

What Happened to the Prop 123 Funds?

This past May Arizona voters approved Prop 123 as a way to address the school funding inflation lawsuit. Based upon estimated calculations, WUSD should receive \$183,000 per year in new revenue, which will go 100% toward teacher salaries. The addition of these funds has enabled the District to raise its base salary to \$36,000, and we are already seeing benefits in terms of recruiting and hiring.

Receipt of Prop 123 funds begins to solve one of two major issues the District faces (teacher salaries), which I describe in greater detail below. The second issue is ongoing and the bond we are placing before voters on November 8 was designed to address these needs.

Item #1: Over the past three years WUSD has lost close to 25% of the high school staff each year and nearly 50% of our middle school math and science teachers. We have developed a recruitment and retention plan which provides a range of initiatives from grant forgiveness to housing, but competitive salaries were a main factor. We have been increasing salaries over the past couple of years, but it was not until we received Prop 123 monies that we could truly tackle this issue in an effective manner. As stated above, we have put 100% of these funds toward teacher salaries starting the 2016-2017 school year and as a result now offer a competitive salary when compared to school districts in the Valley.

Item #2: Now that Prop 123 funds are beginning to address our teacher salaries, our other major concern is the health & safety of our students and the preservation of voter owned schools, equipment and facilities. In 2009, WUSD received \$813,000 in capital dollars from the state to maintain & replace buses, repair roofs & a/c units, fix parking lots, replace technology...etc. In the 2016-2017 school year, we will receive \$72,000 (\$118,000 last year); a 91% loss. As a result, our infrastructure has fallen into disrepair. Over half our students ride on historic or antique buses (most with no air conditioning), we have roofs which are leaking, a/c units which don't work, parking lots which are cracking and building security issues which must be addressed for the safety of our students and staff. To provide a bit of context, one bus costs \$130,000 (we operate 22 daily) and the high school gym roof (which is 17 yrs. old) cost \$150,000 to replace. At this point the state does not have a plan to provide increased funding for these needs. Therefore, we must figure the problem out on our own. In my mind, it is now a moral responsibility. As such, we are putting a \$10 million dollar bond before the voters on November 8 to solve these issues. If you would like to learn more please go the District's website at www.wickenburgschools.org and look for the blinking "bond" tab on the left side of the page for additional information.

I hope this helps each of you to understand the impact which Prop 123 funds have had in increasing teacher salaries and also the very dire health and safety needs which lie before us. As always, if you have questions please feel free to contact me at hcarlson@wickenburg.k12.az.us