

TONTO APACHE TRIBE, CITY OF PAYSON WELCOME FTF

The Gila Region hosted the April 2013 statewide First Things First Board meeting, and local officials took the opportunity to welcome FTF to the area and highlight the importance of education to their communities.

Tonto Apache Tribe Chairwoman Louise Lopez said that while her tribe is small (154 members), most of its members are children. This creates the need to put in place things now that will benefit future generations. She spoke of land the Tribe has purchased around the current Matatzal Casino to expand its economic development in the future.

Culture is very important to the Tribe, Chairwoman Lopez added, as many members have married outside the Tribe, creating great diversity among its current membership.

Payson Mayor Kenny Evans also spoke of the growth in his community. He spoke of community conversations about the possibility of creating a new college in the area that will be a leader in industries such as telemedicine and environmental science.

Both officials were pleased that their communities are working with FTF to improve opportunities for their youngest citizens.



COMMON CORE FOCUSES MOST ON TEACHING KIDS HOW TO LEARN

If Arizona wants all of its children to graduate from high school ready for college and careers, that education must start in the early years and focus on teaching kids how to be constantly learning, an Arizona Department of Education (ADE) official told the Board.

Kathy Hrabaluk, Associate Superintendent of the High Standards for Students Divisions at ADE, said Arizona's past efforts have focused on preparing students with the information they needed to complete the tasks assigned to them in the workplace, since most decisions were left to corporate leaders. Given the changing nature of business and the jobs of the future, employees will increasingly be required to innovate and make decisions, Hrabaluk said. This means, they must be taught how to learn – to research, analyze, find solutions and make decisions. Arizona's new Common Core Standards are designed to ensure that our kids learn how to learn and are prepared for the future that awaits them.

Hrabaluk said the Infant and Toddler Guidelines and the Early Learning Standards are aligned with the Common Core Standards to build those crucial skills early on. She said a solid foundation is particularly important given the research that shows that kids who aren't reading well by third grade are four times more likely to not graduate from high school.

"We have to graduate young people who understand how to drive their own learning," Hrabaluk said. "They need to be ready to move in to a world they're going to have to run."

Background information on Arizona's Common Core Standards, implementation timeline and links to additional resources can be found in Attachment 15 of the Board materials.

FUTURE BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

At its April 2013 meeting, the FTF Board approved its meeting schedule for fiscal year 2014. The schedule is noted below and includes dates for the remaining Board meetings in this fiscal year.

- June 10-11, 2013 – Phoenix
- July 15, 2013 – Telephonic
- August 27, 2013 – Phoenix
- Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2013 – Phoenix
- December 9-10, 2013 – Tucson
- January 21-22, 2014 – Phoenix
- April 7-8, 2014 – Flagstaff
- June 9-10, 2014 – Phoenix



COMMUNITY BY COMMUNITY, EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ARE INCREASING IN GILA REGION

The small community of Young, Arizona is proud to say that all its young children have access to early education opportunities, thanks to a partnership between Young Elementary Schools and the First Things First Gila Regional Partnership Council.

Families and caregivers of young children can come to the school twice per week with their little ones to grow and learn together. And, earlier this month, school staff and parents travelled to Payson to share information about their program with the FTF Board.

“The program is helping to nurture strong relationships – between parents and their children and between families and the school,” Superintendent Linda Cheney said.

The semi-weekly sessions emphasize literacy and reading through activities like math, science and art. At the same time, the activities foster the development of social and motor skills.

Jenny Hunt, the teacher of the Early Bird Program, said parents and children are all excited about the work they do together; some families never miss a class.

Shara Garrett said she is thankful the program is available in her small community.

“I feel like my kids are able to get a preschool experience, and that they are learning in ways that I can’t teach them at home,” she said, adding that her kids are learning to work with other children in groups, which prepares them for school.

Pam Boyse added that her kids get upset when they have to miss the program. “They actually beg for homework.”

Cheney said she is grateful for the persistence of the First Things First staff in proposing the partnership to Young schools.

“These opportunities would not be available to our kids if it weren’t for (their) work,” she said.

Board Chair Steve Lynn said he was proud to see the how FTF funding is making an impact.

“To see a program like this in a community like Young makes me feel good about what’s going on in the state,” Lynn said. “We want all our kids to have the best chance to do all the things in life they want to do.”



ENCOURAGING ARIZONA KIDS TO READ ON!

Arizona Literacy Director Terri Clark shared with the Board how communities are coming together to ensure that kids are reading and succeeding by third grade.

Clark said Arizona is facing an early literacy crisis, with students consistently failing in key benchmarks for success. In her first 6 months on the job, Clark said she has focused on creating cross-sector engagement in a statewide early literacy effort, developing a framework communities can use to identify gaps in early literacy efforts and plan together to fill those gaps, and building momentum to achieve results.

The model developed for creating a birth to 8 early literacy continuum recognizes that one size does not fit all. Instead, communities must plan to ensure that

the right program is available for each child at the right time.

Clark said Read On Arizona has established efforts in several Arizona communities already, including Flagstaff, Goodyear, Phoenix, Sahaurita, Tucson and Yuma.

The plan is for these groups to share their experiences with each other and with other Arizona communities with the goals of: increasing the number of children who demonstrate school readiness at kindergarten entry in the language and literacy domain and increase the percentage of students reading at or above grade level by third grade.

To that end, Clark and community stakeholders have developed a 10-year Literacy Action Plan and are in the process of vetting it and its Year 1 action steps, goals, objectives and outcomes with key stakeholders.

Clark said she is pleased with the momentum that exists in Arizona around early literacy today. Effective practices exist that can be scaled; engagement in literacy efforts is high; and more and more communities are joining the Read On network.

Additional information on Read On Arizona is available in Attachment 16 of the Board materials.



FTF REGIONS PILOTING ONLINE DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING TOOL

The Board watched a virtual presentation of an online developmental screening tool being piloted by three FTF regions: Gila, Pinal and Southwest Maricopa

Lauren Smith of the Brooks Publishing Company walked the Board through highlights of the program, which allows data to be tracked on individual children and on groups of children over time. This not only allows users to see how individual kids are making progress, but also allows decision makers to have data they can use in their work.

FTF CEO Rhian Evans Allvin said regions have been frustrated with the challenges faced in implementing a developmental screening strategy, and that this tool shows promise. The discussion continues, she said, on ensuring that when developmental delays are identified, programs exist that families can be referred to.



BOARD APPROVES STUDY TO INFORM TOBACCO REVENUE PROJECTIONS

The FTF Board approved additional studies by Arizona State University to inform tobacco revenue projections.

FTF Chief Financial Officer Josh Allen said the projections developed by ASU have been fairly accurate, with revenues over the past two years falling within the projected ranges.

Those models based in part on data about tobacco use nationally. The Arizona research will be conducted every four years and used to update the model every two years, Allen said.



BOARD EXPRESSES THANKS TO REGIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL FORUMS

Several members of the Board expressed their thanks to regional council members for their participation in regional forums over the past two months.

“The forums have been delightful,” Vice Chair Pam Powell said. “It has been phenomenal to hear the successes achieved, the questions being asked and the needs expressed in various areas.

Member Cecil Patterson said he has enjoyed seeing how the priorities the Board has established statewide are being carried out in local communities.

Save the date! The FTF Early Childhood Summit will be held on August 25-27 in Phoenix! Registration and program details coming soon.