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Arizona business leaders pushing for new education standards

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By: [Mark Brodie](#) (/users/mark-brodie) on 03/01/2013

Business leaders in Arizona are strongly backing the state's transition to the Common Core standards – a multi-state effort in math and English that supporters say will teach students to think, rather than memorize facts. Businesses are pushing lawmakers and Arizona Governor Jan Brewer to adequately fund it, saying improving the state's education system will also improve its business climate and economy. In the final part of our series, Educating Arizona, KJZZ's Mark Brodie reports on the partnership between education and business.



Intel says it will need workers with advanced degrees to work in its new research and development facility in Chandler. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Sutherland - Intel)

MARK BRODIE: It's pretty hard to miss – a two-story, 285,000 square foot building going up at one of Intel's Chandler campuses. When it's finished later this year, the company says its \$300 million research and development facility will employ several hundred people. Cathleen Barton, Intel's Education Manager for the Southwest, says about half of those new workers will need advanced degrees.

CATHLEEN BARTON: We chose Arizona because it's got great business infrastructure, we have great partnerships with the state and with the

city. But we also built here because we thought we were gonna be able to hire the people that we needed to hire.

BRODIE: Barton says her company has had a tough time finding U.S. citizens with advanced degrees in areas like electrical, materials and chemical engineering, and that Common Core might change that. And, other business leaders agree – saying the new standards will help them fill jobs with qualified workers.

GLENN HAMER: We hear way too often that kids graduating from high school in Arizona are not ready for college and they're not ready for a career.

BRODIE: Glenn Hamer is the President and CEO of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

HAMER: And we're gonna change that. And Common Core is part of that equation to change the status quo.

BRODIE: Hamer says Common Core will help students become more versatile, which should help Arizona attract more businesses. He says the current effort is unprecedented.

HAMER: I have never seen the business community so vested and so engaged in trying to, in a nonpartisan manner, improve our educational system.

BRODIE: That effort isn't lost on educators. And, Andrew Morrill says it makes sense. The President of the Arizona Education Association says there's a fundamental relationship between the quality of education in a state and the quality of business.

ANDREW MORRILL: If we want a strong economy, we're gonna get there through our schools. So, I really like the fact that more business leaders are saying, 'These laws that we've passed, these increased expectations are desirable, but even from a business standpoint, what's the investment strategy that our schools can count on?'

BRODIE: Business and education leaders are looking at that investment. Many say they're confident the state will spend the resources necessary to make sure Common Core succeeds here. Larry Penley, President of the Thunderbird School of Global Management, says money alone won't do the job – it's where and how that money is spent.

LARRY PENLEY: Combine teacher training and the quality of teachers with the standards, and you actually have something that makes a difference in Arizona. Fail to put the standards in place, or fail to provide the kind of teacher training that we need, and you still won't achieve what's so important for economic growth in the state of Arizona.

BRODIE: In the past, the state, with business' backing, has focused on business attraction and retention by cutting red tape and taxes. Todd Sanders, President and CEO of the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce says that's great, but it's not everything.

TODD SANDERS: I think one of the big missing pieces is to make sure that we have that solid educational foundation that will allow companies to come here and hire the right people.

BRODIE: Sanders is optimistic Common Core will help Arizona close that gap and level the playing field with the rest of the country,



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although he warns it'll take some time. And, Alfonso Alva says Common Core will give students a clear understanding of what's expected of them. He's the College Campus Chair for the College of Education at the University of Phoenix, and says the new standards will help businesses get the most out of the education system.

ALFONSO ALVA: It brings them to the table, and it allows us to collaborate effectively with them to see what their needs are, and then see what we can do from our end to meet those needs.

BRODIE: Alva says the skills students learn under Common Core will help them succeed in a global economy. And, he expects more partnerships between educators and business in the future. Intel's Southwest Education Manager Cathleen Barton recognizes it'll be a while before the company can hire the students now starting with Common Core. But, she says, Intel wants to hire the next generation of innovators.

BARTON: And if in their school environment they not only get the chance, but they're expected to think critically, to push the envelope, to explore new ideas, and then present those and stress why they're important and make their case – those are the kinds of skills that we want here, because that will help develop the next great innovation that Intel has.

BRODIE: Barton believes those skills will help students - and workers and businesses - in all sorts of fields, from administrators to engineers to attorneys to human resources.

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