



Dr. George J. Barnes
Superintendent

February 19, 2026

Dr. Michael Halpert
Chief Academic Officer

Dear Balsz Families and Community,

Governing Board

Col. Vic Grace
President
Member since 2022
Past Member 2010-2018

This letter provides an update on the district's budget planning process, and a decision made by the Governing Board. The district recognizes the difficulty of these discussions and appreciates the thoughtful input shared by students, families, staff, and community members throughout this process.

Sidra Zaidi
Vice President
Member since 2024

Like many school districts across Arizona, Balsz continues to face significant financial challenges. To remain fiscally responsible and protect core programs and services, the district must reduce its budget by approximately \$3 million.

Todd Schwarz
Member since 2010

Over the past several months, district leadership and the Governing Board have reviewed multiple budget reduction scenarios while gathering and reviewing feedback from students, families, staff, and community stakeholders. Public comments, written correspondence, and community discussions were considered part of the decision-making process.

Dr. Gail Q. Knight
Member since 2012

At its regular meeting Tuesday, Feb. 17, the Governing Board voted unanimously to repurpose Brunson-Lee School beginning in the 2026-27 school year. The school will be renamed Brunson-Lee Academy and will serve students while offering a science, technology, engineering and mathematics instructional curricular addition. Brunson-Lee Academy will be the district's only K-5 campus offering a dedicated STEM special or elective.

Jacob George
Member since 2024

Balsz Schools
Balsz Online Academy
[www.balsz.org/
balszonlineacademy](http://www.balsz.org/balszonlineacademy)
4825 E Roosevelt Street
(602) 629-6400

Under the approved plan, Griffith and Crockett will continue serving K-5 students within current district boundaries. Music and art will not be offered at Brunson-Lee Academy. Families seeking fine arts programming may enroll their child at their neighborhood school, with district-provided transportation.

Orangedale Early
Learning Center
Preschool
5048 E. Oak Street
(602) 629-6800

The plan also includes further research into adding a preschool program at Brunson-Lee in partnership with a community provider. Additional steps must be completed before that component can be finalized.

Brunson-Lee Elementary
Grades K – 5
1350 N. 48th Street
(602) 629-6900

Even with these changes, staff reductions are anticipated across several roles districtwide. The approved plan is designed to address the district's approximately \$3 million budget shortfall while preserving as many direct student services as possible.

Crockett Elementary
Grades K – 5
501 N. 36th Street
(602) 629-6600

Griffith Elementary
Grades K – 5
4505 E. Palm Lane
(602) 629-6700

District leaders understand that decisions of this magnitude affect real people and real relationships. Schools are more than buildings. They are communities. The district remains committed to transparent communication and to supporting students, families and employees as implementation planning continues.

Tillman Middle
Grades 6 – 8
4309 E. Belleview Street
(602) 629-6500

Thank you for your continued engagement and partnership during this challenging time.

District Office
4825 E. Roosevelt Street
(602) 629-6400

Sincerely,

George J. Barnes

Dr. George J. Barnes

www.balsz.org

Mission: The Balsz District nurtures the unique skills and abilities of all learners.

Vision: Students empowered to be globally competitive and innovative thinkers who contribute to their community's sustainability.

Values: Excellence. Achievement. Innovation. Community



Superintendent

Estimadas familias y comunidad de Balsz:

Esta carta tiene como propósito brindar una actualización sobre el proceso de planificación presupuestaria del distrito y una decisión tomada por la Mesa Directiva. El distrito reconoce la dificultad de estas conversaciones y agradece los aportes reflexivos compartidos por estudiantes, familias, personal y miembros de la comunidad durante este proceso.

Al igual que muchos distritos escolares en Arizona, Balsz continúa enfrentando desafíos financieros significativos. Para mantener la responsabilidad fiscal y proteger los programas y servicios esenciales, el distrito debe reducir su presupuesto en aproximadamente \$3 millones.

Durante los últimos meses, el liderazgo del distrito y la Mesa Directiva revisaron múltiples escenarios de reducción presupuestaria mientras recopilaban y analizaban comentarios de estudiantes, familias, empleados y partes interesadas de la comunidad. Los comentarios públicos, la correspondencia escrita y las discusiones comunitarias fueron considerados como parte del proceso de toma de decisiones.

En su reunión regular del martes 17 de febrero, la Mesa Directiva votó por unanimidad para reutilizar la Escuela Brunson-Lee a partir del año escolar 2026-27. La escuela será renombrada como Brunson-Lee Academy y continuará atendiendo a estudiantes mientras incorpora un componente curricular adicional enfocado en ciencia, tecnología, ingeniería y matemáticas. Brunson-Lee Academy será el único plantel K-5 del distrito que ofrecerá una clase especial o electiva dedicada a STEM.

Según el plan aprobado, Griffith y Crockett continuarán atendiendo a estudiantes de K-5 dentro de los límites actuales del distrito. Música y arte no se ofrecerán en Brunson-Lee Academy. Las familias que deseen programación de bellas artes podrán inscribir a su hijo en su escuela del vecindario, con transporte proporcionado por el distrito.

El plan también incluye continuar investigando la posibilidad de agregar un programa preescolar en Brunson-Lee en colaboración con un proveedor comunitario. Se deben completar pasos adicionales antes de que este componente pueda concretarse.

Aun con estos cambios, se anticipan reducciones de personal en varios puestos en todo el distrito. El plan aprobado está diseñado para abordar el déficit presupuestario aproximado de \$3 millones mientras se preservan la mayor cantidad posible de servicios directos para los estudiantes.

Los líderes del distrito entienden que decisiones de esta magnitud afectan a personas y relaciones reales. Las escuelas son más que edificios; son comunidades. El distrito continúa comprometido con la comunicación transparente y con apoyar a estudiantes, familias y empleados mientras avanza la planificación de la implementación.

Gracias por su continuo compromiso y colaboración durante este tiempo desafiante.

Atentamente,

George J. Barnes

Dr. George J. Barnes

Mission: The Balsz District nurtures the unique skills and abilities of all learners.

Vision: Students empowered to be globally competitive and innovative thinkers who contribute to their community's sustainability.

Values: Excellence. Achievement. Innovation. Community



Mission: The Balsz District nurtures the unique skills and abilities of all learners.

Vision: Students empowered to be globally competitive and innovative thinkers who contribute to their community's sustainability.

Values: Excellence. Achievement. Innovation. Community