

TO LEARN AND EARN

A RACE TO GOOD JOBS

AMEPAC
ARIZONA MINORITY EDUCATION
POLICY ANALYSIS CENTER



ASU Morrison Institute
for Public Policy

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



VISION:

All students succeed in higher education as a result of quality research that shapes policy on critical issues.

MISSION:

To stimulate through studies, statewide discussion, and debate, constructive improvement of Arizona minority student's early awareness, access and achievement throughout all sectors of the education pipeline.

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TO LEARN AND EARN: A RACE TO GOOD JOBS

Topline Findings

Prepared for
Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC)

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TO LEARN AND EARN: A RACE TO GOOD JOBS

To learn and earn. These simple words reflect our basic expectations for youth and adults and call to mind the fundamental connection between education and employment.

When the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC) started To Learn and Earn in 2009, its members wanted to look anew at Arizona’s educational achievement and economic prospects in the 21st century. They started by reviewing six national reports that showed the internal and external threats to U.S. competitiveness, the effects of stubborn minority/majority disparities, and the need to reinvent lifelong learning. No one could miss the substantial implications for Arizona, given the state’s oft-discussed shortcomings in education and persistent minority achievement gaps. The first To Learn and Earn paper in March 2009 presented the issues from the global 30,000 foot level and the statewide 10,000 foot level. The paper highlighted the need to hear the voices of Arizonans about their experiences “on the ground” in education and work. Again with the help of Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, AMEPAC set out to answer the new questions and craft recommendations to complement the many other efforts underway to improve Arizona’s competitiveness. Scores of Arizonans from the Flagstaff, Tucson, Phoenix, and Yuma regions participated in the project, including parents, education and workforce experts, high school guidance counselors, service providers, employers, and students.

This topline—high-level, headline—summary presents some findings from the current project and highlights the policy choices that the research is pointing to. This piece is meant to motivate discussion of the policy choices before the final report is completed for release in August 2010.

To Learn and Earn Uncovered Continuums Among Jobs and People

Area	From	To
Jobs	Career pay/career path	Low pay/no path
Workers and students	Aimed - on track to a goal	Aimless - no track
Employers	Compact - focused on the long term	Here and now - short term
Workforce	Escalator - moving up	Treadmill - moving in place
Education/employment professionals	Collaborative - working together across organizations	Siloed - working alone

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2010.

FINDINGS: FAMILIAR AND CONSEQUENTIAL

To those working in education and employment, some of To Learn and Earn will have a familiar ring. The issues are stubborn in part because of their complexity and in part because of a lack of persistence in public policy and sufficient resources over time. On the ground, the broad spectrum of experience among Arizonans and employers becomes clear through examples of the best and worst in education, training, and work.

“Aimed” and “Aimless” Describes the Continuum of Students and Workers

Effects of lackluster, disjointed high school experiences have left many young adults “aimless.” Many of their peers are “aimed” for success in college and work and able to recognize and take advantage of opportunities. The aimless portion of Arizona’s workforce is on a treadmill. In turn, others are on an escalator, always moving to the next level, unless they choose to get off. Improving K-12 achievement in the long term is critical, but the immediacy of altering many young and working-age adults’ prospects now cannot be ignored. Preventing “aimlessness” should begin with career awareness and planning in middle schools.

Expecting Arizonans to “Go It Alone”

Almost any conversation with workforce professionals and educators comes back to increasing mobility and opportunity in a myriad of forms to match individual needs. Yet, a “survival of the fittest” mentality continues to shape preparation and the race for good jobs. Instead of strong customized support for positive individual choices, much about the systems of education, training, and work expect Arizonans to be able to make it in a “go-it-alone” culture. Many “aimless” students and adults face tall barriers as a result. Even the “aimed” can find transitions to their next steps challenging. It’s not to say information or assistance is not available. But finding them in useable forms continues to be difficult.

Weak Connections Between Dreams and Reality

Disconnects between aspirations and achievement and between goals and costs leave parents, students, and workers ill-prepared to turn visions into realities. Disconnects also are clear between employers’ broad expectations and the narrowness of teaching and training in many quarters. The Great Recession has exposed the fault lines of Arizona’s economy, the difficulties of saying where the jobs will be, and the importance of expanding “career pay, career path” jobs in “export” industries and other current and emerging fields. But the disconnects leave Arizonans unaware of even what they don’t know.

ACHIEVEMENT COMES TO YOUTH AND ADULTS THROUGH PORTFOLIOS OF SKILLS

Academic: Foundational knowledge necessary to pursue postsecondary education without remediation

Employability: Critical thinking, adaptability, problem solving, oral and written communications, collaboration and teamwork, creativity, responsibility, professionalism, ethics, and technology

Applied: Job-specific knowledge and skills

“Compact” Employers Still Train and Retain

Arizona has a continuum of employers from now seemingly old-fashioned “compact” employers that commit to training and retaining the best workers to the “here and now” group that expects to focus on who is available today, knowing their relationship may be quite short term. Some employers are satisfied with Arizona’s workforce and others are not. Some work closely with community colleges and universities while others don’t. Many of the “compact” employers have been Arizona mainstays for decades and continue to anchor important industries. For them and many other employers along the spectrum, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning is critical as is high performance among community colleges and universities. The nearly universal issue among employers is adapting to the Millennial generation of workers with their different outlooks than Generation Y or Baby Boomers.

WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?

- Born between 1980 and 2000
- Approximately 1.3 million Millennial Arizonans over 18 years old
- Comfortable with diversity
- Technology-savvy
- Expecting workplace flexibility
- Looking for immediate feedback

POLICY DIRECTIONS AND CHOICES

Of course, it is easy to say that Arizona, to be competitive in the global race, must change to have “aimed” workers, an “escalator” workforce, and “compact” employers. To do so, Arizona should:

- Define achievement (and college- and career-ready) as the combination of academic, employability, and applied skills.
- Use connection, information, direction, support, and achievement as guiding principles to bridge the disconnects and make transitions easier.
- Evaluate, and expand the “bright spots” in workforce and education integration.
- Improve adults’ prospects in the short term, while improving the P-20 experience.
- Expand “career pay, career path” jobs in current and emerging fields with a combination of human capital and employer incentives.
- Restore state postsecondary scholarship funds.

But that would be looking only from 30,000 feet. Lower down, the choices have to be clear and specific. Arizona should:

Stronger Alignment Among Programs

- Integrate planning for all federal and state education and employment programs in the P-20 Council.
- Expand the state job training fund to administer Individual Advancement Accounts for Arizona adults. These funds are an individual incentive to increase the capacity to learn and earn and leverage other sources.
- Create an innovation fund to catalyze and coordinate state workforce initiatives for emerging industries.
- Extend program options and tools up and down the age spectrum appropriately. For example, move Education and Career Action Plans to middle school and eligibility for attending Joint Technological Education district institutions to young adults.
- Follow through on development of data systems to track student and worker performance.
- Develop performance measures for workforce improvement across the state.
- Adopt credential systems to show employers the employability and applied skills Arizonans have mastered.
- Continue to expand current initiatives in STEM, move on when ready, and career pathways.
- Participate in unemployment insurance and pension reform nationally to support flexibility and mobility for workers.

Better Experiences for People and Employers

- Institutionalize skill assessments among the state's targeted industries to be regular, consistent, and connected to learning, training, and economic development.
- Create an Office of Workforce Communication to provide career, economic, and postsecondary education information in terms that everyone can understand.
- Reshape human services programs at the state and local levels to support adult working learners.

WINNING THE RACE AGAINST TIME

Arizona is not just in a race for economic leadership and the good jobs that come with winning. With each passing year, valuable talents and skills among Arizonans are lost due to inadequate educations, lingering disparities, too few jobs, and ill-informed choices. Arizona is now in a race against time—and cannot afford to lose.

Commissioned AMEPAC Publications

Minority Student Report 2009: A Snapshot of Arizona's Educational Achievement

Prepared by Sylvie Morel-Seytoux

Phase I Research: **"TO LEARN AND EARN:**

Arizona's Unfinished Business in Human Capital"

Prepared by Nancy Welch, Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University

Minority Student Report 2007: A Snapshot of Arizona's Educational Achievement

Prepared by Tonya M. Drake and Nancy L. Osborne

The Road to Higher Education:

Closing the Participation Gaps for Arizona Minority Students (2006)

Prepared by The Latina/o Policy Research Initiative in the College of Humanities,
University of Arizona

Minority Student Report 2005: A Snapshot of Arizona's Educational Achievement

Prepared by Tonya M. Drake and Christine A. Forester

Arizona Minority Student Success Report (2003)

Prepared by Tonya M. Drake and Christine A. Forester

Dropping Out of Arizona's Schools:

The Scope, The Costs, and Successful Strategies to Address the Crisis (2002)

By The Intercultural Development and Research Association. San Antonio, Texas

Arizona Minority Dropout Solutions (2001)

Prepared by Susan E. Brichler

Minority Student Achievement and Workforce Success in Arizona: A Research Study (1998)

By the Mexican American Studies and Research Center, University of Arizona

Corporations and Schools: An Integrated Partnership (1997)

Presented by William J. Post, President and Chief Executive Officer;
Arizona Public Service Company

Arizona Education - Birth to Grad School:

An Exploration into Arizona Educational Demographics (1996)

By Harold Hodgkinson, Center for Demographic Policy, Washington, D.C.

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