

## Budget cuts slash \$218M from all-day kindergarten

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Business leaders were some of the biggest backers of all-day kindergarten when former Gov. Janet Napolitano pushed the idea through the Legislature in 2004.

Six years later, Napolitano no longer is governor and huge budget deficits have prompted the state to strip \$218 million in funding that helped school districts offer the program. School districts still can offer full-day K if they budget for it themselves locally, or they have parents pay fees for the program; but public schools are cash-poor because of the cuts, and families are struggling with the recession.

Education advocates wonder where the business backers of all-day K are now.

“We hope business leaders will speak up for programs like early childhood development that they have advocated for in the past. Arizona hears so often from the business community that, to create a better business environment, the state should invest in full-day kindergarten and other excellent educational programs,” said John Wright, president of the Arizona Education Association. “These cuts ... are devastating to Arizona’s public schools and will set Arizona back as it continues to compete



Wright

for the same jobs and companies settling in other states.”

Business interests lately have focused more on minimizing cuts that impact hospitals and pushing for a tax cut package to bolster the state’s sagging economy.



Sanders

“It’s the nature of the budget situation,” said Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce CEO Todd Sanders. “The business community has been very focused on the overall budget.

We’ve been trying to figure out ways to stop the bleeding and bring the state’s revenue back to stable ground.”

Other business leaders say they like all-day K, but the budget crisis makes it difficult to avoid such cuts. Still, Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Rick Kidder said it could discourage business investment in the state.



Kidder

“States with a reputation for not placing a high value on education often do not make the second cut when businesses seek relocation,” he said.

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