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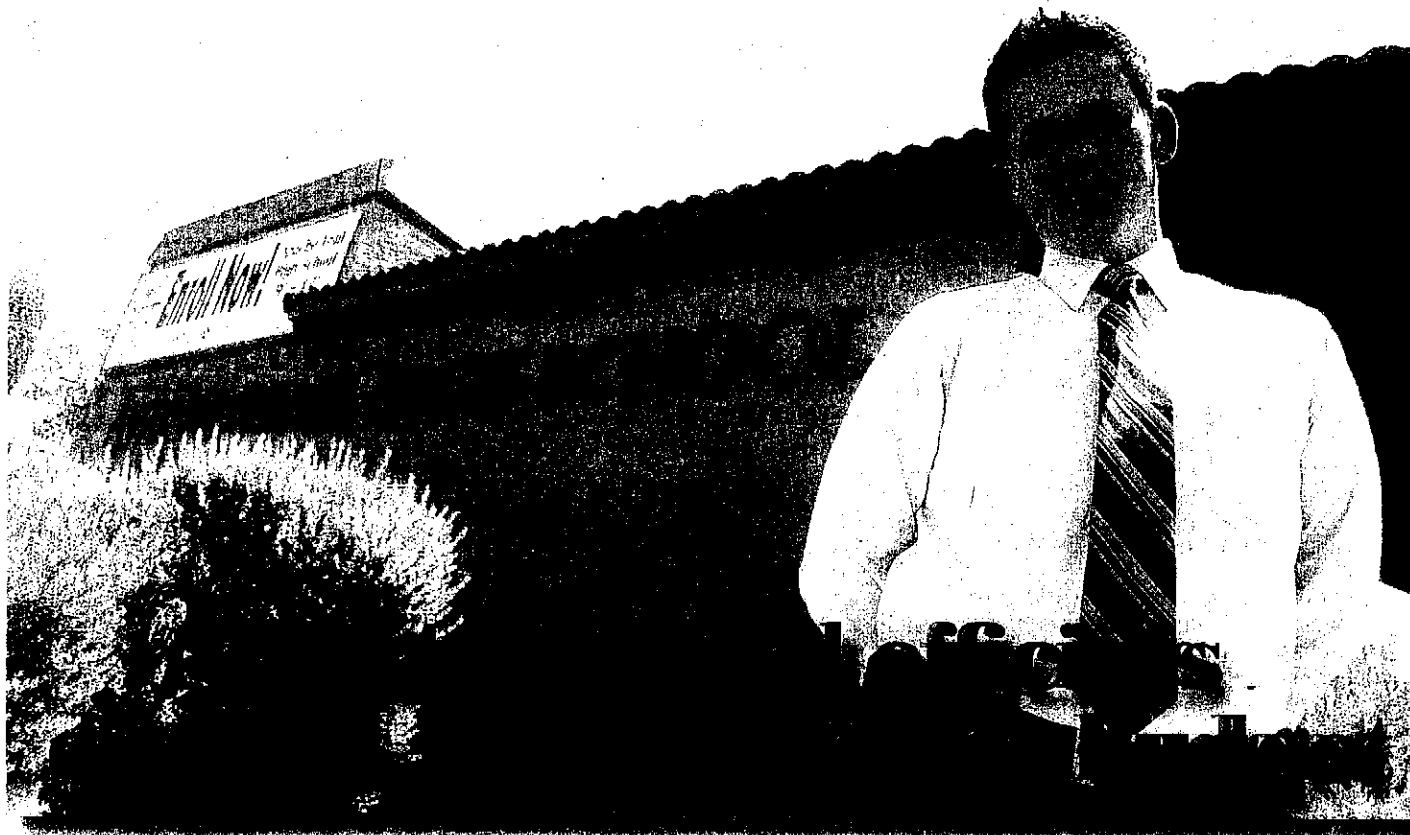
APACHE JUNCTION / GOLD CANYON

# INDEPENDENT

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**By Terrance Thornton**  
Independent Newspapers

Charter school officials say Gov. Jan Brewer's July 6 ratification of two bills relating directly to K-12 funding is a good thing, but all agree the state-funding system in place is flawed.

"Our schools are going to get their money," said Stephanie Grisham, Arizona Associations of Charter Schools spokeswoman, in a phone interview Tuesday, July 7. "The budget woes are over. The panic that was yesterday is gone."

According to Ms. Grisham, the two bills approved by Gov. Brewer included additional assistance funding, which is a 2 percent increase to state funding that can be used for capital facilities projects; and base level funding for charter schools.

Additional assistance funding for grades K-8 is \$1,588.44 per pupil and for grades 9-12 it's \$1,851.30 per pupil while base-level funding is \$3,267.72 for grades K-12,

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Independent Newspapers/Terrance Thornton  
Giles Githero, Apache Trail High School leader, says his school has experienced a steady increase to enrollment numbers because costs associated with private schools coupled with the school's innovative approach to education.

## INSIDE This Week

### Recorder's office presented grant funds

Secretary of State Ken Bennett presented a check to Pinal County Recorder Laura Dean-Lytle for Help America Vote Act Grant funding.



# Council approves most of horse-boarding rules

# Gov. Brewer ratifies two bills specific to school

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according to Ms. Grisham.

Base level funding pays for salaries, utility costs and benefits for employees of charter schools, Ms. Grisham explained.

Although East Valley charter school officials are worrisome the payments may come after the anticipated July 15 deadline, they do say with funding in place attention can now be focused on preparing for next school year.

While some East Valley school districts are combating decreases in enrollment numbers — the Apache Junction Unified School District is experiencing an 8 percent drop in students from the last school year to the one prior, according to AJUSD officials — charter schools in the East Valley are experiencing jumps in enrollment numbers, charter school officials contend.

But despite the increases to enrollment numbers, charter schools are funded on average about \$1,800 less than traditional public school districts, according to Ms. Grisham.

Coupled with less funding when it comes to enrollment numbers, charter schools do not receive transportation funds nor are they entitled facility funding mechanisms, Ms. Grisham explained.

## Apache Junction

Monte Lange, Imagine Schools Sonoran



Independent Newspapers/Terrance Thornton  
Monte Lange, Imagine Schools Sonoran Desert region director, says a collective sigh of relief was felt Tuesday afternoon when news of Gov. Brewer's ratification of school funding bills was made known. He is standing at the one-year-old Imagine Preparatory facility in Apache Junction.

Desert region director, says a collective sigh of relief was felt Tuesday afternoon when news of Gov. Brewer's ratification of school funding bills was made known.

"That has allowed everybody to have a sigh of relief," he explained July 8 while sitting in his office at 1843 W. 16th Ave. in Apache Junction. "We are not funded like a typical school district; we operate on

current-day funding."

Current-day funding, Mr. Lange explained as each fiscal year funding is done in real time meaning that funds allocated during a certain month go toward paying that month's bills.

Imagine Preparatory at Apache Junction officials are anticipating to receive about \$2.6 million in state funding on July

15, but while Mr. Lange was optimistic the money will actually come there is cause for concern, he said.

"It has not been confirmed," he said of when the money will actually come, noting that Gov. Brewer's vetoes of the original two bills did have a new date of Aug. 1 for money to be distributed to charter schools. "As I understand it, the bill she was presented did not have the date change."

According to Mr. Lange, Imagine Schools is the largest charter organization in Arizona with 22 charters and 13 campuses throughout the state. In the Sonoran Desert region there are 14 charters with seven campuses, Mr. Lange said.

But the charter school juggernaut has not been immune to cuts, Mr. Lange explained.

"We have had to make very tough decisions," he said of the February cut to school funding for charter school students. "We had to really look at our staffing."

According to Mr. Lange, support staff hours within the Imagine School charter organization have been reduced and all teacher salaries have been frozen, but layoffs have been avoided.

According to Mr. Lange, there are 4,000 students in seven campuses in southern Arizona.

Mr. Lange says it will be a scramble to prepare for next school year because before Monday, July 6 all attentions were



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# funding for charter and traditional education

focused on what the state legislature was going to do.

"Now we just have to move a lot quicker to make sure we are ready for next school year," he said. "We are expanding this year."

Imagine Preparatory's enrollment has doubled — to 200 — since last year, which was its first year in Apache Junction, and plans are in place to offer grades seventh through 11th with 12th grade coming the following year, Mr. Lange said.

"We just added another grade," he said. "Typically, you just try to grow your own (students)."

Mr. Lange accounts for the increase to enrollment because the economy is forcing parents to look at other options besides private schools they have to pay for.

"You are going to have that private school feel, but not pay for it," he said, noting Imagine Preparatory does not charge tuition. "We envision filling this school by the end of this coming year."

Six hundred students is the maximum total Imagine Preparatory can handle, Mr. Lange said.

Another impact Imagine Schools is experiencing because of reductions to state funding and a down economy is it is forced to halt all future development until further notice, Mr. Lange explained.

"We have stopped all development, so it does have an impact," he explained.



Independent Newspapers/Terrance Thornton  
**Patriot Academy Kindergarten Teacher Heather Wilda stands where the Queen Creek charter school is situated, but plans are in the works for the school to expand.**

"When we have an economy like this we can't help as many parents."

Mr. Lange says he believes school funding may be contingent on a 1 percent sales tax increase across Arizona and without it school funding could be in peril.

"From what I understand, some of it is hinging on a tax increase," he said. "I don't know if Gov. Brewer is going to hold out for that."

★ Giles Glithero, school leader at Apache

since he took over the school leader position about three years ago.

Apache Trail High School officials are anticipating to have 205 students attending classes this fall, which is up from 145 students three years ago.

But while Mr. Glithero agrees budget stability was gained Monday, July 6 by the governor signing bills specific to education funding, he is still planning on a reduced budget.

"There is still uncertainty regarding this because the sales tax is still unstable," he said of the signed bills pertaining to education funding. "They didn't touch the sales tax issue. With that in mind, that is why we are proceeding cautiously."

Mr. Glithero says he has not had to lay off any employees, but rather absorbed costs through attrition coupled with salary freezes for this next fiscal year for all employees at the school.

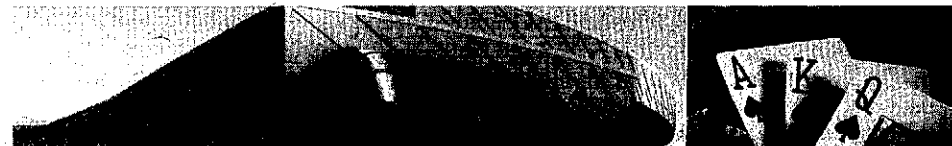
"I have not cut any teaching positions. Times are still going to be tough," he explained. "Our budget is still going to remain conservative."

Despite decreases to funding, Mr. Glithero says enrollment is increasing and parents are choosing charter schools and doing so more often.

The Leona Group is a nationwide charter school organization with 20 schools in the Valley of the Sun and two schools in

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## Charter

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the Tucson area.

"We have been in Apache Junction for almost 12 years and through that time we have provided a strong academic program where students can come to a smaller school environment," he said. "They can succeed where they might not have been able to in a larger school."

### Queen Creek

Jay Brown, who is president of Patriot Academy, 19011 E. San Tan Blvd. in Queen Creek, says Gov. Brewer signing into law K-12 funding was a must, but it still leaves some things up in the air.

"The fact that the state has passed its budget is a good thing, but it still under funds charter schools compared to district schools," he said in a phone interview. "Most people say, 'what is the big deal?' Those kind of issues are always going to be

there."

Mr. Brown says funding sources for facilities and transportation are not part of Arizona's charter schools' state funding formula.

"We have to purchase that out of those funds, when the district gets it for free," he said of procurement of facilities and providing transportation for students. "We are always trying to educate our parents."

Charter school officials agree school districts can tax property owners for facilities and transportation funds while that mechanism is not available to charter schools.

Although it has been confirmed charter school funding is coming July 15 by the Arizona Association of Charter Schools, Mr. Brown says he is not going to believe it until he sees it.

"The state saying they were going to move their payment from July 15, we were like, 'we are going to miss July's funding,'" he said, noting that charter schools operate on current-year funding. "That was and is a huge issue."

But a bright spot for the Patriot Acad-

emy — Mr. Brown contends — is its dedication to offering full-day kindergarten during a time when larger districts are cutting the program in half or doing away with it altogether.

"If they (the state legislature) do what they are supposed to do, we are going to offer the program," he said, pointing out the importance of offering kindergarten since Queen Creek is filled with so many young families. "We are very small, but in a very residential area of Queen Creek."

The Patriot Academy has 115 students and every year its enrollment fluctuates, but because of the recent reductions to state funding the school is forced to halt its current construction projects, Mr. Brown said.

"They are so transient, they move in and out, and a lot of it is due to the economy," he said. "We know that a lot of them left toward the end of the school year. We have lost about eight kids to that; for us that is a large percentage."

The charter school is in a shopping center with 4,800 feet of leased square

footage, but adjacent to the strip mall is an empty shell of a building where the school will be, but only when funding is available.

"We have been, for the last two years, in modular-constructed buildings," he explained. "If they get the funds they say we will, then we will recommence construction."

Mr. Brown says because of reduction in state funding and its fluctuating enrollment tallies, the school has had to withdraw from offering salary increases for its staff this fiscal year.

"I think all the teachers across the state are feeling the pinch. We have made sure to not decrease their salaries this year," he said of his teaching staff. "We are still wondering, what is going to happen. They approved funding but they may not have it."

Patriot Academy is expecting about \$700,000 in state funding on July 15, Mr. Brown said.

*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).*

## Boarding

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this town — will not accommodate horses."

Sandra Eastman did not agree.

"This is in neighborhoods, not commer-

cial property," she told the council. "For the sake of our open spaces ... the city needs to enforce their own R-143 rules concerning CUPs."

Ms. Eastman called into question why the city is opting to look the other way rather than enforcing rules already on the books.

"Why are the illegal boarders not being fined?" she asked. "I am not sure why the

city has not enforced its own ordinance."

Beverly Hanson, owner of Superstition Stables, which is one of the 15 horse-boarding facilities that has participated in the drafting of the proposed amendments, said she was eager to get this done.

"I am tired of this," she told council. "I think just about everything has been gone through a thousand times."

Ms. Hanson contended that the financial impact brought by the horse-boarding public is worth taking note and protecting.

"We need every revenue source we can get; do you understand what I am telling you?" she asked. "I am not asking for you, I am asking for Apache Junction. I know you are going to do your best, we are just trying to give you the tools to do that."

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