Arizona State profile

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.

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
eyear 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

early and outside state government
The BUILD Arizona steering
committee is comprised of both
public and private early childhood
leaders representing government
agencies, business, child care, and
higher education. The steering
committee also includes five
workgroups – Communications,
Early Learning, Professional
Development, Health and Early
Grade Success – and these workgroups
include an even broader range of state,
community and early childhood leaders
in Arizona.

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

For more on the Arizona BUILD Initiative, email Cory Underhill, State Coordinator, caunderhillaz@gmail.com
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**

**State level governance structure**

Arizona’s First Things First (FTF) Initiative receives approximately $130 million in funds annually to support early childhood-related programs. The funds come from a special tobacco tax that was approved by voters in 2006 under a ballot initiative. Funds are also raised from state, federal and foundation grants. These funds are administered by the Early Childhood Development and Health (First Things First) Board, a governmental agency.

The FTF Board is publicly appointed by the governor and state Legislature. It also serves as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council. As emphasized by Arizona early childhood leaders, FTF funds are just one component of what is needed to support the broader early childhood system in Arizona.

**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.

**Early care and education**

**QRIS overview**

Quality First was launched in 2010 by First Things First (FTF). It includes five rating levels with participating programs receiving both financial incentives and coaching supports. It is not currently affiliated with child care licensing.

In the first two years of implementation (as of 2012), more than 20% of state regulated Early Learning and Development Programs (including 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
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 Reward$).

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.)

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 supports 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.
K-12 linkages with the early childhood system

The early care and education community continues to build relationships with the K-12 system to support aligned standards, curriculum and resources. The Department of Education and First Things First work closely on many initiatives, including the development of a kindergarten entry assessment. In addition, the Department of Education’s State Literacy Plan integrates information and recommendations for addressing early literacy (0-5) within its framework.

FTF also recently forged a relationship with a statewide forum for mayors, the Mayors Education Roundtable, with the group agreeing to address early education as its fourth priority.

Through BUILD Arizona, it is anticipated that additional linkages with K-12 will be developed. Specifically, due to an identification of early grade success as a priority of the steering committee, it is anticipated that partners will work to advocate and build awareness about the importance of quality early care and education supports as related to early literacy proficiency – a key issue in Arizona that has been elevated due to recent implementation of a state retention policy (Move on When Reading) for third graders that are far below proficient in reading.

BUILD Arizona will work to continue to “expand the reach” of early care and education into K-12 by developing and working on a 0-8 system framework that supports aligned policy and funding across the continuum from infants and toddlers to preschool to K-3. To do this, BUILD Arizona will work with existing initiatives (READ ON AZ, First Things First, Arizona Academy of Pediatrics, Expect More Arizona, etc.) to leverage opportunities to emphasize the importance of and create linkages between early childhood and K-12. Some examples of this cross over include shared membership between BUILD Arizona and the Arizona Ready Council (K-12 focus), Arizona Business Education Coalition (ABEC) with a K-12 focus, various Chambers of Commerce (which historically have focused on K-12), and K-12 school district superintendents.

A significant movement taking place in the state is the move to implement Common Core Standards. Early childhood leaders are currently not at the table for this discussion. A goal of BUILD Arizona is to create awareness around the critical link between early childhood and students’ ability to achieve at the Common Core level.

In fall 2012, early childhood leaders will begin work on alignment of the early learning standards to the common core. It is hoped that this will be an important step forward towards building a stronger linkage with K-12 leaders and the K-12 system.

Assuring racial, cultural and linguistic responsiveness

In Arizona, 47.6% of young children are English Language Learners (ELL) and 5% are Native American, making it imperative that all the state’s early childhood programs take an approach that is culturally and linguistically responsive. Within the First Things First Regional Councils, 19 of 22 tribes are actively participating and making funding decisions that reflect the culture and language of the children in their region.

All First Things First funded strategies and programs must follow a Standard of Practice so that early childhood practitioners/early childhood service providers ensure that staff and participants at all levels and across all disciplines receive ongoing education and training in culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery. Early childhood practitioners/early childhood service providers should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with communities and utilize a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate community and family-centered involvement.

Arizona requires all state agencies to have a formal tribal consultation policy that guides their relationships and interactions with tribal governments, including in the area of early childhood.
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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
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The Steele Foundation

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 early 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.