

ADVOCACY & ATTAINMENT GROUP **START-UP GUIDE**

To move Arizona forward, we must move education forward

education FORWARD arizona

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Getting Started: How to Launch an Education-Focused Group in Your Community

This start-up guide is designed to help communities develop and implement an educational attainment group that addresses the unique education challenges faced in the individual community.

It explains the key differences between an Attainment Group and an Advocacy Group, provides guidance on best practices drawn from successful groups across Arizona, and highlights real-world examples of how these groups are making a positive impact on education in their communities.

Whether you're just beginning the conversation or ready to take action, this guide will serve as a roadmap to building stronger partnerships and improving educational outcomes in your community.

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Who We Are

Education Forward Arizona is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to sharing the importance and value of education for all Arizonans. We believe Arizona has everything to gain – in our economy, in our workforce, in our communities, and as individuals – when opportunities are provided to continue learning after high school. We believe to move Arizona forward, we must move education forward as the benefits to individuals, communities and the overall state economy are clearly evident and identified in our recent **Billions to Gain** report.

We pride ourselves on providing unbiased, reliable information and data sources, like the **Arizona Education Progress Meter**, to help inform and drive education efforts across the entire P-20 continuum statewide. Education Forward Arizona also provides documents and research in the form of **Education Explainers**, **Advocacy Alerts**, and **Reports and Briefs** to help educate voters on issues that impact all Arizonans and require advocacy at the legislative level.

Education Forward Arizona is leading efforts – both independently and in partnership with the community – to achieve Arizona's attainment goal, Achieve60AZ. We are working with business, education and community leaders statewide to set local attainment goals and create action plans to reach those goals.



Education Forward Arizona's Commitment

The Achieve60AZ goal, established in 2016, and the subsequent **Achieve60AZ Action Plan**, was created to reflect the Arizona future we want, and rapidly evolving workplace environment demands. The goal states that by 2030, 60-percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 will have earned a certificate or degree; we are currently at 49-percent while neighboring states like California, New Mexico, Colorado, and Nevada all have higher attainment rates. This goal was set to align with national experts who predicted that by the year 2030, 70-percent of all jobs will require additional education and training beyond high school. We want Arizona students to be prepared to enter this evolving workforce and benefit from high skill, high demand, high wage (H3) career opportunities.



Education Forward Arizona has staff located in regional areas across the state. Community Impact Managers and College Knowing & Going Coordinators collaborate with community leaders, high schools, chambers of commerce, business leaders, and other nonprofits. This allows the staff to offer support and information in both urban and rural communities seeking to highlight the educational needs in their area. Our staff work to ensure they have a pulse on their communities and are able to connect and speak about local issues.



Our History

Given the slow pace of change, and an often fractured and inadequate response to education improvement in Arizona, community leaders came together – during the pandemic – to outline the strategic direction of a more robust education advocacy organization. Education Forward Arizona is the result of merging three unique nonprofit voices – Achieve60AZ, College Success Arizona and Expect More Arizona – into one cohesive voice, leading to greater impact and efficiency for statewide education improvement.



Education Forward Arizona emerged to address collective community aspirations to:

- Create a cohesive case for education and how it benefits all Arizonans.
- Align knowledge and interests to create more effective approaches and increase accountability.
- Build public and political will for dramatic education improvement.

What is the purpose of an Attainment Group or Advocacy Group?

Public opinion polls have indicated for several years that education is the one of the top priorities for the citizens of Arizona and yet we haven't always agreed on how to achieve the quality education system we say we want.

Despite our collective urgency for meaningful education improvement, we've tolerated an education system in Arizona that has underperformed, one that has denied educational, and thus economic, opportunity to many of our citizens. This has, in turn, hampered our state's growth and has tarnished our reputation as a state.

While focusing on different agendas, the overall purpose of developing either an Attainment Group or an Advocacy Group is to bring local leaders together and address education as a top priority for the community. Communities recognize that the strength of the local education system will strengthen the local economy and provide opportunities for students to advance in a rapidly evolving workforce.

Education Forward Arizona and Attainment/Advocacy Groups

Education Forward Arizona is a trusted source of unbiased information, using data and research to offer guidance. The team of Community Impact Managers (CIMs) engage with local community leaders in education, business, economic development, workforce development, community-based organizations, and parents to share information that will move education forward. The team of CIMs are available to support Attainment or Advocacy Groups by offering the latest research and data as well as helping to organize and facilitate the meetings of the Attainment or Advocacy Groups in collaboration with the local leader of the Group.

When Developing a New Attainment Group, Relationships Matter

It is important to recognize the value of developing relationships when creating a new Attainment or Advocacy Group. The strength of each of these groups is dependent on a local leader who serves as the champion and is able to bring together many voices for a common purpose. The individuals asked to participate usually include education leaders, business leaders, economic development, workforce development, community organizations, and others who have an interest in strengthening education attainment for their community.



Attainment Groups and Advocacy Groups are very similar but do tend to have a slightly different mission. While the mission may be different, the steps to creating one in your community are the same.
Whether your community decides to create an Attainment Group or an Advocacy Group, Education Forward Arizona has team members available to provide support and guidance. Our Community Impact Managers all have expertise in working with both groups and will call upon CEO Rich Nickel for presentations and membership, if desired.

What is an Attainment Group?

An Attainment Group is focused on a mission or goal, typically based on local data from the Education Progress Meter and is unique and pressing to the local community.

Across Arizona, different Attainment Groups have been created to bring together thought leaders in the community who are focused on addressing education issues in collaboration with local education leaders. An Attainment Group is born out of a collective concern about the state of education in a community and is broadly focused on the Achieve60AZ Goal and the seven metrics in the Education Progress Meter.



As the Education Progress Meter illustrates, educational attainment is the last step in the education continuum and really begins with our youngest, ensuring they have access to quality early learning and are able to make steady progress at each of the education milestones: 3rd Grade Reading, 8th Grade Math, High School Graduation, and Post-High School Enrollment.

What is an Advocacy Group?

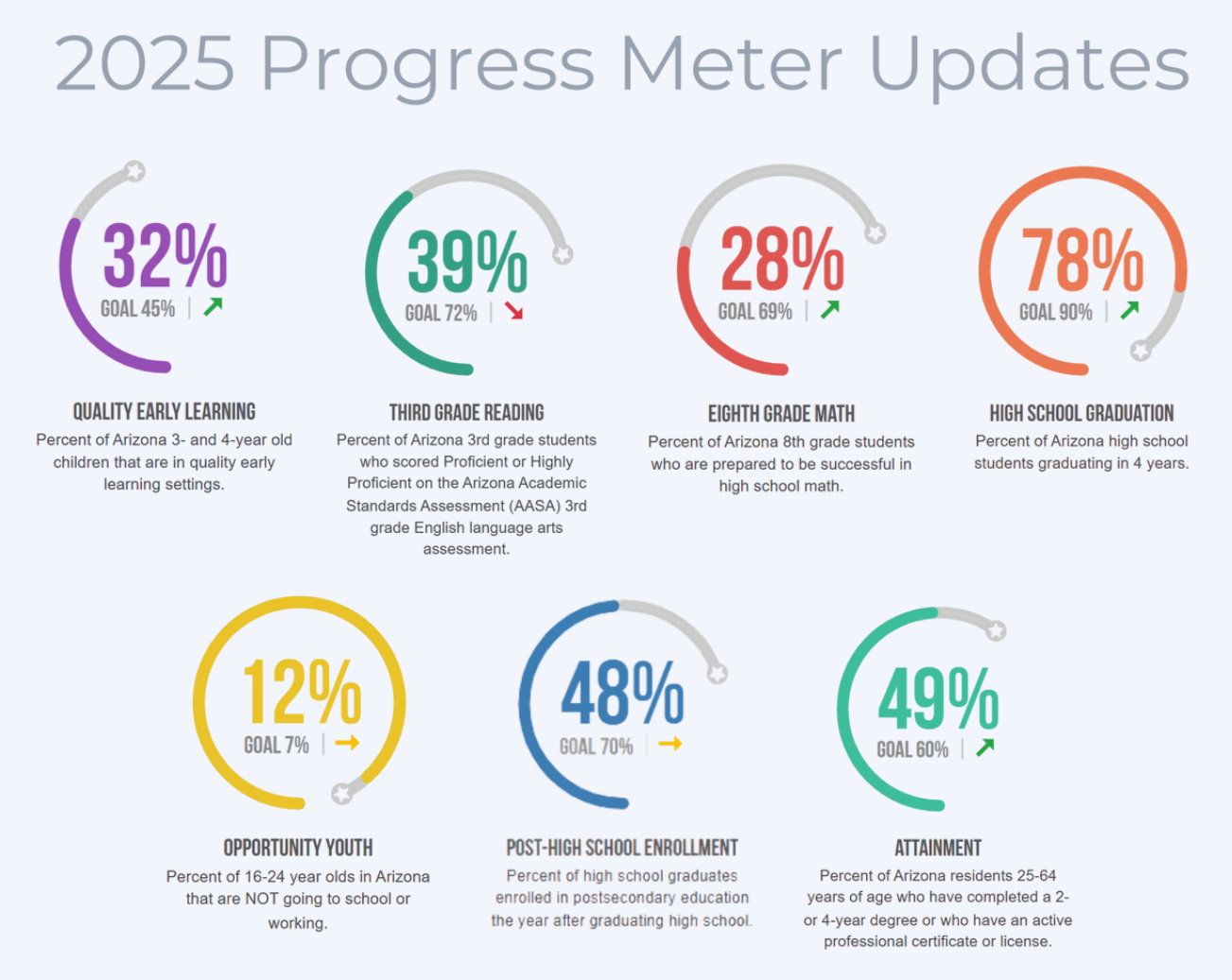


An Advocacy Group has a slightly different purpose from an Attainment Group and is focused on strengthening education in their community through advocacy efforts. Where an Attainment Group is focused on improving educational outcomes by working directly with educators, an Advocacy Group is broadly focused on improving educational outcomes through policy and engaging with local and state elected officials. A broad focus of an Advocacy Group is on the power of an electorate by increasing voter registration and supporting community members to exercise their right to vote and to weigh-in on education issues. Typically, Advocacy Groups work with organizations to develop public policy, track legislative bills, and seek to influence the outcome to positively impact public education.

Start-Up Recommendations for Developing an Attainment Group or Advocacy Group

Attainment Group vs Advocacy Group

While these two groups are similar, the biggest distinction is that Attainment Groups usually focus on a specific educational goal tied to the Education Progress Meter.



Advocacy Groups play a critical role in advancing education as a public priority. Comprised of cross-sector leaders, these groups work to influence policy, shape public opinion, and drive collective action around key education issues. Advocacy Groups tend to focus on educational legislative priorities that should be decided by the group. In addition, each group should analyze their own data and decide on a mission or focus that fits the communities' needs and has the ability to be impacted by those at the table.

The following steps are meant to provide guidance whether the community is interested in establishing an Attainment Group or Advocacy Group.

1 Creating the Group

Education Forward Arizona is here to assist in this important community work. We recommend beginning with your local Community Impact Manager from Education Forward Arizona.



Laura Rosensweet
Senior Community Impact Manager
lrosensweet@educationforwardarizona.org

Regions: Northern Arizona
Coconino, Yavapai, Navajo, Apache counties



Donna Davis
Senior Community Impact Manager
ddavis@educationforwardarizona.org

Regions: Central Arizona and parts of Northwest Arizona
Maricopa, Pinal, Gila, Greenlee, Graham, Mohave, La Paz counties



Melinda Gomez
Community Impact Manager
mgomez@educationforwardarizona.org

Regions: Southern Arizona
Pima, Santa Cruz, Yuma, Cochise counties

2 Membership

Invite as many community and educational leaders as possible. A diverse group of voices at the table helps to understand perspectives in your community. Membership ideas include the following:

- **K-12 education leaders from public, charter and private schools in the target region**
- **Community leaders from non-profits related to education**
- **Library personnel**
- **Community college and university leaders**
- **Chamber of Commerce, economic development and workforce development leaders**
- **City, county, or other elected officials**
- **Others in the community driven to support education attainment**

3 Develop a Mission, Goals, and Tasks

Developing the Mission and Goal should be decided by the group, however providing examples from the Arizona Education Progress Meter and other attainment groups can be a starting point. In addition, communities should analyze their own data and decide on a mission or focus that fits the needs of the community and has the ability to be impacted by those at the table.

Many groups use the Education Progress Meter as a conversation around goal setting. It is important to recognize that data in the Arizona Education Progress Meter represent a "lagging indicator," this means that the impact has already happened and is being reviewed after the fact. We encourage the goal to be written as a SMART Goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) in order to provide the focused attention.

Identifying High-Impact Activities That Move The Mission Forward
Decide the tasks and activities that can be completed to impact the mission and goal. Activities represent a "leading indicator" because they can be accomplished by the Attainment or Advocacy Group and are designed to have an impact on the mission and goal.

4 Meeting Cadence

Each group sets their own cadence with the most popular being on a Quarterly basis. This allows the group to set some action steps or activities to work on between meetings.



Consider if in-person, zoom or hybrid will work best for your group. Also consider if rotating the meeting location will be effective or cumbersome. If you are serving a large county area then virtual meetings will eliminate the travel burden. We have found that in-person meetings are great for continuing to strengthen the group.

Examples of Existing Attainment Groups

Achieve Pinal Attainment Group

- **Education Forward Arizona Lead:** Donna Davis, Senior Community Impact Manager for Central Arizona
- **Focus Areas:**
  - 3rd Grade Reading with AARP Experience Corps program
  - Career Awareness through Careertopias and now World of Work events
- **Goal:** To increase 3rd grade reading proficiency and career awareness around local career opportunities.
- **Tasks:** Monitor progress to include 3rd grade progress, and volunteer recruitment. Assist in planning World of Work community event in the future.
- **Meeting Cadence:** Monthly for Achieve Pinal and bimonthly for Experience Corps

Copper Corridor Attainment Group – Established Spring 2024

- **Education Forward Arizona Lead:** Donna Davis, Senior Community Impact Manager for Central Arizona
- **Members:** Leaders from Superior, Globe, and Miami
- **Focus Area:** Still planning but to date – early literacy, career awareness, student, parent, teacher engagement, mentorship
- **Goal:** To increase attainment in the Copper Corridor
- **Tasks:** Being determined
- **Meeting Cadence:** Currently monthly

Northwest Attainment

- **Education Forward Arizona Lead:** Donna Davis, Senior Community Impact Manager for Central Arizona
- **Focus Areas:** FAFSA completion, High School Counselors, Career Awareness software, Equity and Industry Partnerships
- **Goal:** To increase attainment in Mohave and La Paz counties
- **Tasks:** Currently meeting with small workgroup to determine future of the initiative. Discussing another kick-off event and getting others involved around tasks like apprenticeships, early childhood, career awareness in elementary grades and collaborating with other organizations with similar goals.
- **Meeting Cadence:** Will be determined by work group.

Examples of Existing Attainment Groups

Page Attainment Group – Established Summer 2022

- **Education Forward Arizona Lead:** Laura Rosensweet, Senior Community Impact Manager for Northern Arizona
- **Members:** Leaders from Page Unified School District, city/government leaders, Chamber of Commerce, Coconino County Health services, library, tribal leaders, Coconino Community College and the alternative schools there including the county accommodation school.
- **Focus Area:** Third grade reading
- **Goal:** Improve the 3rd Grade Reading progress meter data from 15% to 20% proficient by December 2025. (Established January 2024)
- **Tasks:** Developing a master calendar of events and activities to support the goal.
- **Meeting Cadence:** Quarterly in Page
- **Previous Goal:** Share information between parties along with looking at opportunities to improve attainment.
- **Previous Tasks:** Spring 2023 the group identified paid internship opportunities available throughout the county and used that as a steppingstone for post-high school enrollment.

Prescott Education Advocacy Council

- **Education Forward Arizona Lead:** Laura Rosensweet, Senior Community Impact Manager for Northern Arizona
- **Focus Area:** Involved in advocacy around local issues in Yavapai county, such as school board elections, bond and override elections, and county superintendent elections.
- **Goal:** Restore full and essential funding for traditional district public schools.
- **Tasks:** Collect signatures for candidates for office, help with campaign signage. Activate people in your network. Host candidate forums. Letter writing campaigns.
- **Meeting Cadence**: Currently monthly

Yuma Education Advocacy Council

- **Education Forward Arizona Leads:** Rich Nickel, CEO, and Mendy Gomez, Community Impact Manager, Southern Arizona
- **Focus Area:** Educational Advocacy in Yuma County

Additional Statewide Initiatives from Education Forward Arizona

Ask Benji

Ask Benji is a first-of-its-kind chatbot that helps Arizona students, parents, and educators get quick answers to questions about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Ask Benji is a free service that helped nearly 34,000 students in the 2022-2023 school year. Ask Benji is a chatbot that draws from a large database to answer questions about FAFSA and financial aid. Benji doesn't talk, only texts, but if Benji is unable to answer your questions, one of our dedicated staff members at Education Forward Arizona monitors the responses and engages directly with the student.

Ask Benji was created to help more students and families in Arizona achieve a college education by helping them complete a FAFSA.

To join, use your cell phone and text "Hi Benji" to 602-786-8171.

For more information about this powerful and free service, please visit our website at **Ask Benji - Digital FAFSA Assistant** or contact Dr. Jennifer Murphy, Senior Director of Attainment and AzCAN, at **jmurphy@educationforwardarizona.org**.

Advocates Network

The Education Forward Arizona Advocates Network is a statewide network of business leaders, educators, community leaders, parents, teachers and voters.

Together, we are a powerful voice for education across the state who is supporting Arizona's students and educators. We use our voices to elevate the importance of education to policymakers and to weigh in on key issues.

To join Education Forward Arizona's Advocates Network, please submit this **form**. Already a member of the Education Forward Advocates Network? **Learn more about current issues**, watch your email, join our next Education Power Hour and **take action!**

AzCAN – Arizona College Access Network

The Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN) is a community of college access professionals committed to closing the education attainment gap in Arizona. The goal is to increase the percentage of students enrolled in education or advanced training, within one year after high school graduation, to 70% by 2030; today this rate is 48%. The efforts around increasing postsecondary enrollment will directly impact the Achieve60AZ attainment goal. Currently, there are more than 360 organizational members across Arizona in every county; however, to reach the Achieve60AZ goal, we must continue to grow this critical network of education professionals. AzCAN members include nonprofits, high school staff, parents, college outreach programs, funders, government agencies, and business leaders, all of whom are committed to advocating for and engaging in the work required to achieve the goals.

AzCAN is a member of the National College Attainment Network.

Membership is free and open to all. For more information, contact Dr. Jennifer Murphy, Senior Director of Attainment and AzCAN, at **jmurphy@educationforwardarizona.org** or visit our **website**.

College Knowing & Going

College Knowing & Going (CKG) is focused on preparing more Arizona high school students for postsecondary success through programs that create college-going culture with the support of partner organizations.

The College Knowing & Going – College Readiness Team Project, led by Education Forward Arizona, supports 30 high schools in implementing a data-driven, student-centered approach to college readiness. School-based teams—made up of high school administration, counselors, teachers, postsecondary partners, community members and College Knowing & Going coordinators from Education Forward Arizona—work together to improve academic success, expand college access, and strengthen the college-going culture based on local needs. Participating schools receive stipends to carry out their action plans.

For more information, contact Ruben Saenz, Senior Director of Statewide Initiatives at **rsaenz@educationforwardarizona.org** or visit our **website**.

Success Services



Success Services supports scholarship recipients through one-on-one and group mentorship and coaching. Each student is paired with a Success Adviser who helps them navigate college life, academics, and career planning.

We work with partners across the state to administer several scholarship opportunities including the Adelante Scholarship, Chevy Humphrey Women in STEM Scholarship , Education Forward Arizona Scholarship, Guarantee Your Future with Freeport, Helios 20th Anniversary Pathway Scholarship and the Native American Scholarship Program.

Success Advisers support students in these scholarships by offering guidance for students, connect students to campus resources, and provide ongoing support via text, email, or phone. Throughout the year, we host events like Career Week, the Etiquette Dinner, and the Leadership Symposium to build community and professional skills.

Success Services also partners with our Alumni Network to host an Annual Alumni Reunion and encourage Alumni to give back, whether financially or through volunteering and mentoring our current students.

For more information about Success Services, please visit our **website** or contact Myrna Cardenas, Vice President of Success Services Partnerships, at **mcardenas@educationforwardarizona.org.**

Have Questions?

Contact our Community Impact Managers for any questions you have on starting an advocacy or attainment group in your community.



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