Arizona State profile

Arizona A snapshot

Number of children from birth to age five: 455,000
Approximately 55.7% are low income.

Population: 6.5 million
16th most populous state

Racial composition: 57.4% White, non Hispanic/Latino
4.5% African-American
30.1% Hispanic/Latino
3% Asian
5.2% Native American

Early childhood state funds:
Approximately $117.5 million, including approximately $98 million from First Things First

County-based state: No

Governor: Republican

State legislature: Republican

BUILD Arizona structure

BUILD Initiative home
BUILD Arizona Steering Committee

State leads
Cory Underhill, State Coordinator,
Karen Ortiz, Vice President, Helios Foundation, and Merl Waschler, CEO,
Valley of the Sun United Way, serve as the core planning group for BUILD Arizona.

The overall goal is to reframe early care and education (0-8) as a critical component of the overall education system/policy framework.

BUILD Initiative priorities

The BUILD Arizona steering committee and workgroups are currently developing a workplan through which they will set goals and activities. While each workgroup has a different focus, the priorities of each will emphasize system changes to strengthen the early care and education system and develop linkages to the K-12 system to support early grade success. The overall goal is to reframe early care and education birth to age eight (0-8) as a critical component of the overall education system/policy framework.

Through initial workgroup meetings, the following priorities have been identified as a first focus.

Health – Support expanded access to comprehensive screening and services for children ages 0-8 to include social, emotional, physical and cognitive assessment. The workgroup is also exploring a second health objective focused on nutrition, physical activity and the prevention of early childhood obesity through public health policy and strategies.

Quality Early Learning – Increase access to high quality preschool opportunities for three and four-year-olds.

Early Grade Success – Provide policy/advocacy and awareness support for READ ON AZ – a developing statewide literacy initiative geared to improving third grade reading proficiency. Support
related policy as it comes forward (i.e., all-day kindergarten, chronic absence policy, etc.) to build a bridge between the early care and education and kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) systems.

Communications and Engagement – Facilitate collective advocacy/messaging, using existing networks, to support policy and resource development for implementation of a 0-8 system vision.

Professional Development – Advance early childhood professional development to include a revised Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, a workforce registry, and improved alignment and access to degrees and credentials

State and local level early childhood governance structure

Local level governance structure
Through the First Things First Initiative (FTF), Arizona has 31 regional councils, including several Tribal Councils, that are responsible for developing regional early childhood systems. Each council has staff to support their collaboration and community engagement efforts and an advisory board comprised of volunteers that include community leaders, parents, representatives of government agencies and early childhood and other education-related entities.

Each regional council has a funding allocation via FTF and makes decisions about the allocation of these resources for their region. Use of these resources must be designed to meet specific state early childhood performance standards and achieve progress on the 10 School Readiness Indicators at both the state and regional level.

Arizona’s First Things First (FTF) Initiative receives approximately $130 million in funds annually to support early childhood-related programs.

Public, private, and faith-based settings and 11% of family child care homes were enrolled. In 2013, Quality First provides a tiered differentiation of supports, based on the program’s star level. Programs at higher levels will receive higher financial incentives and less coaching. Programs at lower rating levels will receive more coaching and lower financial incentives. (The FY 2013 investment in Quality First by First Things First is $28 million.)

Percentage of participating providers: 20%

Head Start/pre-k in QRIS?
Head Start had not been participating in Quality First, but plans are underway to offer a rating-only option that would accelerate their participation but not provide any financial benefits.

State pre-k investment
The state invested in a pre-k program but eliminated those funds in 2011. First Things First now funds preschool scholarships in place of the state funds. This includes $13.7 million for Pre-K Scholarships and $39 million for Quality First Scholarships in FY 2013.

Early learning standards
Early learning standards for ages three to five (3-5) were completed in 2005 by the Department of Education. Birth to age three guidelines were completed in 2012. All guidelines align with the state’s K-12 curriculum standards, as well as professional development for early learning providers on how
to integrate those standards in their programs. The standards are also incorporated into the QRIS Ratings Scale. Work is now underway to further align the standards with English language arts and math Common Core State Standards in kindergarten.

Professional development system

Arizona’s Early Childhood Articulation Task Force has worked for several years to facilitate more Memorandums of Understanding and to establish official partnerships around shared curricula and course credit transfers between community colleges and the state’s three universities.

While all programs must meet state standards, only one in the state (Northern Arizona University) is nationally accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Arizona also has the newly released Infant Toddler Developmental Guidelines, Arizona Early Learning Standards and Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Care and Education: Birth through Kindergarten in place to address the importance of quality teacher-child interactions and to guide curricula.

From 2004 through 2009, Arizona also had a voluntary statewide professional development registry (SCCEEDs) in place that reviewed, listed, and promoted training for caregivers and provided tracking of caregiver educational attainment for almost 10,000 caregivers. The registry was discontinued in 2009 due to state budget cuts.

In 2012, a Professional Development System-Building Workgroup was convened by First Things First to build a unified vision and enhance the state professional development system. It recently became a workgroup under BUILD Arizona.

A key objective of the workgroup will be to develop an actionable workplan with the following outcomes:

- A revised Arizona Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework
- A plan for developing alignment and implementing an early childhood workforce registry
- A plan for improving alignment and access to early childhood degrees and credentials

To support and incentivize higher education, Arizona offers both the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program and a wage supplement program (Professional Rewards$).

As of 2012, after only two years, Arizona T.E.A.C.H. scholars have earned 25% of the credits earned in T.E.A.C.H. North Carolina in 20 years. T.E.A.C.H. Arizona also is committed to statewide access, investing the highest percentage of funding on direct scholarship costs of any T.E.A.C.H. state in 2011, and is the only state to concentrate efforts on removing barriers to participation for tribal communities. (The FY 2013 investment in T.E.A.C.H. is $3.2 million.)

The Professional REWARDS$ program promotes retention of high-quality early care and education professionals by providing financial awards based on educational achievement, wages earned, and hours worked per week. As of 2012, 1,783 stipends had been awarded to REWARDS$ participants. (The FY 2013 investment in REWARDS$ is $1.8 million.)

Both programs require a commitment from staff to continue working in their current program to promote workforce stability and continuity of care for children.

Another innovative initiative in Arizona is the Communities and Resources in Early Childhood Education (CREATE). In support of this program, the Helios Education Foundation recently granted the University of Arizona $1.5 million over five years to support a new curriculum for college students who want to specialize in preschool or K-3 education, and workshops to help current teachers get new ideas for engaging young children and their families in reading and stories.

Assessment

How is assessment being used within the early childhood system?

Formative assessments and screening measures are embedded in the Quality First Point Scale and are required for implementation of Early Learning and Development Programs rated at the 3-, 4-, and 5-star levels as indicated on the scale.

Participating programs are required to assess children's growth and development through portfolio assessment using screenings, anecdotal records, work samples, and developmental checklists. Arizona also has adopted a common child-level formative assessment system for early childhood programs funded by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).
Kindergarten entry assessment
Arizona is a leadership state in PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career), which is developing a K-2 assessment. State leaders are leveraging that work to provide feedback to the PARCC consortium regarding the need for a diagnostic element during the first quarter of school.

Currently, Arizona school districts use a variety of methods to assess literacy in kindergarten, but no common kindergarten assessment has been adopted by the Arizona Department of Education. The goal of a statewide assessment will be to provide kindergarten teachers with the information they need for individualized instruction while providing system stakeholders with information about the effectiveness of preschool programs. This would link existing grade three to 12 assessments to K-3 effectiveness.

State leaders are in the process of developing a series of recommendations that will be submitted to the Arizona State Board of Education with the intent of adopting a kindergarten entry assessment by January 2014.

Health/mental health/ nutrition
Among the health, mental health and nutrition strategies underway in Arizona are:

- Creation of care coordination models
- Development of a comprehensive medical home model
- Improvement of oral health and nutritional outcomes for young children (First Things First has allocated more than $4 million toward oral health and $2 million for nutrition, obesity, and physical education in FY2013 and held the Arizona American Indian Oral Health Summit in 2011.)
- Creation of an infant mental health professional development and training network for mental health clinicians and other professionals working with young children

In addition, some FTF regional councils offer a Loan Repayment and Stipend Program to provide financial support to increase the availability of therapists in highly underserved communities. Program incentives are available to speech/language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, mental health specialists, and child psychologists who are willing to live and work in underserved communities throughout Arizona.

Family support/engagement
Among the family support strategies underway in Arizona are:

- The Parent Tool Kit
- The Birth to Five Helpline
- Reach Out and Read
- Community-based Family Support Centers
- An intensive home visiting systems approach through the MIECHV grant using Healthy Families, Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers and Early Head Start models.
- Native language enrichment programs on tribal lands to preserve the local heritage and culture
- Fatherhood projects

Cross-sector linkages
Early learning, health, mental health and family support
There are a number of examples of cross-sector linkages.

For programs that participate in the QRIS, child care health consultants provide technical assistance to child care staff, providing information and guidance on the health, safety, and social-emotional development of the children in their care. In some regions, mental health consultants and inclusion specialists provide additional support.

Through “Empower,” the Department of Health Services partially subsidizes child care licensing fees for programs that actively encourage young children to make healthy choices about nutrition and physical activity. FTF also pays 50% of licensing fees for all Quality First providers.

First Things First funds care coordination models through the Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics that provide coaching to public and private health providers to improve screening and identification and coordination of services.

Arizona recently received a large (approximately $9 million each year for four years) competitive federal grant to expand the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. This project is an extensive collaboration between the Arizona Department of Health Services, First Things First, Arizona Department of Education, Arizona Department of Economic Security, Behavioral Health Services, community physicians, community-based providers, Nurse-Family Partnership program, Healthy Families program and others.

For more on the BUILD Initiative, contact Gerry Cobb at gcobb@buildinitiative.org or visit www.buildinitiative.org
Also, support for native language
development and cultural preservation
is encouraged through programmatic
support and an investment in FY 2013
of $556,000.

As an English Only state, Arizona’s state
entities face some limitations in regard
to outreach and culturally/language
appropriate service provision for some
of the state’s diverse populations.
BUILD Arizona seeks to explore the
challenges facing the ELL population by
identifying gaps and barriers – especially
within the area of early reading
proficiency/early grade success.

**Data coordination plans**

First Things First recently convened
an Early Childhood Research and
Evaluation National Advisory Panel to
provide recommendations to the FTF
Board on developing a comprehensive
statewide and regional research and
evaluation framework. The panel was
composed of 12 nationally-recognized
experts in early childhood research,
evaluation and programs. Their expertise
included evaluation design and
methodology; Native American early
education; placed-based, systems-level
evaluation; school readiness, including
literacy and language development,
cognitive development, and executive
functioning; state prekindergarten
evaluation; special needs and early
intervention; health; and a unique
Arizona, state-specific, perspective.

Based on the panel recommendations,
FTF’s Research and Evaluation Plan
will focus on data coordination and
consultation with tribal communities
as well as development with state
agencies of a statewide comprehensive,
longitudinal, integrated database. The
plan will also focus on enhanced support
for dissemination, understanding, and
utilization of the increased volume of
data and analysis findings; kindergarten
assessment; and evaluation studies of
strategic focus areas.

**BUILD Arizona Funders**

Helios Education Foundation
Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust
The Steele Foundation

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**About the BUILD Initiative**

The BUILD Initiative helps
states create comprehensive early
childhood systems – coordinated,
effective policies that address
children’s health, mental health
and nutrition, early care and
education, family support, and
eyearly intervention. BUILD’s vision
is at the center of an emerging
and vibrant state-based policy
movement in the early childhood
development field. We work with
those who set policies, provide
services and advocate for our
youngest children to make sure that
they are safe, healthy, eager to learn
and ready to succeed in school.

Visit [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org).

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