

# Proposition 100

## **Jobs, class size hang in balance May 18, officials say**

By Angela De Welles and Terrance Thornton  
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On May 18 Arizona voters will be asked to decide on a one cent-sales tax increase that East Valley school district officials say is critical to retaining employees, quality educational environments and ensuring manageable class sizes.

If Proposition 100 is approved, a temporary, one-cent sales tax would be levied and collected starting June 1, 2010. According to what is proposed, the tax would be repealed in May 2013.

According to election information, two-thirds of the revenue will go to primary and secondary education. The rest would be directed to health and human services and public safety.

A news release from Gov. Jan Brewer's Web site states the one-cent sales tax will generate \$1 billion in additional revenue each year it is in place.

While Proposition 100 will help East Valley school districts stave off some budget reductions to their operational budgets next fiscal year, — decreases will come — but how deep those cuts will be depend on the outcome of the Proposition 100 vote, school leaders say.

A compounding factor is some East Valley School districts are dealing with significant drops in enrollment, which in turn, shaves the piece of the financial pie divided up by the state legislature.

### **Where do you stand on this issue?**

Do you support Proposition 100? Are you opposed? We want to hear from you. Go to [www.newszap.com](http://www.newszap.com) find your community, then go to the local public forum and let your voice be heard on this important topic.

### **Statewide concern**

Every school district in Arizona is facing the same issue — decreases to state funding — and while changes have been made, the worst may still be coming, according to Chuck Essigs, Arizona Association of School Business Officials director of government relations. "That is going to force significant changes to how schools operate," Mr. Essigs said in an April 27 phone interview of the repercussions following a Proposition 100 defeat. "Schools are a people business; it very quickly impacts employees."

The Arizona Association of School Business officials is an organization made up of about 1,500 people with administration positions in Arizona school districts, Mr. Essigs explained.

"We provide information on the finance laws and the legislation effecting the operations of a school district," he explained.

According to a report gathered by Mr. Essigs, and available at [www.aasbo.org](http://www.aasbo.org), dollars to school districts generated from Proposition 100 in fiscal year 2010 are estimated to total \$396,597,009.

"It is not a little hiccup it is a major impact on schools if that sales tax election is not successful," Mr. Essigs pointed out.

Even if Proposition 100 is approved, according to the report, Arizona school districts are facing \$352,178,140 worth of reductions to state funding.

"This is not going to get better next year. The misconception is that this is additional money; there is not a penny for additional programs," Mr. Essigs explained. "It is to prevent future cuts. It is startling to see how bad things have gotten and how fast they got this way."

The financial issues faced by Arizona school district revolve around drops in student enrollment and decreases in state funding, which is the result of the current economic recession, Mr. Essigs said.

"There is no way that schools can be spared from reductions," he said. "It just happened so quickly and the dip is far below what we have faced before."

### **Mesa Unified School District**

The Mesa Unified School District, regardless if Proposition 100 passes, is faced with a \$25 million budget gap next fiscal year, but if the sales-tax measure is not approved that number could swell to more than \$50 million, according to MUSD spokeswoman Kathy Bareiss.

"This is in addition to \$60 million in budget cuts over the last two years," she explained April 26 in a written response to emailed questions of fiscal years 2008-09 and 2009-10.

In fiscal year 2009-10 MUSD has an all-funds budget of \$375,132,387 and has 65,550 students according to the AASBO budget impact report.

State funding for Arizona school districts are based on average daily membership, which is an enrollment tally taken after the first 100 days of the school year, Ms. Bareiss said.

"Mesa Public Schools provides staff — teachers, office workers and aides — supplies and equipment to the schools based on the site enrollment," she pointed out.

Coupled with cuts to state funding for full-day kindergarten and soft capital, which is what school districts use to purchase the items in the classroom, MUSD is facing a significant reduction in student enrollment, according to Gerrick Monroe, MUSD assistant superintendent of business and support services.

"If Proposition 100 is not supported it will have significant impacts on the services, the programs we provide, the employees and the communities we support," he said in an April 28 phone interview. "In the past few years Mesa Public Schools has made budget reductions."

Mr. Monroe says MUSD has, for the past two fiscal cycles, not been forced to reduce teaching positions, but if Proposition 100 is not approved Mesa Public Schools could be with hundreds less to teach students.

"In our attempt to protect the integrity of the teaching occurring in the classroom," is how Mr. Monroe described the more than \$60 million in cuts already absorbed by the district. "If this proposition is not successful, we will no longer be able to focus on the non-instruction positions. This will directly impact the teachers in our district."

But those decisions will only come following the May 18 vote, Mr. Monroe explained.

"It all depends on the decisions that will be made," he said of the planned governing board choice following the vote outcome. "What we have developed is an option list for the administration; some of those options include increasing class sizes."

Mr. Monroe says everything is on the table.

"Depending on the decisions that are made, it could be hundreds of teaching positions that could be reduced," he noted. "To be able to commit to you a hard number, we don't have that right now. We plan to make those decisions, when we need to, quickly, after May 18."

Mesa Public Schools, right now, is a potential victim of circumstance, Mr. Monroe contends.

"School funding in the state of Arizona is directly related to the General Funds they (the state legislature) have available," he explained. "Regardless of the economic state or the property values of a given district we are tied to the prosperity of the General Fund of Arizona."

Being in a growing district compared to a declining one is making the difference for East Valley school districts, Mr. Monroe says.

"If you are in a growing district in the state of Arizona you may have been able to weather the state's declining funding, but Mesa Public School is not a growing district," he said. "We believe, that through attrition, we will not actually have teachers being let go if it (Proposition 100) passes."

But handing out pink slips or not, Mr. Monroe anticipated there to be 75 to 100 fewer teaching positions through MUSD next school year.

"The majority of which is due to our declining school enrollment. We are 1,498 students less," he said of this year's ADM compared to last year's. "What we have seen is we have an aging community."

East Mesa resident Jean Sipes says she has already cast her "no" vote for Proposition 100.

"It is all very confusing and by the time you decipher it, it is more of a bad thing," she said in an April 27 phone interview of voter pamphlets delivered to Mesa homes. "The school districts of Arizona have not been very responsible."

Ms. Sipes says a solution can be found, but those at the helm may not be the right people for the job.

"It is a fixable subject, but it is just a matter putting somebody in here from outside Arizona," she said of the little-town politics she says is apparent in the larger cities and towns of Metropolitan Phoenix.

"It is not working, it is very obvious."

Ms. Sipes says East Valley school districts just have not been forced to "tighten their belts" and asking for more money is not the right solution.

"Teachers, they complain about how much they are making and I think they make pretty good money," she said. "The quality of education is not apparent out of the amount they (the Legislature) are investing. I just don't think money is necessarily the solution."

### **Apache Junction Unified School District**

The Apache Junction Unified School District is facing a \$4.5 million budget gap next fiscal year and if Proposition 100 does not pass that number will increase to \$6.7 million, according to Jim Lockwood, AJUSD assistant superintendent of finance. "Our situation, our budgetary challenges started well before the state challenges they are having," he said in an April 27 phone interview of financial pressures felt forcing planned school closures. "That was a very monumental step, but it did let us look at the amount of staff we needed to provide that quality educational environment for our kids."

In fiscal year 2009-10 AJUSD has an all-funds budget of \$29,785,240 and has 5,334 students, according to the AASBO budget impact report.

Faced with a drop in student enrollment over the last two years, the second year of phasing out a maintenance and operations override phase and cuts to state funding, AJUSD has issued more than 80 pink slips and closed two schools.

Closing Gold Canyon Elementary and Thunder Mountain Middle schools were targeted by district administration as the most cost-effective approach to shaving about \$2.6 million from its planned maintenance and operations budget for fiscal year 2010-11, district officials say.

The district's M&O budget for fiscal year 2009-10 is \$31.4 million, according to Mr. Lockwood.

An override allows a school district to spend up to 10 percent more than the state-formulated expenditure limitation, school officials have said. The AJUSD has 600 fewer students attending its schools over the last two school years, district officials agree.

Mr. Lockwood says if Proposition 100 does not pass, the AJUSD could potentially increase its number of laid-off employees from 90 to 100 full-time positions.

"We are probably hovering I would say close to 100 reductions in force that are attributed to our budgetary challenges," he said. "We may be 10 higher than what we need to be."

Mr. Lockwood says laying off more will help administration weather the unknown variables associated with the coming sales-tax vote.

"Those 10 individuals allows some flexibility on how to respond to that," he said of Proposition 100 not passing.

Mr. Lockwood says changes to the district's bottom line have hit all aspects of the educational institution hard.

"We had some pretty significant cuts," he said of staff reductions, school closures and paying-to-play fees associated with extracurricular activities. "We are going to keep that at the level it is," he said of the \$50 fee for high school sports.

But class sizes are going to go up regardless of Proposition 100, Mr. Lockwood says.

"They are higher than what they have been," he said of class sizes reaching the limit rather than the minimum in all grades at AJUSD. "We are going to be seeing some increases to class sizes."

In an effort to avoid more teacher layoffs, Mr. Lockwood says a 5 percent pay cut is a strong possibility if the sales-tax measure is not approved.

"From my perspective it is a very strong reality. We are going to be looking at across-the-board salary reductions," he said. "That is the only viable way; we have taken other steps already in place. We are hopeful that voters will value education."

Mr. Lockwood says this sales-tax vote is not an increase to state funding, which he says is something not really understood by the voting public.

"It is not an increase to funding; it is really just how much the decrease is going to be," he said. "Even if it passes the funding for education is going down. If it doesn't pass schools could get cut even further."

AJUSD parent Judy Williamson says she plans to support Proposition 100 at the ballot box this month, but says she has concerns that the money will actually go where it is supposed to.

"That is a really tough one," she said in an April 27 phone interview. "I don't really care for the idea of the tax increase, but if it is going to make a big difference."

Ms. Williamson says her biggest concern for next school year is the possibility of larger class sizes.

"I feel already that the class size is too big," she said of the amount of students in both her daughter's kindergarten and son's elementary grade class approaching 30 pupils. "My daughter is already in kindergarten with a class of 27, I think that is too many kids already."

Although Ms. Williamson says she has no plans to take her children out of AJUSD, but she says her confidence in the district has been tried during these times of change.

"I don't know if it is the changes that are going to take place, but I have just heard from so many upset parents," she said of her wavering confidence in AJUSD.

"I guess when my kids started the school I felt really good with the school district. Now, I feel like so many things are happening that I question if the school district is strong enough."

### **Queen Creek Unified School District**

The Queen Creek Unified School District faces about a \$1.8 million budget gap next fiscal year, but if Proposition 100 is voted down May 18, the district will face a \$3.9 million gap, according to Shari Zara, QCUSD chief financial officer.

"If it passes, that means that Queen Creek will receive older capital money we were supposed to receive," she explained in an April 27 phone interview. "It does mean increased class sizes, it means pro-gram cuts."

In fiscal year 2009-10 QCUSD has an all-funds budget of \$25,902,792 and has 4,799 students according to the AASBO budget impact report.

"We have a scenario of a list of different things that could be out there," Ms. Zara said of actions that will occur only after the May 18 vote results are known.

Ms. Zara says, for QCUSD, Proposition 100 translates into class size. If it passes, then class sizes will remain at projected levels; if it fails, those projections will increase.

"It looks like right now with the 'yes' vote we are staying in the range for each grade level," she said of high school class sizes ranging from 30 to 34. "If Proposition 100 is voted down then that means we will have to take that range and increase it."

Layoffs are not likely, Ms. Zara says.

"Once we know how that election goes it would be a reduction... We have all different scenarios," she explained. "We have just identified all different areas where we can cut."

Ms. Zara says one cost-savings measure being pondered is if the sales-tax increase is not approved, QCUSD employees could see a 3 percent to 5 percent reduction in salary next fiscal year.

From mandatory shutdowns of school buildings planned in the summer months to watching every penny that goes out the door, Ms. Zara says QCUSD officials are turning over every financial rock they can find.

"We are looking at every way possible to reduce down any fixed costs we have," she said. "We are having mandatory shutdowns during the summer. We do four 10-hours days during the summer breaks. We are going to have wish lists from our parents."

Ms. Zara says although items like staples, pens, paper and notebooks sound like minor items in the grand scheme of running a school district, she says every little bit helps.

"It sounds like little piddly things, but every penny does help," she pointed out.

Another facet of cost savings measure will come in the form of increased fees for extracurricular sports.

"We are increasing our athletic costs," she said of requiring \$100 next year for high-school-sports participation. "We have done surveys and it is within the realm of what other high schools are doing."

When asked if the problems facing QCUSD are a result of poor fiscal management, she replied, "No, it is not. We have been very underfunded."

"The problem is when they came up with their (the state legislature's) funding formula it hasn't been keeping pace," she said of the 2 percent inflation rule for state funding allocations.

While 2 percent is added for inflation, the cost of things such as excess utilities have risen 12 percent over the last two years, Ms. Zara says.

Queen Creek resident Alexandra Sanchez, a J.O. Combs parent, says she is in support of Proposition 100.

"You know I really think it is great," she said in an April 27 phone interview. "I think it needs to be passed."

Although Ms. Sanchez says she is in support of the proposed sales-tax increase, she says she has concerns about where the money will actually go when, and if, it reaches East Valley school districts.

"How do we really know that the money is going to education?" she asked.

"It is so hard to trust the state right now — you just never know."

Despite her concerns of where the money goes, Ms. Sanchez says the measure needs to be approved.

"I think it needs to be done," she said.

"I think it will help save those positions for teachers."

### **Chandler Unified School District**

If Proposition 100 does not pass, the Chandler Unified School District is looking at \$29 million in cuts. If voters approve the one-cent tax, the district faces \$14 million in reductions, according to a fact sheet posted on the district's website, [ww2.chandler.k12.az.us](http://ww2.chandler.k12.az.us).

Either way, district officials are looking at cutting programs and jobs.

CUSD Spokesman Terry Locke said the district already has cut back over the past two years due to decreased funding from the state.

In the 200-09 school year, the budget decreases totaled \$6.4 million and this year there was \$10.6 million cut from the district's budget, Mr. Locke said.

He said CUSD has done a good job so far of keeping the cuts from having a big impact in the classroom, but eventually that will change.



"If (Proposition 100) fails, we'll have no choice but to increase class sizes," he said.

"There is only so much cutting you can do that doesn't impact student achievement."

The district is looking at increasing class sizes by one to two students if voters do not approve the tax. If Proposition 100 is passed, class sizes will remain what they are this year.

Teachers and staff will face a 2 percent to 4 percent pay cut if Proposition 100 fails. If it passes, there will be no pay cuts, according to the fact sheet.

Job losses will total 100-150 if the proposition is not voted in, but the district is still looking at cutting 30-40 jobs even if the tax is approved.

Another impact being examined is the district's soft capital budget. If proposition 100 is passed, CUSD would cut 80 percent of its funds that pay for student furniture, equipment, textbooks and computers.

According to the fact sheet, 100 percent of that fund would be cut if Proposition 100 gets voted down.

Some cuts are expected no matter the outcome of the election.

District-sponsored field trips and DARE, the drug prevention and education program, will be gone even if voters approve the one-cent sales tax.

Parents can expect to pay a \$100 fee for athletic and extracurricular activities if the proposition is not approved.

Randi Bell, a fourth-grade teacher at Haley Elementary, 3401 S. Layton Lakes Blvd., said she has been teaching in Arizona for 17 years, but only came to the Chandler district two years ago.

She worries what is in store for her position.

Ms. Bell's class works on a weekly newspaper and draws from current events for content. She said students have asked her about the proposition.

"I have to be totally neutral with them," she said.

However, she said the cuts in recent years have been felt, but "as teachers, we always make it happen."

"(Teachers) love the kids, they love what they do," she said. "But at some point the straw's going to break the camel's back."

Haley Elementary Principal Pam Nephew said she just hopes every voter is informed and that people actually get out and cast a ballot.

"Every vote is counted," she said.

In her school class sizes are 22-24 students, but Ms. Nephew said that could jump higher if the proposition fails. She believes that increase in class sizes would be one of the biggest impacts to the students.

### **Gilbert Public Schools**

Proposition 100's impact on Gilbert Public Schools is about \$8.4 million.

According to budget information on the district's website, [www.gilbert.k12.az.us](http://www.gilbert.k12.az.us), Gilbert schools will face a \$14.2 million deficit if Proposition 100 is voted down.

If voters do approve the proposition, the district faces a \$5.8 million deficit.

If the tax is not approved, Gilbert will lose about 130 teachers. If it is approved there will be a reduction in non-teaching staff.

The fate of full-day kindergarten in the district also hinges on proposition 100.

If the tax is approved, the district will offer free full-day kindergarten, if not, GPS will charge tuition for full-day kindergarten. Class sizes are also expected to increase if the proposition is voted down.

Adelaida Severson is a GPS Governing Board member and a co-founder of the Parent Legislative Action Network. She said she has heard from parents regarding Proposition 100.

"There are mixed feelings about the proposition and I believe this comes from misinformation and unawareness of the temporary tax increase. ... This is muddled by the fact that Gilbert is also proposing a tax increase with Proposition 406," Ms. Severson said in an e-mail response. "As PLAN has been going around to schools trying to inform parents, we are met with those who don't know that it is a statewide vote and that it isn't just for full-day kindergarten, that it is a tax increase wherein two-thirds of it will go to public education, meaning public universities as well and public safety."

District officials by law cannot use their position to influence the vote, but Ms. Severson says the district can inform parents.

PLAN also has held forums and spoken at about 15 PTSO meetings. More information can be found on the group's website, [www.theirfutureisnow.org](http://www.theirfutureisnow.org).

"This is a grassroots effort to inform parents and the community not only about Proposition 100, but to let them know they have a voice and to let their legislators know that what they are doing to public education is not OK," Ms. Severson said.

PLAN will host its next forum 6:30-7:30 p.m. May 5 at Gilbert High School, 1101 E. Elliot Road.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forums at [newszap.com](http://newszap.com). News Editor Terrance Thornton can be reached at 480-982-7799 or [tthornton@newszap.com](mailto:tthornton@newszap.com)