

# Tucson Citizen

## Our Opinion: Education? Let's specify

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Any meaningful, lasting progress for the Tucson region hinges on better education. And the foundation of a good education, obviously, is literacy.

Thus the new report from the Tucson Regional Town Hall rightly devotes considerable attention to literacy.

Town Hall participants also enumerate the need for more and better teachers, smaller classes, improved early childhood programs, stronger K-16 funding from the Legislature, more meaningful tests, more student accountability and more parental, business and community involvement.

Did they want fries with that?

Seriously. Not much is new in this education wish list: "The teacher shortage in the Tucson region will be cured. . . . We will fund and build quality schools, with fewer students per teacher and adequate supplies."

The report details our needs more extensively, perhaps, and certainly reflects an earnest desire to ensure that all our children are above average.

But other than suggesting a real estate tax, more state school funding and those ever elusive "public-private partnerships," in this report, there's no "there" there.

Granted, some action plan and assigned tasks are to be sorted out later by Town Hall participants. But considering that a chunk of them are business people, we'd like to see them galvanize their cohorts with something more than platitudes.

We'd like some concrete promises that can and will be kept:

- Will every good-sized business in our region commit at least an hour per month of

volunteer work in schools or literacy programs from every one of its employees?

- Shall the CEOs and other business leaders themselves vow to personally mentor a child from a low-income family to ensure that youngster's literacy, educational achievements and bright future?
- As we lobby the Legislature for better school funding, as has been done in every legislative session in modern memory, how about some business leaders putting their own money into that hat they're holding out?
- Could every one of Tucson's top business leaders bear to contribute, say, one-fourth of 1 percent of their net profits to an education fund for our region's K-12 public school systems?

Perhaps then legislators would take us seriously, much as lobbying by Tucson investors last year helped to secure legislative approval of Rio Nuevo funding.

Town Hall participants are on target in realizing that improved education ranks right up there with water and health care as one of our region's top needs.

More than 13 percent of Pima County residents, ages 18 to 64, have no high school diploma. In Tucson alone, 19 percent of adults are functionally illiterate, and 27 percent of those age 5 and up do not speak English, says Literacy Volunteers of Tucson.

So, yes, by all means, let's tackle this problem. We long have known what is needed to improve learning in our schools. But this time, let's each commit real time and money, setting an example for fellow residents. Let's get this ball rolling, and let's do it now.

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[The Town Hall education plan: some details.](#)

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