviewing the process and scores.

See **Education** on page 6

Farewell



AHLSTROM, Romaine (76) ~ 10/12; Librarian

BAKER, Gary (71) ~ 8/21; Teacher

BENNETT, Joanne B. (86) ~ 10/21;
TUSD Reading Specialist



BEVINGTON, Raymond (79) ~ 10/07;
Administrator

CURBELO, Lila, (78) ~ 10/25; Teacher

DILLARD, Jean (88) ~ 10/21; School Nurse
and Volunteer

HIGGINS, Mary Ann (64) ~ 10/12;
School Administrator

HUIE, Goldie Don (93) ~ 9/29; Teacher,
Flowing Wells



JAURIQUE, Ramon (88) ~ 10/11;
Administrative Specialist

JOHNSON, Shirley (83) ~ 10/01; Teacher,
DeGrazia Elementary, Marana USD

KUNZ, John (42) ~ 9/30; English Teacher

LANE, Edith (79) ~ 10/12; Teacher, Magee
Middle School



LIPSEY, Shirley (90) ~ 9/30; Educator,
Head Start Teacher

MATHEWS, Sharon (74) ~ 10/03;
Teacher, & Counselor

MENTZER, Anna (37) ~ 10/11;
TUSD Food Services



STONE, Sandy (85) ~ 10/23; Pima College Faculty

TUHEY, Nancy (85) ~ 10/26; Teacher, TUSD

VAUGHN, Betty Jo (65) ~ 10/19; Teacher



YIHAS, George (84) ~ 9/23; Teacher, TUSD

Education continued from page 5

Mesa Charter School Utilizes Textbooks with Religious Bias

A year ago, I reported on a lawsuit filed against Heritage Academy, a Mesa based charter school, with three campuses in the Phoenix area. The lawsuit alleged that the school was using religious based textbooks in its curriculum, in defiance of Constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state. The lawsuit has been dismissed and appealed over a curious ruling.

The District court judge hearing the suit would not allow the plaintiff to use the pseudonym, John Doe, in the filing. The judge suggested that the plaintiff use initials instead. Fearful that their student would be singled out by staff and students in the school, the plaintiff refused to use initials they felt would be personally identifiable. The plaintiffs are, in part, represented by Attorneys from Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, a Washington, D.C.-based organization.

Fear of Reprisal Stops Suit

That ruling has been appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and the plaintiffs are hoping the appeals court will hear the case. In the meantime, since the plaintiff refused to use initials, the District Court dismissed the suit. A successful appeal could revive the suit.

Heritage Academy was originally opened as a private school and converted to a public charter school in 1995. The founder, Earl Taylor, teaches high school seniors at the Academy. Taylor says, he loves to teach the “miraculous story of America’s founding and particularly the sources and principles upon which our country was founded.”

Taylor utilizes two books authored by a Tea Party favorite, W. Cleon Skousen. The books are entitled The 5,000 Year Leap and The Founding of America. Those books claim that God inspired America’s founders to draft the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Taylor supports Skousen’s claim that “without religion, the government of a free people cannot be maintained.”