

# School Districts Must Evolve to Prepare Students for Future

by AJUSD Superintendent Chad Wilson, Ed.D.

A primary goal of the Apache Junction Unified School District (AJUSD) is to implement an academic pathway that prepares all students to pursue post-secondary learning opportunities. We recognize our responsibility to be good fiscal stewards of our community taxpayers' money to best benefit our students. It is important to effectively and efficiently focus local education spending on quality academic programs and electives for students. Unfortunately, because of a 600-student drop in district enrollment over the last two years and the failure of the override election, \$2.6 million dollars must be cut from the AJUSD budget to prepare us for the 2010-2011 school year.

As we restructure our district to solve our financial issues, we must always keep in mind our goal of implementing academic strategies that help achieve college readiness for all. As a result, the AJUSD administration is making the following recommendations be implemented beginning in the 2010-2011 school year:

1. Close Gold Canyon Elementary School (GCES) and relocate those students to the remaining elementary schools.
2. Close Thunder Mountain Middle School (TMMS) and relocate 6th grade students back to existing elementary schools making them K-6, rather than K-5, schools. Relocate TMMS grades 7th and 8th to Desert Shadows Middle School making it a grade 7-8 school.
3. Introduce a new, technology-intensive approach to educating grades 7-8 in a junior high school configuration at Desert Shadows.
4. Implement the Secondary Learning Plan as determined by the community in 2003.
5. Adjust attendance boundaries at district elementary schools as necessary to implement the above recommendations.

The closures of Gold Canyon Elementary School and Thunder Mountain Middle School will allow AJUSD to reconfigure its resources in order to better provide greater educational opportunities for its students than had the schools not been closed. By not closing these schools, educational offerings for students in 2010-11 would be reduced, class sizes would be larger, and student fees dramatically increased.

Given the District's current financial forecast, it is believed that "what we provide students is more important than where we provide them." When better economic times return and as student enrollment increases, both GCES and TMMS will be re-opened to operate in a manner consistent with the District's educational mission.