



Centering Arizona Students' Success (CASS)

Dr. Ruiz's Strategic Plan for Arizona's Public Schools

Introduction

Arizona deserves an education leader focused on students instead of politics.

For 35 years, I have worked in Arizona K-12 classrooms and community colleges helping students succeed. I have taught mathematics, prepared future teachers, led one of Arizona's largest community colleges, and prepared workforce development programs for industry leaders. I know that no single elected official can solve every challenge facing Arizona education, but that it's imperative to have a Superintendent of Public Instruction who has relevant experience and will always center student success.

The Superintendent should provide leadership, improve transparency, support schools, strengthen accountability, help educators, and build partnerships with families and communities that improve outcomes for students.

This plan focuses on those responsibilities.

I) Pillar One - Improve Student Achievement

Arizona's academic outcomes remain below where they should be. Reading and mathematics proficiency must become the Arizona Department of Education's highest priority. For too long politicians in charge have prioritized political ambition over test scores.

What I will do

Arizona Literacy and Math Initiative

Expand ADE's support for evidence-based instruction by providing districts with resources, implementation guides, and focusing on phonics and early math and literacy intervention.

FOCUS Framework

Build statewide improvement efforts around five priorities:

- Foundational skills first
- Outstanding teachers and classroom support
- Consistent accountability and transparent results
- Urgent intervention for struggling students
- Student-centered success pathways

Data That Schools Can Use

Improve ADE reporting so districts receive timely, understandable performance information that helps teachers and administrators identify struggling students earlier.

II) Pillar Two - Support Arizona Educators

The adults on our campuses matter more than any program.

The Superintendent cannot determine salaries, but ADE can become a better partner for educators. The environment created by current leaders is openly hostile towards teachers and has created a worst-in-the-nation teacher crisis.

What I will do

End the Culture Wars

Refocus ADE on supporting educators instead of policing them. Tear down the "ESA Empower Hotline" creating a chilling effect on our teachers.

Reduce Administrative Burdens

Review ADE reporting requirements to eliminate unnecessary paperwork where possible.

Teacher Leadership Network

Create statewide teacher advisory groups representing:

- rural schools
- urban schools
- charter schools
- district schools
- special education
- CTE
- early childhood

These educators will meet regularly with the Superintendent to identify challenges and solutions.

Rural Schools Initiative

Expand technical assistance specifically for Arizona's small and rural districts that often lack administrative capacity by creating a Rural and Small Schools Office within ADE.

Professional Learning

Increase access to voluntary professional development and mentorship focused on:

- mathematics
- literacy
- AI and technology
- special education
- classroom management
- mental health and teacher wellbeing

III) Pillar Three - Accountability & Responsible Stewardship

Arizona taxpayers deserve confidence that education dollars are spent appropriately. The current Superintendent and State Treasurer have deliberately withheld public information around ESA spending and have refused to enforce the guidelines that are meant to provide oversight around public resources.

What I will do

Modernize ESA Oversight

Within existing law:

- improve automated fraud detection
- strengthen front-end purchase verification
- use risk-based auditing
- publish a transparent data dashboard
- improve customer service

Public Transparency Portal

Publish easy-to-understand dashboards showing:

- student achievement
- student safety
- graduation rates
- district school, charter school, and ESA finances

- federal funding
- ESA participation, attrition, and retention
- teacher workforce trends

Performance Dashboards

Develop public-facing dashboards showing statewide progress toward measurable goals.

Faster Customer Service

Reduce processing delays for districts, educators, and families through modernization of ADE operations.

IV) Pillar Four - Every Student Matters

Arizona's diverse student body has a variety of different needs. The Superintendent should prioritize serving all students well, instead of prioritizing their own personal ideology and political ambition.

What I will do

Strengthen support and technical assistance for:

- SPED students
- English language learners
- tribal schools
- LGBT students
- rural districts
- military families
- unhoused students
- foster youth

Special Education Improvement Initiative

Provide districts with expanded guidance, compliance assistance, and best-practice resources to improve services for students with disabilities.

Postsecondary Readiness

Work with:

- community colleges
- universities
- employers
- apprenticeship programs
- nonprofit organizations

to strengthen pathways from high school into careers, the trades, or higher education.

CTE Advisory Council

Every student should be prepared for life after high school and should be equipped with knowledge about the opportunities and pathways that exist. A Career and Technical Education Council will ensure that our labor and trades partners provide options for students who want to continue training or certification beyond high school or immediately enter the workforce.

V) Pillar Five - Innovation That Works

Technology should improve teaching and be a single tool in the toolbox—not replace teachers. The Superintendent does not create or implement standards, but can advocate for best practices.

What I will do

Develop statewide guidance on:

- responsible and ethical AI use
- academic integrity
- student privacy
- cybersecurity
- digital citizenship
- evidence-based technology adoption

These would serve as optional best practices for districts and charters.

Share What Works

Create an innovation clearinghouse where schools can voluntarily share successful instructional practices.

VI) Pillar Six - Strong Partnerships

Education improves when schools, families, and communities work together.

What I will do

Listening Tour

Hold regular listening sessions in every county in the first year of office with the Arizona Classroom Conversation tour.

Superintendent Advisory Councils

Establish permanent advisory councils for:

- teachers
- parents
- students
- tribal nations
- business leaders
- charter leaders
- district superintendents
- CTE and trades

Community Partnerships

Expand partnerships with nonprofits, businesses, universities, and community organizations to support schools because education is economic development and the future prosperity of Arizona is at stake.

VII) Pillar Seven - Safe, Healthy Schools

Students learn best when they feel safe and supported. School safety grant decisions should be based on the unique needs of the individual schools and should not be dictated by the personal ideology of the Superintendent. Modernized automated systems should be utilized to ensure that the grant money is implemented effectively and according to the law so that students are protected.

What I will do

Support districts through guidance and assistance on:

- school safety planning
- behavioral health resources
- suicide prevention
- chronic absenteeism
- bullying prevention
- crisis response

Work collaboratively with state agencies responsible for health and public safety.

VIII) Pillar Eight - Restore Trust in Public Education

Arizona has extraordinary educators and schools and they should be celebrated, not sued or denigrated. The Department should celebrate success while being honest about challenges.

What I will do

Arizona Public Education Report

Publish an annual report that clearly explains:

- where Arizona is improving
- where challenges remain
- how taxpayer dollars are being used
- goals for the coming year

Modernize and improve the public transparency portal so that Arizonans can have access to all publicly available data concerning public, charter, private, micro and homeschools.

School Spotlight

Regularly recognize educators, students, principals, support staff, and schools making exceptional contributions.

Transparent Communication

Provide clear, factual information to families in their native languages without political rhetoric.

IX) First 100 Days

Immediately upon taking office:

- Launch the Arizona Classroom Conversation listening tour.
- Initiate an independent audit of the ESA program.
- Convene educator, parent, student, business, and tribal advisory councils.
- Begin an operational review of ADE customer service and administrative processes.
- Publish a baseline public dashboard on student outcomes, educator workforce trends, and ESA administration.
- Release draft AI and educational technology guidance for public comment.
- Restore respect for the education profession and begin to stabilize the teacher workforce and remove the teacher snitch line.
- Begin a review of reporting requirements to identify opportunities to reduce unnecessary administrative burden.
- Publish a strategic implementation timeline with measurable annual goals.

X) Measuring Success

Publish progress on meaningful goals that the Superintendent can directly impact:

- Reduce ADE response times to schools and families.
- Show Improvements in third grade reading and eighth grade math assessments
- Decrease the number of teacher vacancies
- Improve transparency through regularly updated public dashboards.
- Recognize more public schools for academic growth and innovation.
- Reduce the student to counselor ratio
- Increase family engagement through advisory councils and county listening sessions.
- Improve compliance and stewardship in ESA administration.
- Strengthen partnerships with higher education, business, tribal nations, and community organizations.