

My Turn: Education is the future of Mesa

John Giles, AZ I See It 12:12 p.m. MST December 29, 2016



(Photo: Michael Schennum/The Republic)

I'm a fan of Mesa's city logo, which depicts three flat-topped mountains, or mesas, one in front of another. To me, it reflects the challenges we face as a city. We are on one level, but aspiring to improve and reach the higher, more prosperous [NextMesa \(http://www.mesaaz.gov/city-hall/mayor-council/mayor-john-giles/nextmesa\)](http://www.mesaaz.gov/city-hall/mayor-council/mayor-john-giles/nextmesa).+

We can move to that next level, within our financial constraints, by focusing on what's most important. Keeping our community safe will always be a top priority. In 2017, both our police and fire departments will implement innovative measures that will better focus resources on our most significant needs.

Mesa values education

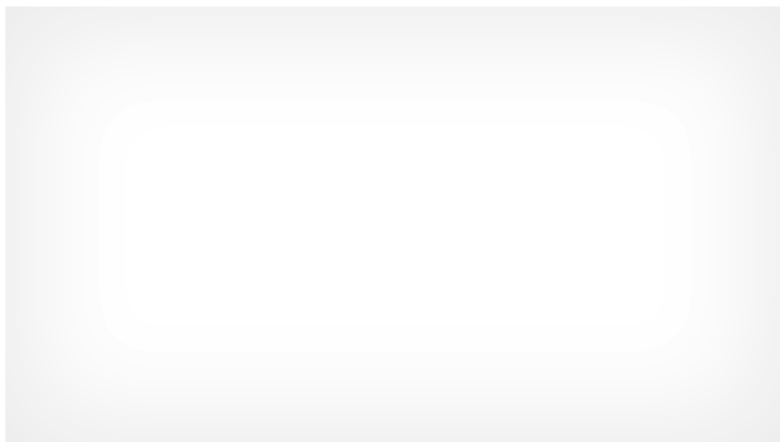
Education is one of our city's core values. Excellent schools are one of the main reasons many of us choose to live here. But, unfortunately, school readiness and educational attainment levels in Mesa are trending downward. We are at risk of losing one of the qualities that defines us.



Mesa Mayor John Giles. (Photo: Mesa)

Our K-12 school system is outstanding, but the state budget doesn't provide any funding for early childhood education. Nationally, half of all children have access to pre-K programs. In Mesa, that number is less than one-third.

ADVERTISING



inRead invented by Teads

This year I formed an Early Childhood Education Task Force with the goal to help our youngest students reach their potential. The city already provides libraries, museums, parks and recreation and cultural programs that can be even more focused on kindergarten readiness.

I'm committed to making that happen. As a community, we need to rally to make additional options available for parents including on-line programs and tools that families can use in their homes.

We have made significant progress in increasing opportunities for post-high school education and training in Mesa. Mesa Community College, ASU Polytechnic, Northern Arizona University, Benedictine University, Wilkes University and others are thriving.

Bigger and younger

Mesa is approaching half a million residents, over a third of whom are school-age or younger; but, we currently lag behind our neighbors in college degrees. To keep up with our youth, we must continue to develop as a "college town."

I'm committed to establishing an ASU campus in our downtown without raising taxes. Downtown Mesa and ASU are a perfect match: The two locations are linked by light rail, only a few minutes apart. ASU continues to grow, literally bursting out of its Tempe campus, and downtown Mesa would benefit from a large, prestigious anchor bringing economic activity and vibrancy.

Focusing more attention on education is the right thing to do for two reasons. First, these are our children, we love them and have an obligation to prepare them to be successful, the same way our parents and city leaders did for us, if not better. Growing up in Mesa should be an advantage.

Second, and somewhat selfishly, focusing on education will pay economic dividends for everyone who lives here whether they are raising children or not.

Check out subscriber-only Insider offers and

SAVE \$1000'S

for groceries, auto services, family outings and more...

EXPLORE OFFERS
([HTTP://WWW.AZCENTRAL.COM/INSIDER
/DEALS/2016/08/16/DEALS-INSIDER
/88835230/](http://www.azcentral.com/insider/deals/2016/08/16/deals-insider/88835230/))

Following good examples

Cities like Austin, Denver, Salt Lake and Seattle are experiencing unprecedented economic growth because they are attracting and developing a bright, young, educated workforce, and companies are taking their jobs to where the talent is. Thus far, Mesa has remained competitive, but that will change if we are content to watch and not react to the changing education trends in our city.

By focusing on where we can improve as a city, I don't mean to ignore that Mesa is prospering on many levels. We have a disproportionate share of A+ ranked schools. New businesses, restaurants, and subdivisions opened throughout the city in 2016 and we are still one of the safest and most affordable places to live in the country. Our conservative fiscal philosophy, combined with strong neighborhoods and a service-first ethos, creates an excellent foundation for businesses to succeed.

So what's next for Mesa? Plenty. The light-rail expansion to Gilbert Road, along with quality investments along the light-rail line, continues our urban rebirth. New housing and commercial developments are popping up across the city. And, in February, we will welcome back the Chicago Cubs, winners of the World Series! I'm proud of Mesa and plan to be even more so. Let's work hard and, together, take Mesa to the NextMesa.

John Giles is mayor of Mesa.

Read or Share this story: <http://azc.cc/2hwWRYq>