

## Despite reservations, Prop 123 needed

By: Guest Opinion © May 12, 2016 , 5:25 pm



As the Prop 123 election draws to a close and sentiment around it is more polarized, we need to underscore the importance of its passage. While admittedly imperfect, it does provide a way to get beyond the long-standing school inflation lawsuit.



Rev.  
Martha  
Seaman

We wish the agreement provided more than 72% of what the schools are owed. We'd also prefer that the dollars came directly from the General Fund rather than the State Land Trust and that it would omit seemingly arbitrary spending ceilings. But Arizona has dug such a deep hole for education funding for over three decades that our schools need an immediate infusion of funds, particularly to pay teachers long overdue raises.

The proposition is the result of a difficult political compromise, and supporters can be forgiven their lack of enthusiasm for the whole package. We applaud the fact that education advocates and the legislative leadership struggled hard with one another to come to an agreement. The very fact that they did so demonstrates that we need to do much better by our public schools and our children.

The proposition *can* be a constructive first step—if it is connected to a plan to move us back to a competitive position in per pupil spending. We still have a long way to go, even to reinstate the recession era cuts to schools. We now spend \$1,000 less per student (adjusted for inflation) than in 2009.

So pass or fail, the state's leadership will still bear the responsibility (1) to halt further cuts to our district public schools, including misguided efforts to privatize public resources, and (2) to specifically propose measures to boost school revenues to move us towards the national average in per pupil spending, not just remain even.

We have moved from 19<sup>th</sup> in student spending during the 1960's to 49<sup>th</sup> today, a free fall that was hastened by a series of tax cuts in the 1990s. Arizona now spends \$3,000 less per student than the national average. The consequences are severe: low graduation rates, the highest levels of dislocated youth (not working or attending school), and a continual exodus of experienced teachers, among others.



Rabbi John  
Linder

We sympathize with those voters who feel shortchanged by the proposition: that the schools are settling for far less than they are owed, that we should hold out for a better deal. This opposition to the proposition in no way says these voters don't support more resources for public schools. It is precisely because they support schools that they are expressing their angst.

But there is a greater issue involved. For children, a lost year can become a lost lifetime. Large class sizes, teacher shortages, and long-deferred maintenance will continue to shortchange our next generation. They can't wait any longer.

Arizona needs to develop a plan to leverage the resources to boost our per-pupil spending to at least the national average over a reasonable period of time. And substantial new revenues must be part of the mix. Anything else is magical thinking.

*Rabbi John Linder, senior rabbi of Temple Solel in Paradise Valley, and Rev. Martha Seaman, deacon with the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, are members of the Executive Board of Valley Interfaith Project.*



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