

Save Our Schools Spoke to PebbleCreek Democratic Club



Left to right: Charlotte Krause, PC Dem Club program chair; SOS advocates Kristin Roberts and Nicky Indivacitch; and Vicki Barber, PC Dem Club president (photo by Gillian Driscoll)

Gillian Driscoll

PebbleCreek Democratic Club members were treated to a great presentation at their October meeting. Save Our Schools (SOS) is a non-profit network of 20,000 education advocates dedicated to supporting and retaining public education in the U.S. Two SOS representatives gave a fact-filled account of how education in Arizona is being affected negatively by several factors. Save Our Schools is advocating and spreading the word around the state so that parents, teachers, and the general public become aware of the imminent demise of public education in our state. Public schools are the best investment in our economic future. Every child deserves a supportive school in their neighborhood while property values and public safety benefit as well.

Our speakers noted that Arizona is 49th in the U.S. for per-pupil funding. Its teacher salaries are in the bottom 5 in the U.S., which is causing a teacher hiring and retention crisis. The student to counselor ratio is approximately 600 students per counselor and buildings are in need of repair. Schools are closing, especially in rural areas. Almost all schools are not fully staffed and must rely on substitutes to fill in, meaning that students have little continuity of teaching.

One issue that has contributed to this current state of education in our state has been the introduction of vouchers that give financial support to private school students. Through this scheme over \$600 million has been lost to public schools with \$46 million lost by Goodyear schools alone. This

has been the effect of so called "school choice." Private schools do not have to adhere to the required standards of teaching, content, safety, and more that public schools do by law and this system is open to fraud. The vouchers tend to benefit higher income families and impact lower income families negatively.

Kristin Roberts, a high school English teacher who has taught in Arizona schools for 15 years, gave the presentation that held the audience's attention throughout. She told us that teaching is much harder than it used to be and class size now is around 35 students on average.

Nicky Indivacitch, a mother of five and Outreach Director for SOS, added information on how the organization has been reaching out to voters in Arizona to make sure they are aware of this information and are registered to vote. They have reached 28,000 voters in the last six weeks due to the tireless work of their volunteers. They have also presented this "roadshow" presentation over 100 times since the beginning of the year. Nicky encouraged all present to spread the word about public education and its need for support to friends and neighbors so that the situation might be turned around soon.

Members also heard about the stunning amount of clothes, household items, furniture, and more that was collected and donated since May. Volunteers sorted and distributed 2,129 pounds of items to various charities and organizations around the county and \$100 was also donated to the Agua Fria Foodbank. Thank you to all.