



INDEPENDENT



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Helios Education Foundation and Education Forward Arizona partnered on a report that looked into the many economic benefits that can come to the state by increasing the number of college graduates.

EDUCATION'S FUTURE

Arizona could get 'billions' in benefits by boosting college graduation rates

Helios report highlights benefits of increased education

AZ LIFETIME GAINS IN COMPARISON TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES PER COHORT

Social gains made with more education?

- Some college: \$202,820
- Associate's degree: \$240,800
- Bachelor's degree: \$982,680
- Advanced degree: \$1,489,730

Fiscal gains made with more education?

- Some college: \$61,600
- Associate's degree: \$71,790
- Bachelor's degree: \$357,200
- Advanced degree: \$550,420

By Caroline Yu, Daily Independent

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A study promoting the benefits of a college education in Arizona found it could put billions of dollars into the state's economy, just with an incremental increase in the number of graduates.

Improving education persists as a major issue for Arizona state officials juggling funding, school safety and advancing curriculum, with the Helios Education Foundation and Education Forward Arizona following suit with a new report on the extensive economic benefits of investing in and developing statewide education.

From declining test scores to distractions in the classroom, stakeholders in Arizona's public education community met to hear the results of a new report titled "Billions to Gain: Investing in a More Educated Arizona," conducted by Helios and Education Forward.

As it stands, 25% of qualified students choose to forgo college, resulting in only one in 10 students actually graduating with a post secondary education, the report stated.

In the continuing mission to improve upon Arizona's public education system, "Billions to Lose" analyzed the economic effects and benefits of fostering a more educated population through increasing higher education numbers in hopes of creating changes statewide.

Released to the public at a March 9 convening, Helios and Education Forward brought in students, business leaders and government officials to speak on what schools and the state can gain from continuing education, including comments from Gov. Katie Hobbs and State Superintendent Tom Horne.

Speaking via video, Gov. Hobbs spoke of her commitment to investing in Arizona's educational systems and how post secondary education can not only benefit each student but the state at large.

"The research being released today emphasizes the importance of raising college attainment levels. We know that post secondary education is key to putting Arizona students on the path to prosperity," Hobbs said.

Identifying its importance, she also discussed her proposed state budget, which includes priorities like a \$20.5 million investment in high school dual enrollment programs and \$80 million dollars in funding to expand the Arizona Promise Program.

As part of the convening, attendees partook in activities and discussions to learn more about the roadblocks modern students face in continuing education, hearing from both leadership and actual students.

While the numbers show potential for high school-only graduates to succeed economically, the Helios Foundation and Education Forward shared more about the practically limitless opportunities to be gained through college and other post secondary education options.

Results

In 2015, the Achieve 60AZ goal was set, positing that Arizona will have 60% of adults ages 25-64 holding a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2030. Data from the Arizona Progress Meter shows that the rate was just over 46% in 2020.

Meeting that goal is seeming to be a challenge for Arizona, which is partially why "Billions to Gain" came about.

Built off an older report titled "Doubling Arizona's Economic Growth," this new report sought further understanding of the previous data and how the state can meet the goals necessary for increased economic success.

Speaking of "Billions to Gain," Kimberly Lent Morales and Paul Perrault, the Helios Education Foundation authors of the report, provided details about how much Arizonans at the individual, social and fiscal levels can economically benefit from increasing numbers of college enrollment.



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Local students and recent graduates shared in small groups their experiences with understanding and seeing firsthand the benefits of an education beyond high school.

The individual analysis entailed the personal benefits like lifetime earning and motivation; Social analysis looked into gross earnings and health status among others; Fiscal analysis showed effects in areas like higher tax revenues and decreased public spending.

Generally, the report found that there are plenty of benefits that students can gain from receiving a college or other higher institutions education, but those advantages also extend to Arizona's economic health.

The analysis was conducted using a pool of 68,690 Arizona public high school graduates from 2022, looking into the social impacts of a post secondary education to the student and how their professional successes ripple, ultimately supporting the collective state in different venues.

One key data point from the report showed that increasing the college completion rate by 10% would result in \$1.37 billion of social gains and \$0.52 billion in fiscal gains for the state. Their model also showed that raising the enrollment rate by 20% would bring about \$5.09 billion in social and \$1.82 billion in fiscal gains.

In their presentation, Morales and Perrault focused specifically on the economic benefits and growth. "Billions to Gain" also delved deeper into the differences in economic sectors and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Morales explained that in their research, the model looked at key factors relating to educational attainment, such as lifetime earnings, physical health and inclination to commit crimes — all of which showed more positive results in college graduates.

Lifetime Earnings, by Highest Education Level



Courtesy Helios Education Foundation/Education Forward Arizona

"Billions to Gain" analyzed the expected lifetime gains after attaining higher education, concluding that in comparison, high school-only graduates are expected to make less.

"When we looked at the social value of higher education, Arizonans with a bachelor's degree contributed a billion dollars more in social gain per individual, over a high school graduate," Morales said.

While the benefits seem clear, a college education can still have its roadblocks for low-income and or minority students. The report noted that post secondary attainment is stratified along "familiar" racial and socioeconomic lines, despite finding that Arizona can make exceptional gains, socially and fiscally, by getting underrepresented groups to go to college.

Looking at how Arizona can start reaping these benefits soon, the report stated that "bold action" will need to be taken by educators, policymakers, local business and community leaders in order to overcome the aforementioned challenges to increasing access to higher education.

The key focus areas to achieve the 2030 goal are strengthening the pipeline to college through efforts like a dual enrollment program, tackling barriers to and through college and making college a more affordable opportunity.

Call to action

State Superintendent Tom Horne spoke briefly of the current state of Arizona public education, touching on his own priorities and some of the distractions he's seen in the system. One bill that he's currently pushing for would reinstate a statewide graduation test to prove students' educational level — something he noted has been controversial in the legislature.

"If students are going to go to college, they have to be well prepared through K-12, and so the best value that I can add to this discussion today is to say what we're doing to increase education outcomes for students K-12," Horne said.

Some of the major issues related to educational outcomes that he's been involved with at the capitol are securing proper and necessary funding, raising academic outcomes, increasing transparency and accountability, improving school safety and teacher salaries.

Horne also noted several “distractions to academics” that are brought about through social emotional learning, including declining amounts of discipline and critical race theory acting as a divisive curriculum. In his work, he’s come across stories of teachers playing games as a learning vehicle in lieu of traditional instruction.

“Our philosophy that we’re trying to present to the schools is that every instructional minute is precious,” he said.



State Superintendent Tom Horne spoke at the public release of "Billions to Gain," sharing his perspective on the state of Arizona's public education and how it can improve going forward.

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With that mindset, Horne finds the trend of social emotional learning to be ineffective in teaching academics, and going forward, he’ll advocate for policies that promote a traditional curriculum statewide and include the voices of students’ parents.

Attendees also heard from John Arnold from the Arizona Board of Regents, Marla Franco from the University of Arizona and Glen Lineberry, a Miami Unified School District principal who is involved with the Arizona Student Opportunity Collaborative.

The final panel spoke about where Arizona should invest in order to increase college enrollment and completion rates across the board. With their unique perspectives, they talked about what Arizona can do to best support students of all backgrounds.

Closing the event, Education Forward Arizona’s President and CEO Rich Nickel spoke briefly about the foundation’s commitment to moving the state’s education standards forward and sharing these results to a wider audience.

“This conversation is really just beginning today. The report is terrific, like other folks have said, but it’s a tool for us all to talk about the value of attainment in education,” Nickel said.