



Arizona Mayors
Education Roundtable



How Local
Education
Initiatives
**Are Unlocking
Possibilities
for Arizona
Students**

JUNE 2024

About the Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable

The Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable, an initiative of Helios Education Foundation and WestEd, brings together mayors of Arizona cities and towns, district superintendents, and their key staff to share data, evidence-based and promising practices, and programmatic strategies that can help address local challenges affecting students' educational and career choices. Major funding for the Roundtable is provided by the Helios Education Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Arizona Community Foundation.



Local Education Initiatives, Statewide Impact

From the earliest years of childhood through the last year of college, Arizona communities are harnessing the transformative potential of education to unlock opportunities for young people and their families to thrive. Local education initiatives in municipalities throughout the state enable more students to meet key learning benchmarks and overcome barriers to success.

Early literacy development, programs and services that expand access to education and training after high school, and efforts to ensure that students complete their post-high school education offer young people vital support at crucial moments in their educational journeys.

Moreover, these kinds of supports are essential in the context of Arizona's early literacy crisis, widespread educational disparities, and depressed rates of high school graduation, college enrollment, and college completion. Accordingly, Helios Education Foundation has identified third-grade reading, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary attainment as key drivers for student success locally and across Arizona.

This brief highlights standout local and statewide education initiatives championed in Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable member communities that address these three student success drivers.

Three Key Drivers of Student Success in Arizona

- ▶ **Third-Grade Reading:** The ability to read at grade level by third grade is among the most important education benchmarks for young learners. Third grade represents a pivotal transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Literacy skills and attitudes become more and more essential to success in other subjects, like math and science. Without foundational reading skills, students who are not reading on grade level by third grade face an uphill struggle to catch up in subsequent grades. Third-grade reading is so essential that it is a leading indicator of a student's likelihood of graduating from high school or dropping out.
- ▶ **Postsecondary Enrollment:** The transition from high school to post-high school education and training is another watershed moment for students. But it is one that often presents them with significant barriers—ranging from information and academic preparedness gaps to familial and financial challenges—that can prevent high school graduates from ever enrolling and setting foot in a college classroom.
- ▶ **Postsecondary Attainment:** A postsecondary certificate or degree can be life-changing for individuals and their families. Most people with such a credential can expect to benefit from higher earnings, better health, and more economic opportunities than they would have had if their education stopped after high school. At the same time, postsecondary attainment leads to increased prosperity for communities, municipalities, and Arizona.

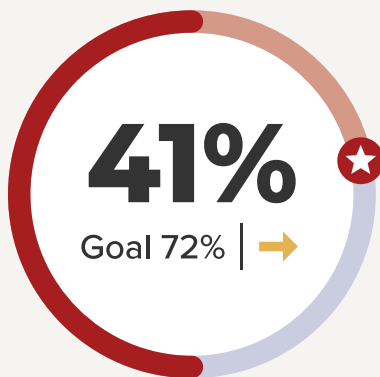
Why Local Education Initiatives Matter in Arizona

The nonpartisan Arizona Education Progress Meter is a broadly accepted and supported framework for measuring seven indicators of the state’s education progress and student outcomes. The Education Progress Meter includes three indicators that directly measure the key drivers of student success Helios Education Foundation prioritizes.

All three indicators show that Arizona’s rates of third-grade reading and post-high school education and training (enrollment and attainment) are well below state goals, and the pace of statewide improvement is lagging.

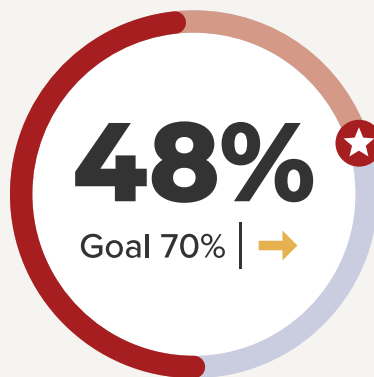
Statewide Education Progress Meter Indicators Illuminate the Scale of the Challenge

These indicators emphasize the importance of local education initiatives that respond to the challenge of increasing early literacy and postsecondary enrollment and attainment rates.



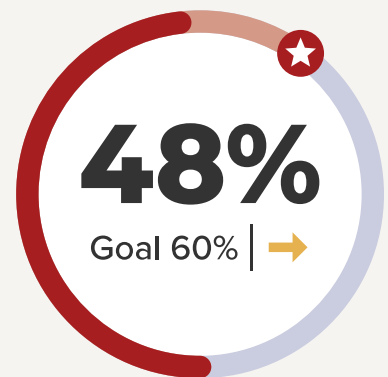
Third Grade Reading

Percent of Arizona 3rd grade students who scored Proficient or Highly Proficient on the AzM2 3rd grade English language arts assessment.



Post-High School Enrollment

Percent of high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education the year after graduating high school.



Attainment

Percent of Arizona residents 25-64 years of age who have completed a 2- or 4-year degree or who have an active professional certificate or license.

Source: Education Forward Arizona

Advancing Early Literacy To Support Third-Grade Reading Locally and Statewide

Through the national AARP Experience Corps program, four Arizona communities provide young learners extra support to help them build their early literacy skills and ensure they can read at grade level by the end of third grade. Experience Corps is an evidence-based volunteer program that places early literacy tutors in schools to provide one-on-one tutoring for second and third-grade students struggling to read. Volunteers receive extensive training (and ongoing evaluation) in a structured, evidence-based model for improving reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension skills. Participating communities in Arizona include Casa Grande, Mesa, Phoenix, and Tempe.

Read On Arizona, a statewide initiative with local implementation, supports local literacy efforts through a network of Read On Communities. In each community, local stakeholders—including schools and school districts, local governments, early learning programs, businesses, faith communities, and nonprofit organizations working directly with families—collaborate to ensure young learners develop the literacy skills they need to be proficient readers. These community networks use the same strategic approaches of the statewide Read On Arizona initiative to coordinate and maximize their efforts to improve early literacy and school readiness. Of the 20 Read On Communities, nine participate in the Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable:

- Casa Grande
- Flagstaff
- Goodyear
- Mesa
- Northern Pinal County
- Phoenix
- Pima County
- Tempe
- Yuma

Expanding Access to Education and Training After High School To Increase Postsecondary Enrollment

Information gaps and affordability are among the most significant barriers to accessing education and training after high school. Many would-be college students are deterred from ever applying and enrolling—or even considering the possibility of college in the first place—because of the high cost and limited understanding about financial aid options. As a result, too many students do not complete the necessary coursework to be ready and eligible for further education after graduating high school.

Promise Programs in Arizona Help Make College More Affordable

Promise programs are designed to make education and training opportunities after high school more accessible and affordable by guaranteeing tuition assistance for eligible students. In Arizona, three communities—Mesa, Phoenix, and Pinal County—offer promise programs to support local students through scholarships to local community colleges.

The ***Mesa College Promise*** ensures Mesa residents that all qualified high school graduates can attend Mesa Community College (MCC) for two years with tuition and fees fully funded. As a so-called “last dollar” scholarship, it covers tuition and fees at MCC that are not covered by other forms of financial assistance (e.g., federal aid or other scholarships).

The ***Phoenix Promise Program*** is a partnership between the City of Phoenix and the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) that provides scholarships to eligible Phoenix residents who are pursuing an associate degree or baccalaureate degree from any Maricopa Community College. The program provides last-dollar tuition and fees assistance, as well as a stipend each Fall/Spring semester to cover additional educational expenses.

The ***Pinal Promise*** program, a partnership between Central Arizona College Foundation and Central Arizona College, provides two years of last-dollar scholarship support to eligible students who graduate from a high school in Pinal County and enroll at Central Arizona College.

Local Scholarships and Resources Increase Access and Affordability

Apart from promise programs, other community initiatives in Arizona offer more selective scholarships for local students and access to informational resources and supports designed to smooth the path to education and training.

College Connect Tempe is a community-based partnership that provides free resources to local students and families to help them plan for further education after school and identify the support they need to achieve that plan. Services available through College Connect Tempe include a workshop series, one-on-one advising, and access to college experts from schools across the state. The program also provides selective scholarships for students in Tempe.

The ***Pima First, Sahuarita Wins Scholarship*** program is a community-based initiative that provides scholarship support to eligible students in Sahuarita. The scholarship, which has a merit component to the eligibility criteria, covers two years of paid tuition and fees at Pima Community College.

Locally Prioritizing Education and Training After High School To Increase Postsecondary Attainment

Education and training after high school equips Arizonans with the skills and credentials that are increasingly necessary for success in Arizona's economy. Approximately 70 percent of jobs in our state require a degree, certificate, or license, and individuals who have credentials like these can expect to earn more in their lifetimes, enjoy better health, and have more stable employment and more opportunities in the workforce.

Research by Education Forward Arizona and Helios Education Foundation projects approximately \$1,531,000 in lifetime earnings for Arizonans with bachelor's degrees, compared to \$679,000 for individuals whose education ends at high school. For Arizona, attainment is an engine for statewide economic growth. Projections show that Arizonans with a bachelor's degree will contribute \$982,680 more to the state than a high school graduate. This differential adds up to significant overall economic gains; if Arizona were to achieve a 10 percent increase in the number of Arizonans who hold a bachelor's degree or other postsecondary credential, the state economy would gain roughly \$1.37 billion annually (gains from earnings, health, welfare, and workforce productivity).

In recognition of the value attainment brings to Arizona, its communities, and its residents, the state has adopted the Achieve60AZ attainment goal. Reaching this goal will mean that 60 percent of the state's working adults (ages 25-64) will have a certificate, license, or degree. Reaching the attainment goal is more than a postsecondary education issue. Preparation begins with our youngest students in early childhood education. It builds as they progress through elementary, middle, and high school and as they pursue opportunities for post-high school education and training. Roundtable municipalities that have adopted the Achieve60AZ goal include Casa Grande, Flagstaff, Mesa, Nogales, Phoenix, Tempe, Tolleson, Tucson, Coconino County, Pinal County, Prescott Valley, Sahuarita, and Superior.

Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable Municipal Leaders

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Becky Daggett

Florence

Tara Walter

Fountain Hills

Ginny Dickey

Gilbert

Brigette Peterson

Goodyear

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