

Community comes together to support education at #Now It Starts rally

May 20, 2016 / #Now it Starts rally suggests next steps after Prop. 123

Even before the results of the [Prop. 123](#) special election were known, teachers, students, parents and community members came together at the **#Now It Starts** rally at the state capitol on Thursday afternoon to focus on the serious funding issues Arizona schools face

Arizonans are ready to discuss concrete steps for further investments in public schools, said The Rev. Martha Seaman with [Valley Interfaith Project](#).

“The relentless pattern of disinvestment has to stop,” Seaman said at the rally.



Lisa Irish/AZEdNews

The Rev. Martha Seaman with Valley Interfaith Project speaks at the #NowItStarts rally on the lawn of the Arizona State Capitol on Thursday, May 19, 2016.

“The future of our families and our shared prosperity requires strong schools.,” Seaman said. “We can’t have a viable economy without a high level of education. It’s the best investment we can make. We can’t tax break ourselves into prosperity.”

The way Prop. 123, the settlement to the inflation funding lawsuit, was structured made it “a very difficult vote for most of us,” Seaman said.

“That’s because, we, like the vast majority of Arizonans, support public schools. Most of us think we should be investing more in our schools,” Seaman said. “This election cannot be interpreted as fixing our school funding problem, because if it passes it throws a stopgap lifeline to schools who need these dollars.”

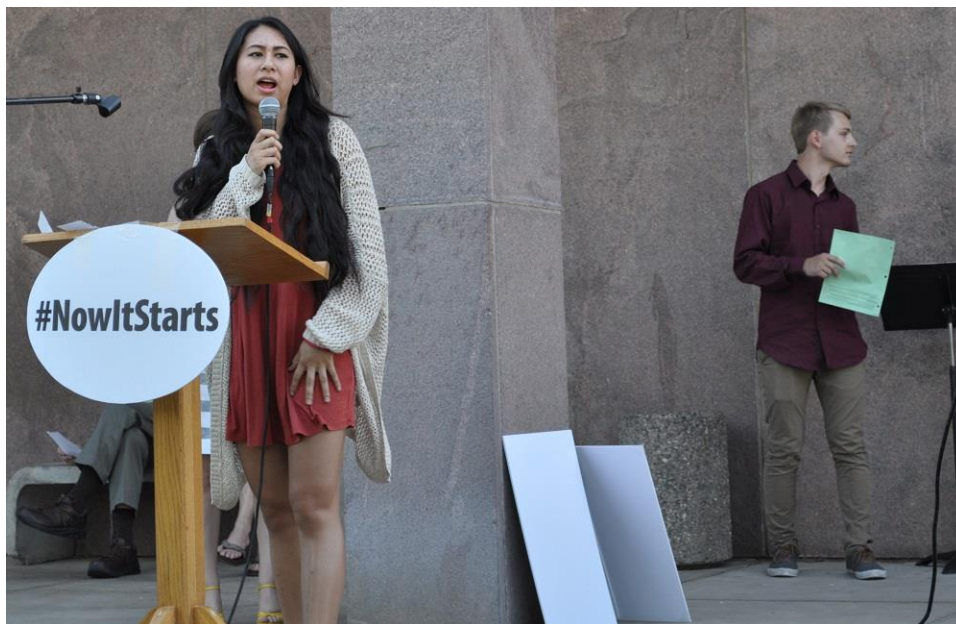
The top budget priority for most districts for [Prop. 123 funds](#) is supporting teachers with [salary increases](#) and classrooms with additional instructional resources.

This is key, because as Sasha Yurokin, a senior at [Chaparral High School](#), said at the #NowItStarts rally that three teachers at his high school “who love their jobs and love their students” will leave the field at the end of this school year because “they cannot afford to keep teaching for so little pay.”

Nancie Lindblom, [Arizona Educational Foundation](#)’s 2013 Teacher of the Year, said most teachers leave the profession in Arizona after their fifth year.

“If we want to keep our teachers in the classroom for 20, 30 and 40 years like we have today, we need to make sure that we’re funding education,” Lindblom said.

“We need to provide our students with the opportunities they have to be successful and we can do that if we make that commitment today if we step forward and invest in all of our students,” Lindblom said.



Lisa Irish/AZEdNews

Shaley Huang, a junior at Pinnacle High School, talks about the economic hardships teachers face, after Sasha Yurokin, right, a senior at Chaparral High School, spoke about how students have borne the brunt of education funding cuts at the #NowItStarts rally at the Arizona State Capitol on Thursday, May 19, 2016.

Prop. 123's passage means that "more than half-a-million Arizona public school students in kindergarten through seventh grade will finally have the opportunity to learn in a classroom that was funded in the manner voters intended when they passed Prop. 301 in 2000," said Tim Ogle, executive director of [Arizona School Boards Association](#).

"I'm sure that by now, you are tired of hearing that Arizona ranks 49th in student spending, thousands behind the national average, \$1,000 below even our own pre-cut budget," Yurokin said. "Well us students are tired of feeling it."

Shaley Huang, a junior at [Pinnacle High School](#), said the teachers who have helped and supported her face economic hardships.

"Teachers shouldn't be forced to pay for supplies that can't be provided by the district due to funding problems," Huang said. "They shouldn't be forced to work second jobs just to feed their families."

Huang said "Our future generation is the most important asset we have, but the time to invest in them is now. Please legislators, fund education to the level it deserves."



Lisa Irish/AZEdNews

Rony Assali, a math teacher at Arcadia High School, talks about how tax cuts since the 1990s have severely decreased the amount of money in the state's general fund at the #NowItStarts rally at the Arizona State Capitol on Thursday, May 19, 2016.

Rony Assali, a math teacher at Arcadia High School, said Prop. 123 should be just the beginning of the effort to more adequately fund Arizona public schools at the #NowItStarts rally.

“Let’s be clear, Prop. 123 as contentious and gut-wrenching as it was only addresses a fraction of the problem we face in school funding,” Assali said.

Back in the ’80s, Arizona ranked 34th in per-pupil funding, and in the ’60s, the state ranked 19th, Assali said.

“When we invested more in our schools, our state tax efforts were stronger, meaning we taxed higher for the state general fund because that’s how the majority of public education’s funded,” Assali said.

“We’ve cut taxes almost every single year since 1990, so guess what? We’ve manufactured this crisis,” Assali said. “While lawmakers from both parties by the way have voted these tax cuts in over the decades, we the citizens have allowed it to happen every year.”



Lisa Irish/AZEdNews

Christine Marsh, right, Arizona Educational Foundation’s 2016 Arizona Teacher of the Year said it’s time for everyone to come together to focus on the education and future of all Arizona’s children at the rally. Rally co-chair Jessica Johnson with Valley Interfaith Project is to her left.

Assali said that accounting for inflation and population growth, “our state has lost \$3.7 billion in revenue every single year. We don’t have a spending problem in Arizona, we have a revenue problem.”

What’s next?

Now, the focus should be on what happens next, said Christine Marsh, Arizona Educational Foundation’s 2016 Teacher of the Year at the #NowItStarts rally.

“Join me in letting candidates and policy makers know that we expect them to support public education and public schools,” Marsh said.



Lisa Irish/AZEdNews

Jen Darland, with Arizona Parent Network, urges people to support candidates who make increasing funding for public education and teachers their number one budget priority at the #NowItStarts rally at the Arizona State Capitol on Thursday, May 19, 2016.

Jen Darland with [Arizona Parent Network](#) said she’s asking all parents, grandparents and other family members who are eligible voters to support pro-education measures and candidates and ask them “one question, are these candidates willing to swear to uphold their oath and pledge to you that should they be elected they will make increased funding for our public schools and our teachers their number one budget priority.”

Capital funding should be increased, because many Arizona public schools are dealing with repair issues for aging buildings, said Mary Ann Wilson, a member of the [Glendale Elementary School Governing Board](#).

“Since 2009, my district has been reduced \$22 million specific to capital funding,” Wilson said. “What does this mean for our schools? Well, this is what it looks like: We have cracks in our walls, we have settling issues, plumbing problems where pipes have burst, we have saturation in the ground which causes damage to carpets, tiles and creates trip hazards. Due to the poor conditions in some of our schools, we’ve had to use safety tape to block off areas that are unsafe. We’ve even had a sinkhole.”

The longer we neglect these buildings and their issues, the higher the cost will be, Wilson said.

- See more at: <http://azednews.com/2016/05/20/now-it-starts-rally-suggests-next-steps-after-prop-123/#sthash.Luw08phZ.dpuf>