



***Sonoita Elementary School District #25***

***Elgin School***

*23 Elgin Road*

*Elgin, Arizona 85611*

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***Christopher Bonn Ed.D, Superintendent***

*Melissa Paul, Administrative Secretary*

Dear Elgin School Parents & Families,

I want to thank the parents and community for their overwhelming support and advocacy for the programs, staff and students at Elgin School. Public education is the foundation of our democracy, and your partnership and support of our students is a big part of our success.

The school is currently facing a deficit of approximately \$150,000. Cuts to education funding at the state level have significantly impacted schools across Arizona, but rural schools like ours have been hit exceptionally hard. Additionally, our expenses have risen and, like many of you, we are paying more for benefits, insurance premiums, and the resources and services that keep our institution running. Many of you may be aware of recent funding increases at the state level however, these mandated increases receive little or no funding from the state general fund, therefore they must be supported through existing budgets or by an increase in property taxes. We were also notified in January by the State Tax Coalition that we are currently at 150% of the Qualifying Tax Rate (QTR) for the 2017-2018 school year, which prohibits the school from increasing the budget if it raises the tax rate. For the 2018-2019 school year, the Qualifying Tax Rate (QTR) was reduced even further. The resulting tax burden places higher emphasis on local property taxes, which are set through Arizona statute by the state tax coalition.

While the state legislature has returned some of the monies to Arizona schools, the amount that Elgin School will receive does not significantly impact our budget deficit. As an organization, we have spent the last 4 years poring over our budget and identifying areas where we can lower costs by utilizing resources more efficiently without sacrificing our effectiveness. Our school has received over \$1 million in grants and awards during this time through our efforts to find alternate finance methods. As a result of these efforts, Sonoita has been able to avoid reductions in force at a time when school districts across the state have not.

Unfortunately, funding changes in many areas this year at state and local levels continue to impact our budget, and our efforts are no longer enough to sustain our current need. The change from Average Daily Membership (ADM), previously known as the 100<sup>th</sup> day count, to Average Daily Attendance (ADA) currently referred to as 'Real Time Funding,' has also had an impact. Rather than an average attendance, rate for the first 100 days, our school now loses funding for every minute that a student is absent from class. This change in funding has resulted in a reduction in funds received from the state. We have also lost funding because we have successfully promoted English Language Learners and students receiving Special Education Services. Seeing no other options, the board has determined that we must finally reduce the number of employees for the 2018-2019 school year in order to reduce costs and recover our budget deficit.

As Principal/Superintendent, my commitment to students is the highest priority. As our vision statement says, "Elgin School is a safe and caring learning community committed to the development of the **whole** child." To us, this means that subjects like Art and PE are integral to our instructional program; as are the literacy and technology resources and support available in the Media Center. Additionally, student supports such as our School Counselor, Title 1 Coordinator, Data & Assessment Coordinator, Special Education Director, and Intervention Specialists are required for many of the grants and programs we participate in at state and local levels.

My second priority is to the amazing educators who work with our students. Providing them with the resources and support necessary to do their jobs is critical to our efforts. It is important to keep our campus safe, communicate effectively with all stakeholders, and provide our teachers with the data, resources, training, and support they need to continue to provide our students with a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. All of these positions are key to fulfilling our school mission and vision, and therefore we must fight to promote and maintain them.

For these reasons, I have presented several scenarios to the board including the possibility of moving 5<sup>th</sup> grade into the middle school beginning with the 2018-2019 school year. This move will allow us to continue to provide all necessary services and support to students and teachers while giving our 5<sup>th</sup> graders the opportunity to be taught by highly qualified content area specialists. All of our middle school teachers are appropriately certified to teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and these teachers will receive additional support and resources to ease this transition. Our 5<sup>th</sup> grade students have already successfully joined their middle school classmates through their participation in Elgin School sports, and we have every confidence that they will also be able to share a lunchtime and participate in enrichments (Art, PE, etc.) together.

While this idea may not work in larger schools, in a small, rural school like Elgin where students already know each other quite well, we feel this will be the least disruptive way to reduce our workforce while maintaining our commitment to our students and teachers. We understand that this is a significant change in the Elgin School culture, and that families will continue to have questions and/or concerns. Please know that every alternative was considered prior to making this decision, and we consider your input critical to easing this transition. I am available to provide clarity and address any concerns or comments you may have; please contact the front office if you would like to make an appointment to meet with me. We look forward to your input and participation throughout this difficult process. Thank you for supporting Elgin School as a partner in education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bonn', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Bonn, Ed.D  
Principal/Superintendent