PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Phoenix Union Launches $1.2 Million Community-Driven Initiative on School Safety

Today, the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) announced a $1.2 million community-driven initiative on school safety. In a video recently released by Superintendent Dr. Chad Gestson, he stated that Phoenix Union will not re-sign its annual Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the City of Phoenix for School Resource Officers. Instead, Phoenix Union will use the funds to launch the largest school participatory budgeting (PB) initiative that our nation has ever seen.

As the district responsibly yet courageously addresses two pandemics, racism and COVID-19, Dr. Gestson said that this is the right time for PXU to revisit and even rethink school safety. The 2020-2021 school year will see even more campus closures and remote learning, resulting in a reduced need for day-to-day school safety measures, including the use of local law enforcement. Phoenix Union will use off-duty officers, as and when needed, to assist with required law enforcement notifications, campus and community safety needs, and other mandatory reporting issues. Officers will be assigned to the district, not to schools.

This decision will result in significant budget savings. “The savings will be reinvested back into our people for the 2020-2021 school year,” said Dr. Gestson. “The majority of the funds will be used to train and further develop our school safety teams in preparation for the launch of the 2021-2022 school year. None of the funds will be allocated to positions this year in order to ensure that those funds are available in subsequent years.”

Dr. Gestson says that the community will decide how to spend the funds for the 2021-2022 school year. “We are putting real money into the hands of real people, our people, and giving them real power.”

In September, three separate yet complimentary participatory budgeting processes will begin. In total, PXU will allocate $1.2 million to this initiative - $500,000 to a staff-driven process, $500,000 to a student-driven process, and $200,000 to a parent-driven process.
District administration will commit to implementing the winning ideas for up to three years, beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. Other ideas that score well but do not ultimately win will also be considered for implementation. All three PB processes will focus solely on improving campus and community safety. Funds must be spent on positions or initiatives allowed by state statute and procurement law, per Maintenance and Operations guidelines.

Phoenix Union is no stranger to participatory budgeting. In 2018, PXU became the first district in our nation to launch district-wide student-based participatory budgeting. For several years, district leadership has allocated $7,000 per comprehensive campus and $4,000 per small school for PB. The results have been impressive - new water stations, more shade structures, and improved common areas, to name a few.

The participatory budgeting process will promote true civic engagement. Participants – in this case all staff, students, and parents – will first spend time learning about school safety. After learning comes idea generation – the community, not the district, will generate ideas on how to improve school safety using the funds allocated. After ideas are reviewed, proposals will be developed and presented by and for participants. As the last step in the process, all participants will vote on the final proposals. Winning or selected ideas will then be implemented for the 2021-2022 school year.

Phoenix Union Governing Board member Stanford Prescott stated, "We have a responsibility to ensure that every student, staff, and community member feels safe at our schools. This process will allow our district to reimagine school safety through the voices of our entire school community."

"As a Board member, I am so pleased that we are removing police from our schools and letting our students vote on how to spend the funds," said Naketa Ross.

"I firmly believe that our community must inform our decisions in Phoenix Union," said Stephanie Parra, Board President. "I'm proud that we continue to lead by example by including our students, parents, and employees in the decision-making process as we solve very complex issues impacting our District."

At 2:00PM on Friday, July 17th, Phoenix Union will host a Special Meeting of the Governing Board to discuss next steps. For the health and safety of our community, this meeting will be held virtually. For updates on this groundbreaking participatory budgeting initiative, including the Special Meeting of the Governing Board, please visit our website at www.pxu.org/PB.