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## Mesa schools push tax-credit aid

*District planning ad campaign for funds at year's end*

Justin Juozapavicius  
 The Arizona Republic  
 Dec. 15, 2004 12:00 AM

Take away the money Edison Elementary gets from tax-credit contributions and you may as well scratch the school's after-school reading club.

Same goes for the ecology club, library book drive or band and orchestra program.

You may as well take the money out of the pockets of the 750 Edison students who depend on it for extracurricular activities like museum trips throughout the school year.

advertisement



"The money's not going into teacher salaries or to buy me a nicer pen," said Principal Howard Paley, whose school has a 72 percent free and reduced-lunch rate. "It's going directly to students."

In 2003, Edison received \$36,335 in school tax-credit contributions, funds that go directly to extracurricular student programs, such as field trips, classroom enrichment and gifted programs.

The state's largest school district set a record last year, collecting \$4,541,806 in contributions, more than \$700,000 higher than 2002.

More than 18,700 people donated to the district in 2003, averaging \$243 per donor.

Under Arizona law, a married couple can receive up to a \$250 tax credit for contributions to the school of their choice in support of extracurricular activities. Individuals can get a \$200 credit.

Those who donate don't have to have a child enrolled in school.

"In some cases, the people we talked to thought it was too good to be true," said parent Debbie Forrest, whose group has raised \$100,000 in donations so far this year from four schools. "(To) understand that you get every penny back, why wouldn't you give?"

Since the 2004 contribution deadline is Dec. 31, the Mesa school district is planning an advertising campaign as the month winds down to emphasize the importance of the program.

The district already operates a Web page where people can donate and will place ads in newspapers the last week of December to make a final push, said Kathy Bareiss, district spokeswoman.

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"We want to let people know they can sit their in their pajamas and make a contribution," she said.

In the 5,600-student Apache Junction Unified School District, which received \$79,207 in contributions in 2003, eighth-graders at Desert Shadows Middle School will get to go on a field trip to Washington, D.C., next semester thanks to the tax-credit program, said Carol Shepherd, district spokeswoman.

And at Peralta Trail Elementary, tax-credit money will help buy supplies for an after-school art program geared toward students in first through third grades, Shepherd said.

"Boy, what an outstanding contribution that makes in a child's life," Paley said.

To donate online, visit [www.mpsaz.org/pay](http://www.mpsaz.org/pay).

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