

Introduction

Arizona believes every student deserves an excellent education, every step of the way. Realizing this vision is vital to our state's economic prosperity, quality of life and civic health. A critical component to realizing this vision is to close the achievement gap that leaves so many students behind, increase educational attainment overall and prepare a highly skilled workforce. To fully understand how far we need to go, we recognize the need for reliable information that communicates where we stand as a state on issues ranging from a child's access to quality early learning to postsecondary attainment and all that falls in between. The Arizona Education Progress Meter (AEPM) was designed to be a source for this information.

The indicators and goals identified for the AEPM are used to track progress in communities in our state. This PDG B-5 grant opportunity will provide Arizona an opportunity to accelerate its collaborative work on two key AEPM goals: increasing the percentage of Arizona three and four-year old children enrolled in high-quality early learning settings and the percentage of Arizona 3rd grade students who score Proficient or Highly Proficient on the AzMerit 3rd grade English Language Arts assessment. The goals are linked, and thus the strategic action plan needed to make improvements in both areas are connected.

Arizona's ambitious, but achievable goal is to develop a strategic plan that aims to increase the percentage of Arizona three and four-year old children in quality early learning settings from 24% to 45% by 2030, and to support improving third grade reading proficiency from 44% to 72% by 2030. At the core of Arizona's strategic plan will be a focus on strengthening the early childhood education (ECE) system and empowering families with information to make the best decisions for their children. Arizona's theory of change is if we develop local planning committees to collect, review, analyze, and plan using data and if we

provide adequate professional development and technical assistance on evidence-based tools for program evaluation and implementation planning, then we will increase the likelihood of those local planning committees creating community-specific strategic plans of action and informing the development of a statewide strategic plan aimed to effecting change on a scale necessary to meet Arizona's goals of increasing the percentage of three and four-year old children in quality early learning settings and improving third grade reading proficiency. A logic model for this approach is identified in the section **Arizona's PDG B-5 Goals and Logic Model.**

Arizona recognizes a focus on outcomes for children is not enough. Intentional strategies for supporting ECE practitioners is also critical. Through the PDG B-5 grant opportunity, Arizona proposes to support increasing the quality of the ECE workforce by: increasing the number of practitioners better prepared to work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; helping more administrators develop an awareness of the positive impact of high-quality early learning experiences; prioritizing capacity-building of practitioners to create more inclusive settings for all children with disabilities and to see the positive effect of inclusion for non-disabled students; to support ECE degree-seekers reach completion; and to more intentionally support practitioners in their abilities to support early language and literacy development. Ultimately, Arizona will use this PDG B-5 grant to help more adults help more children from vulnerable populations enter school prepared to succeed.