

Unification: What is the problem that needs to be fixed?

As I follow the work of the School District Redistricting Commission, I realize that this is an effort by the Arizona Legislature to make progress with unification.

In the past, locally driven unification efforts in Kyrene were unsuccessful; also, previous statewide incentives had little impact. The fact is that the characteristics of the communities in our geographic region make it extremely difficult to navigate through the complex funding formulas, federal programs and local agreements that levy additional monies for the schools. This is the real problem.

Until the Legislature is willing to look at the entire model of education in Arizona, it is not likely that isolated efforts, such as redistricting, will resolve the challenges education faces in this state. I find it difficult to put a great deal of time and energy into this recent initiative when the issues that negatively impact a district like Kyrene are not being considered.

It is not possible to explain the complicated set of mandates, student formula weights and re-



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quirements attached to the funding that is provided by the state in this brief editorial. However, it is a tangled mess that truly needs to be unraveled. Until there is genuine reform in how education is funded in Arizona, I have little hope that redistricting will improve the current situation. A long-term, comprehensive plan is needed to address the issues that include everything from graduation rates and requirements to educating English-language learners. Unfortunately, redistricting in isolation will not provide the essential solutions.

In the meantime, it is important to look at the known facts. Kyrene has 22 Excelling and three Highly Performing schools, as rated by the Arizona Department of Education. While we continue to increase academic progress for each student, realize that Kyrene already exceeds the state average on

AIMS testing. Administrative costs are below the state average, which translates to more money in the classroom: that's a top priority and 65 cents of every dollar in Kyrene are spent in the classroom. With strong support from the community, class sizes in Kyrene are some of the lowest in the area, and strong partnerships exist between Kyrene, Tempe Elementary and Tempe Union to provide an articulated K-12 education for all students. Also, the three districts all consider efficiencies and partnerships for business and support services on a regular basis.

With performance like this, my question still continues to be, "What problem are we trying to fix with redistricting?"

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