



Prioritizing What Matters Most

An Education Action Plan
for Arizona to Meet the
Achieve60AZ Goal

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Arizona has an ambitious goal to reach 60 percent education attainment by the year 2030. Reaching the goal will mean that 60 percent of the state's population of working adults (ages 25-64) will have a certificate, license, or degree.

This goal was created in partnership with a leading coalition of experts, business, and community leaders. Working together, they set the goal because they believed in the transformational power of education attainment to create stronger communities and bolster our state's economy. If Arizona reaches this goal, then it will unlock significant economic and individual prosperity with higher lifetime earnings for individuals, reduced social spending, and a more vibrant state economy.

While some gains have been made since the goal was originally launched in 2016, progress must be rapidly accelerated across all of P-20 education for the state to meet the goal by 2030.

Reaching the attainment goal is not just a postsecondary education issue. Preparation begins with Arizona's youngest students, in early childhood education, and builds as they progress through elementary, middle, and high school. Recognizing the importance of this continuum, more than 200 individuals and organizations came together in 2017 to create seven other goals in the [Arizona Education Progress Meter](#) to help us measure progress and drive action to meet the state's attainment goal.

As we work to move forward, the question often asked by the broader community is:

“What do we need to do as a state to reach the Achieve60AZ goal and the goals in the Arizona Education Progress Meter?”

Community and business leaders across the state have been asking this question, seeking specific action steps that should be taken to improve education attainment and to support promising practices. To this end, Education Forward Arizona convened education, business, and community leaders to identify and prioritize the most important action steps the state can take to advance the Achieve60AZ attainment goal and those in the Arizona Education Progress Meter. The work began with a set of education thought leaders and expanded to hundreds of others across the state, including groups of educators and students. In all, more than 300 people were engaged through a dozen convenings and surveys.

Together, we created this shared action plan, which gives the state clear direction – from a nonpartisan perspective – regarding how we can improve student outcomes. It is meant to serve as a guide for policymakers, funders, educators, businesses, and community leaders to jointly prioritize and advocate for essential changes that will move education forward.

Priorities to Action

This action plan also mirrors the priorities of Arizona voters that were identified in a poll conducted by Education Forward Arizona and HighGround Public Affairs in the spring of 2022. The poll of 500 Arizona likely voters revealed that they prioritize ensuring every school has quality teachers and principals, improving student outcomes in math and reading, increasing access to Career and Technical Education, increasing school counselors, and providing scholarships to low-income students to go to college, among other priorities. The poll also showed that Arizona voters do not prioritize the political issues that often consume the broader public conversation on education. The results are a good reminder that Arizonans care about improving the issues that matter most in education – those that most impact Arizona students and educators.

Arizona leaders and voters agree that we should be prioritizing the actions that will support good teaching and learning at all levels of education, P-20.

How the Arizona Education Community Developed this Action Plan

Through a collaborative and inclusive process, more than 300 Arizonans worked together to identify the key actions that should be taken to increase education attainment, beginning in early education, in K-12, and in postsecondary education. In all, 12 forums* were held in Yuma, Maricopa, Mohave and La Paz Counties, in addition to two statewide sessions and gatherings in northern Arizona, the Copper Corridor, and southern Arizona. Contributors included:

- ▶ Educators
- ▶ Students
- ▶ Issue experts
- ▶ Business leaders
- ▶ Education, community, and civic leaders

** Additionally, multiple surveys were also conducted and included forum attendees and additional leaders who were not able to attend the sessions.*

Through the convenings and surveys there were countless ideas discussed and debated, with the top priorities included in this action plan. The list of top actions answers the question, “What can we do today?” These priorities represent the strategies that were prioritized most often and heard in nearly every convening and throughout the survey results. A set of supporting recommendations was also developed.

An Education Action Plan for Arizona

Top 10 Priorities to Meet the Achieve60AZ Goal

These priorities – listed in non-hierarchical order – represent a shared articulation of the actions that matter most for improving teaching, learning, and student outcomes in ways that meaningfully contribute to progress toward the Achieve60AZ goal of reaching a 60 percent attainment rate among adults (age 25-64) in Arizona by 2030 who have completed a 2- or 4-year degree or who have an active professional certificate or license.

- 01** Increase educator pay and implement strategies to improve recruitment and retention, including a statewide mentoring and induction program.
- 02** Offer state-supported full-day Kindergarten and inclusive pre-K.
- 03** Recruit and retain a highly-qualified early childhood workforce, with a focus on wages and expansion of the Arizona Teachers Academy, in alignment with Preschool Development grant shared goals.
- 04** Increase and sustain professional development, coaching, and support for educators in reading and math.
- 05** Create a math equivalent to Read On Arizona.
- 06** Start the Education Career Action Plan (ECAP) in 8th grade, and provide counselors and teachers with support and training.
- 07** Increase equitable access to dual and concurrent enrollment.
- 08** Increase the number of school counselors, psychologists, transition specialists, and social workers in Arizona schools.
- 09** Expand the Arizona Promise scholarship program to low-income, DACA and undocumented students; students with disabilities; and students attending community colleges.
- 10** Implement a long-term P-20 funding solution that mitigates the impact of Prop. 123 and the COVID-relief funding ending in 2024-25.

What It Will Take – A Deeper Look

To complement each of the top priorities, the following strategies offer greater depth and insight into what it will take to meet the Achieve60AZ goal and each indicator along the way. They are organized below by Education Progress Meter indicator and are ordered with the highest priorities at the top of each list.

EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION / TEACHER PAY

- ▶ Increase teacher pay.
 - ▷ Incentivize recruitment for teachers of color. Incentivize teaching in high-need communities. Create incentives for teaching dual enrollment.
 - ▷ Provide an increase in base pay to educators receiving National Board Certification at the state level.
- ▶ Provide incentives to teachers to address total compensation.
 - ▷ Consider incentives for housing (including the provision of housing directly), medical/insurance, and loan forgiveness programs.
 - ▷ Provide state health insurance to educators.
- ▶ Improve working conditions. This includes addressing workloads, class sizes, behavioral issues, and protecting prep time. Ensure educators have access to mental health services.
- ▶ Help teachers feel valued and appreciated. Change the narrative about the profession. Recognize and celebrate teacher excellence.
- ▶ Provide comprehensive, authentic, and meaningful professional learning, instructional coaching, and support for Arizona’s educators.
 - ▷ Provide evidence-based induction and mentoring support for new teachers from quality mentors (multi-year), meaningful professional development, and leadership training for school administration.
 - ▷ Build in more calendar days for professional development.
 - ▷ Provide funding to schools to allow educators to select aligned professional development opportunities.
- ▶ Ask the state universities to develop a common teacher preparation curriculum or courses in English and math.
- ▶ Develop and strengthen the principal and district leadership pipeline.

QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

- ▶ Offer state-supported full-day Kindergarten and inclusive pre-K across a mixed delivery system. Explore opportunities to expand public/private partnerships to increase access to quality and inclusive early learning from birth to age five.
- ▶ Recruit and retain a highly-qualified early childhood workforce, with a focus on wages and expansion of the Arizona Teachers Academy.
- ▶ Establish a long-term funding source to ensure that quality, inclusive early-learning opportunities can continue once federal COVID funding ends for Quality First programs (First Things First) and beyond.
- ▶ Expand resources and supports for family childcare to ensure children have quality early learning opportunities and family members have the opportunity to work or go to school.
- ▶ Expand and scale Inclusion Coaches under First Things First.

3rd GRADE READING*

- ▶ Expand and sustain equitable access to high-quality early learning (see above).
- ▶ Build educator capacity in the science of reading and scale existing current literacy initiatives.
 - ▷ Offer quality professional development, coaching, and mentoring to teachers and elementary school administration, ensuring rural communities have access.
- ▶ Bring evidence-based literacy solutions to a greater scale by providing strategic pathways and funding for promising programs to become evidence-based.
- ▶ Provide a sustainable funding stream to support Comprehensive Literacy State Development expansion and the state's early literacy collective impact initiative.
- ▶ Advocate for funding and strategies that would support evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- ▶ Provide evidence-based interventions for struggling readers.

**These priorities align with the Shared Priorities and [Early Literacy Policy Framework](#) of the state's early literacy initiative, Read On Arizona.*

8th GRADE MATH

- ▶ Expand and continue support to build educator capacity in math pedagogy and expand professional development in mathematics.
 - ▷ Create and share a set of high-yield instructional strategies for K-8 math educators.
 - ▷ Prioritize math coaches at the elementary level. Pool resources to provide coaching support to rural schools and others without coaches. Leverage volunteers to support where possible.
 - ▷ Share promising practices and create a system by which these practices can be shared among schools.
 - ▷ Require additional training in mathematics education for all K-8 educators; provide funding and support to meet this goal.
- ▶ Create a math equivalent to Read On Arizona that would bring together Arizona's mathematics talent who would provide support to schools, provide statewide data, inform policy conversations, convene statewide groups, identify funding opportunities and other activities, with a focus on equitable access for all communities.
- ▶ Provide evidence-based interventions for struggling students.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

- ▶ Increase the number of school counselors, psychologists, transition specialists, and social workers.
 - ▷ Create a formal pipeline of individuals to be prepared for these roles and offer scholarships or student loan repayment, similar to the Arizona Teachers Academy.
 - ▷ Ensure their roles are manageable; consider splitting functions among multiple counselors for college planning, academic advisement, and mental health support functions.
- ▶ Increase resources for counselors, teachers (including special education teachers), and school staff to be able to identify student barriers and provide resources to meet student needs to help them graduate. Support school staff in connecting students to programs that provide additional support to students as they navigate completing high school and preparing for their postsecondary education.
- ▶ Support strategies to increase student access to quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs as a proven means of increasing student high school graduation rates for these students.

- ▶ Begin career exploration early and ensure all students receive a quality career guidance experience that begins in middle school and offers flexibility for students. Expand equitable access at scale to a development tool for students across the state. Move Education Career Action Plan (ECAP) implementation to the 8th grade. Support educators and counselors with ECAP implementation strategies and training.
- ▶ Examine high schools with high graduation rates to summarize their successes and try to replicate their strategies statewide.

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

- ▶ Increase and expand wraparound services and community school programs in K-12.
 - ▷ Align community partners to identify and coordinate resources to serve opportunity youth. Create a resource directory.
- ▶ Be proactive in identifying and supporting Opportunity Youth earlier.
 - ▷ Implement a screening process that can be done in middle and high schools as well as through career training programs, the courts, and colleges to identify Opportunity Youth, their needs, and the barriers they experience. Integrate this screening into other screenings that exist. Use attendance data to better track and be able to quickly identify students at risk of stopping out.
- ▶ Remove barriers to traditional pathways and ensure that alternative pathways exist and are available to these young adults.
 - ▷ Allow students to re-enter education more easily. Provide grants and financial aid to support their re-engagement.

ATTAINMENT/POST-HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

- ▶ Provide state-funded financial aid for Arizona students in community colleges and universities, including the expansion of the Arizona Promise Program.
 - ▷ Expand the Arizona Promise Program for all students OR any student qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, students with disabilities, DACA and undocumented students, and students attending community colleges.
 - ▷ Couple state-funded financial aid with wraparound services (i.e., academic and personal advising via mentors or accommodations) that ensure student persistence and completion.

- ▶ Expand and reimagine early college options, specifically dual and concurrent enrollment.
 - ▷ Ensure incentives exist for students, teachers, and schools, and ensure options are available equitably across the state for all students. Increase the number of educators certified to teach dual enrollment courses and provide incentives for certification and teaching dual enrollment. Identify and remove barriers.
 - ▷ Ensure parents are notified and are aware of early college options for all students and as a part of IEP transition processes.
- ▶ Provide additional supports to students to identify scholarships and complete their FAFSA.
 - ▷ Help students understand the possible pathways available to them and what it takes to achieve them.
- ▶ Align postsecondary transition plans for students with disabilities to mirror ECAP timelines.

CROSS CUTTING PRIORITIES*

- ▶ Provide increased funding to meet the needs of low-income schools and students with disabilities.
- ▶ Provide funding for mental health support for teachers and students, P-20.
- ▶ Offer schools more flexibility to innovate.
- ▶ Increase broadband access in rural and low-income communities.
- ▶ Expand parent and family engagement opportunities. Provide resources and tools to support parents.
- ▶ Support and promote social-emotional learning as a critical pillar of academic performance and reducing absenteeism.
- ▶ Leverage and expand access to data, especially disaggregated data that can support data-driven programs, policies and practices.
- ▶ Increase funding for all of education (P-20).

**These priorities apply to one or more of the goals aligned to the Education Progress Meter.*

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