

TO LEARN AND EARN

A RACE TO GOOD JOBS

AMEPAC
ARIZONA MINORITY EDUCATION
POLICY ANALYSIS CENTER



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

The first installment in the *To Learn and Earn* project, published in March 2009, concluded that Arizona has “unfinished business” in human capital — the knowledge and skills that are so important to stimulating innovation, creating wealth, and promoting economic growth.* It identified the next step in finding solutions as looking closely at Arizonans’ experiences to answer questions about such topics as career planning, moving from school to work and hiring priorities. “We know that science and technology are driving global economic changes and that competition is white hot. We know that economic growth is now based on ideas and innovation. We see Arizona’s disconnects. But we need to know much more about the experiences among Arizona’s workers, particularly the low skill and minority students and employees who are increasingly important to the labor force.” The result is this “on the ground” look at education and employment through the eyes of high school and college students, parents, young adult workers, educators, workforce professionals, guidance counselors, and employers.

BACKDROPS FOR TO LEARN AND EARN

This final installment of *To Learn and Earn* is set against a number of important backdrops.

- Significant economic changes and competition are changing workforce demands, shining an intense spotlight on demographic shifts, skill disparities, and educational achievement. Postsecondary education is now required for the majority of middle and high skill jobs.
- The Great Recession has left Arizona’s economy reeling, increasing concerns about the quality and quantity of jobs and achievement of the equitable, high-wage

economy Arizonans say they want. The recession has been particularly tough on students and young workers. At the same time, new jobs are still coming online in emerging areas, such as renewable energy.

- Substantial long-term initiatives to improve education and workforce development in Arizona are in process. Across the educational spectrum, many efforts are expected to remake learning over time. However, the legacies of minority/majority disparities, dependence on newcomers for skills, inadequate integration of workforce development, education, and economic development, and lackluster educational performance have left pressing short-term problems, as shown by Arizonans’ experiences.

CONTINUUMS OF JOBS AND PEOPLE DESCRIBE ARIZONA’S SITUATION TODAY

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

Lackluster high school careers and other experiences have left many students and adults of all ages “aimless,” while many of their peers are “aimed” for success in college and work. 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. A “survival of the fittest” culture has left many Arizonans to find their own way in the economy. Strong, customized support is increasingly available, but the “go-it-alone” culture has left barriers. Even the “aimed” can encounter challenges.

“Compact” to “Here and Now” Employers Offer Jobs of Varying Quality

Arizona employers range from now seemingly old-fashioned “compact” employers that commit to training and retaining the best workers to the “here and now” group that focuses on who is available now, knowing their relationship may be short term. For “compact” employers, diversity, science and math skills, and employability are key issues.

* Abel, Jaison R. and Todd M. Gabe, *Human Capital and Economic Activity in Urban America*, 2008.

CONTINUUMS ARE EVIDENT AMONG JOBS AND PEOPLE

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

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2010.

“Collaborative” to “Siloed” Defines Education and Employment Professionals

Significant efforts to bring a myriad of education and employment services together in a coherent whole have been fruitful but there is much more to do, particularly with economic development.

With this framework, the goals clearly are to design systems and services that help more Arizonans move to the high side. But what is happening on the ground? Arizonans’ responses are telling.

HIRING TODAY

WHAT LESSONS SHOULD EDUCATORS AND POLICY MAKERS TAKE FROM EMPLOYERS’ EXPERIENCES?

- A diverse workforce is now an economic asset. Filling disparities makes business sense.
- Arizona should embrace moving to the top tier in human resources, including a new culture of achievement.
- Employability is a key skill that many Arizona students and workers lack.
- Employers agree with parents. Career planning should start earlier and include employers as partners.
- A 21st century “safety net” for workers may be needed given the frayed connections between employees and employers.

WHAT STANDS OUT ON THE GROUND?

Employers want to be central to improving the workforce. Educational institutions and workforce intermediaries are important as bridges between employers and residents.

GETTING STARTED

DOES CAREER PLANNING NOW SERVE A 21ST CENTURY WORKER AND WORKFORCE?

- Career planning has been hit or miss, mostly “miss” for the “aimless.”
- Students’ aspirations often don’t match plans and actions.
- Parents and students agree with employers. Start career activities earlier preferably in middle school.

WHAT WOULD YOUNG ADULTS SAY ABOUT GETTING STARTED?

- The process of finding information and a career can be mysterious.
- Finding one’s way takes effort, even for the most persistent and successful.

WHAT STANDS OUT ON THE GROUND?

Information, alternatives, and support services are available but many students and young adults are missing out. The “fortunate few” exemplify how things could, and should, go for far more Arizonans.

MOVING UP/MOVING ON

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FOR LOW-SKILL ADULTS?

- Insufficient information about career pay/career path opportunities
- Pressures of combining learning, work, and family
- Outdated learning modes

- Negative experiences in early workforce years
- Lack of completion and success
- Language, literacy, and basic skills
- Learning and skills must go hand in hand for earnings gains

WHAT WOULD BRING THEM BACK OR KEEP THEM LEARNING?

- Direct connection to good jobs
- Support, skills, connections, and credentials
- Combining learning and work
- Incentives and bonuses for achievement

WHAT STANDS OUT ON THE GROUND?

Frustration stands out among many. Sector strategies, even in innovation fields, integrated services, and incentives hold promise. Adult education has been at the margins of workforce development and now must come back to the center.

COMPLETING ARIZONA’S UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN HUMAN CAPITAL

HOW CAN ARIZONA IMPROVE ITS HUMAN CAPITAL SYSTEM?

- Use structure, connection, information, communication, direction, support, and achievement as guiding principles as additional education and employment policies are considered.
- Redefine achievement (and college and career ready) as the combination of academic, employability, and applied skills.
- Evaluate and expand programs to enhance in-school and on-the-job achievement beyond the fortunate few.
- Improve adults’ prospects in the short term, while enhancing the P-20 experience.
- Create individual and employer incentives to foster learning and more career pay/career path jobs.
- Open an Office of Workforce Communication to create channels for compelling action-oriented information about the economy, economic development, and career navigation from middle school to mature workers.
- Focus on a 21st century workforce safety net.

WHAT STANDS OUT ON THE GROUND?

The talents among Arizona’s low-skill adults represent an untapped resource, as do parents as partners with employers and college access programs. Proven approaches could address the frustrations among workers and employers, the development of a 21st-century safety net, and a statewide approach to compelling information for consumers, leaders, and professionals. The number of low-skill adults and the calls for diversity, employability, STEM, and degree/program completions show disparities are an economic drawback to be changed once and for all.

In this era of limited resources, finishing Arizona’s human capital business will require strong collaboration and a willingness to experiment, while also learning lessons from others. What the state has done in the past is clearly not sufficient to win the race to good jobs in the future. With each passing year, valuable talents and skills are lost due to inadequate educations, lingering disparities, and ill-informed choices. Arizonans want the best in education and the good jobs that come with it. Now is the time to invest in the short-term and long-term policies that will allow Arizona to win the race.

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.



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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