

Arizona Voters: Education Is Central to the State's Economic Future

2026 Arizona Education Issues Survey:
Findings and Messaging Implications

What This Poll Tells Us: Five Headlines

- 1 Voters link education directly to Arizona's economy:** 75% say state leaders must do more to ensure a skilled, well-trained workforce.
- 2 There is a mandate for attainment:** 72% say more should be done to increase the share of Arizonans with education or training beyond high school.
- 3 Voters reject this year's disinvestment:** once informed, 63% oppose the elimination of education and workforce investments — and majorities oppose every individual cut tested.
- 4 Accountability is the unifying demand:** 77% are concerned ESA dollars are being wasted; 86% want annual independent financial audits of ESA funds.
- 5 The gap is information, not agreement:** only 36% have heard anything about the budget's impact on schools, colleges and workforce programs.

Voters Say State Leaders Must Do More on Workforce

75%

say elected leaders — including the Governor and Legislature — should do more to ensure Arizona has a skilled and well-trained workforce

53% say do a lot more; 22% say do a little more

Only 12% say leaders are already doing enough

The demand crosses party lines:

80% of Democrats, 80% of independents and 68% of Republicans say do more



Messaging takeaway: Workforce readiness is the shared frame that carries education into the economic development conversation.

A Standing Mandate to Raise Attainment

72%

say more should be done to
increase the share of Arizonans
with education or training
beyond high school

Only 16% say enough is being done;
5% say less should be done

Support has strengthened over three years:



Voters heard the Achieve60AZ context — a 60%-
by-2030 goal against roughly 50% attainment today
— and still asked for more action

Messaging takeaway: The attainment goal is not a niche policy target; it is a voter expectation of statewide leadership.

Economic Anxiety Is the Entry Point for Education

82%

call jobs and the economy a serious or moderate problem — up from 70% in September 2025

57%

say Arizona's ability to maintain economic growth is a problem

63%

say fewer Arizona students earning degrees and certifications after high school is a problem

Cost-of-living pressure dominates the landscape:



Messaging takeaway: Lead with the economy and talent pipeline, then connect to education investment — not the reverse.

Voters See Student Outcome Gaps as Serious Problems

MATH

95%

call it serious that only 27% of Arizona 8th graders meet state math standards (against a 69% goal) — 78% very serious

LITERACY

94%

call it serious that only 36% of 3rd graders read at grade level (against a 72% goal) — 81% very serious

GRADUATION

86%

call it serious that 78% of students graduate in four years, against a 90% goal

EARLY LEARNING

78%

call it serious that only 31% of 3- and 4-year-olds have access to quality early learning, against a 45% goal

Messaging takeaway: Outcome data, stated plainly, produces near-universal agreement that Arizona is off track.

Framing Finding: Naming the Statewide Goal Raises Urgency

Identical data tested with and without the bipartisan statewide goal attached (200+ policymakers, educators, civic and business leaders)

3rd grade reading

- 94% serious with the goal vs. 86% without (+8)
- very serious 81% vs. 66% (+15)

Four-year graduation rate

- 86% serious with the goal vs. 64% without (+22)
- very serious 50% vs. 26% (+24)

8th grade math

- 95% vs. 92%

Early learning access

- 78% vs. 70%

Messaging takeaway: Always pair the current number with the statewide goal. The gap — not the statistic — is what moves voters.

Near-Universal Support for the Solutions We Advocate

96%

support comprehensive literacy and reading programs to ensure students read by 3rd grade (86% strongly)

93%

support academic achievement and workforce development programs creating career-focused pathways to good-paying jobs

91%

support expanding access to AP and dual enrollment so high schoolers earn college credit (up from 88%)

91%

support funding Adult Technical Education for workers and career changers (up from 83%)

87%

support low-cost child care for adult parents who are full-time students (up from 77%)

81%

support more counselors to help high school students plan for college or career (up from 76%)

Voters Reject Education Disinvestment — Once They Know

Awareness is low: only 36% have seen, heard or read anything about the budget's impact on schools, community colleges, universities and workforce programs — just 10% a lot

After hearing what was cut, 63% oppose the state's elimination of education and workforce investments; 48% strongly oppose

Only 24% favor the reductions

Opposition is bipartisan: 77% of Democrats, 65% of independents and 53% of Republicans oppose



Messaging takeaway: Information changes opinion. Our first job is telling voters what happened.

Majorities Oppose Every Specific Cut Tested

- 72%** oppose eliminating adult education and workforce development programs
- 71%** oppose cutting the Arizona Promise Program for low-income students at public universities
- 70%** oppose eliminating dual enrollment that gives high schoolers job training and career education
- 64%** oppose cutting operations funding for Arizona's public universities
- 64%** oppose eliminating 9th Grade OnTrack, designed to raise graduation rates
- 61%** oppose failing to adequately fund 3rd grade literacy programs
- 58%** oppose providing no operating support to Maricopa and Pima community colleges

Accountability for Public Dollars: ESA Waste Is a Top-Tier Concern

77%

are concerned Arizona's ESA program is wasting taxpayer dollars — 52% very concerned — unchanged from 77% in September 2025

53%

call a lack of accountability and transparency in ESAs a serious or moderate problem when described as vouchers

Concern is bipartisan:



Only 17% are not concerned about ESA waste

Messaging takeaway: The accountability argument is stronger than the program-opposition argument — and it travels across party.

Voters Want Specific ESA Guardrails

86% support requiring annual independent financial audits to track how ESA funds are used (69% strongly)

82% support requiring regular reports on ESA student achievement in reading and math, graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment

79% support strict usage controls for ESA families to ensure dollars are used responsibly

72% support a separate ESA accountability board solely responsible for program oversight

66% support a clearly defined household income eligibility cap — the least popular option tested

Messaging takeaway: Lead with audits and academic reporting; income caps are a weaker, more contested frame.

The One Place Voters Split: Consequences for Inaction on ESAs

Asked about the state's failure to enact ESA accountability requirements, voters divide:

45% oppose the failure, 44% favor

- This is the only budget-related item in the survey without majority opposition
- Yet the same voters back audits (86%) and achievement reporting (82%) overwhelmingly
- The gap suggests confusion about what "accountability requirements" means in the abstract

Messaging takeaway: Never argue accountability generically.
Name the mechanism — independent audits, published results, receipts for spending.

Caution Flag: ESA Support Has Risen Over the Past Year

53% now favor the ESA program, up from 43% in September 2025; opposition fell from 49% to 37%

ESA favorability also improved: 35% favorable vs. 18% unfavorable (was 22%–22%)

Nearly half of voters (47%) still have never heard of the program or hold no opinion of it

 **Republicans favor 68%–21%**

 **Democrats oppose 58%–36%**

 **Independents split 48%–42%**

 **Messaging takeaway:** Our lane is accountability and outcomes for public dollars, not program repeal — the audience for repeal is shrinking, the audience for oversight is not.

Prop 320: Voters Reward Dollars-to-the-Classroom Accountability

64%

would vote yes on Proposition 320, requiring certain districts to spend at least 60% of operational dollars on direct instruction; 16% no, 20% undecided

Intensity is moderate — 30% definitely yes — leaving a large soft and undecided bloc

Reinforces the central insight: voters apply the same accountability standard to public schools and to ESAs

Support is bipartisan



Messaging takeaway: Accepting accountability for public school dollars strengthens, not weakens, our standing to demand it of ESAs

Our Messengers Have Credibility

73% **Local community and technical colleges:** 73% favorable, 3% unfavorable — the strongest net rating in the survey (was 62%–11%)

75% **Arizona's public universities — UA, ASU, NAU:** 75% favorable, 12% unfavorable (was 63%–25%)

64% **Private universities in Arizona:** 64% favorable; local Joint Technical Education Districts: 45% favorable, 2% unfavorable

53% **Local public school districts:** 53% favorable, 26% unfavorable — improved from 47%–34%

By contrast, political figures are polarizing:
Trump 45%–52%,
Hobbs 51%–40%

Messaging takeaway: Institutions, educators and employers are better validators than political figures.

Also Worth Noting: Cost and Debt Are Live Attainment Barriers

80%

say the amount of debt students carry when leaving Arizona's universities is a problem
— 57% serious

63%

say the cost of tuition at Arizona's public colleges and universities is a problem

58%

say a lack of funding for Arizona's two- and four-year colleges is a problem

72%

say a lack of funding for K–12 public schools is a problem
— 53% serious

Messaging takeaway: Affordability is the bridge between voters' cost-of-living anxiety and our postsecondary agenda.

Also Worth Noting: Where Salience Is Low

Only
27%

see enrollment in Arizona's colleges and universities as a problem — 37% don't know

Only
38%

see the quality of education at public colleges and universities as a problem — down from 45%

43%

don't know whether ESA accountability is a problem when the program is called "the ESA program"; that falls to 34% when called "ESA vouchers," and the problem rating rises from 41% to 53%

Awareness gaps are broad: 47% have no opinion of ESAs, 29% have never heard of JTEDs

Messaging takeaway: Voters are not worried about institutional quality — they are worried about results, cost and stewardship. Use concrete, familiar language.

Implications: A Three-Part Message Architecture

- 1 Economy first** — Arizona cannot build the workforce its economy needs while cutting the programs that create it. 75% already agree leaders must do more; 82% see jobs and the economy as a problem.
- 2 Outcomes with goals attached** — pair every statistic with the statewide goal. Goal framing raised "very serious" ratings by up to 24 points.
- 3 Accountability for every public dollar** — independent audits, published academic results and usage controls, applied to district spending (Prop 320, 64% yes) and to ESAs (86% audits) alike.

Immediate priority: Close the information gap. 58% have heard nothing about the cuts, and informing them moves 63% into opposition.

Validators: Community colleges, universities, JTEDs and employers — not political figures.

Methodology

- Statewide survey of N=602 Arizona registered voters (want to call this out?)
- Fielded August 2–8, 2026; telephone (54%) and text-to-online (46%)
- Margin of sampling error $\pm 4.0\%$ at the 95% confidence level
- Split samples (A/B) used to test alternative question wording and framing
- Sample composition: 39% Republican, 31% Democrat, 24% No Party; 60% Maricopa, 14% Pima, 26% other counties
- Trend comparisons available to September 2025, September 2024 and November 2023 where noted

Thank you