



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 1, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry 
County Administrator

Re: **Frequently Asked Questions on Preschool/Childcare in Pima County and Arizona**

My Executive Assistant Nicole Fyffe prepared the attached series of questions and answers as it relates to the preschool system in Arizona as well as Pima County. This information may be helpful to understand many of the issues associated with preschool systems. Much of this information is also covered in an April 2019 Whitepaper on this same subject found through the following link:

https://webcms.pima.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Government/Administration/CHHmemosFor%20Web/2019/April/Early%20Childhood%20Education%20%20Funding%20of%20the%20Preschool%20Investment%20Program.pdf

We are currently working with stakeholders to develop the framework for implementing the Board's February 16, 2021 direction to budget \$10 million for preschool scholarships, with the goal of providing a detailed implementation plan to the Board by mid-April.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Francisco Garcia, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Dan Sullivan, Director, Community and Workforce Development
Nicole Fyffe, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator

FAQs on Preschool/Childcare in Pima County and Arizona

3.1.2021

1. Q: Who provides preschool in Arizona and Pima County?

A: Preschool, for the purpose of these FAQs, is generally defined as early childhood education for 3 and 4 year olds (and 5 year olds with birthdays after the cutoff date for Kindergarten). In Arizona and Pima County, preschool is provided through a mixed delivery system of varying quality, and includes programs at school districts, private and non-profit centers, and as well as home-based programs. In Pima County, preschool enrollment is low when compared nationally and enrollment in quality preschool is even lower. Half of all preschool age children are from low-income families.

2. Q: Doesn't the State already provide assistance for low income families for childcare/preschool?

A: Preschool tuition can rival college tuition, and existing public funding for those who need it is insufficient. Market rates for full day, full year preschool average between \$7,920 and \$9,240 a year in Pima County (2019). High quality preschools cost even more. The majority of public funding for preschool and child care tuition subsidies in Arizona is federal funding passed through the Arizona Department of Economic Security as subsidies for low income and foster families, and federally funded Head Start centers that provide mainly half-day fully-funded care for low income children. Voter-approved tobacco tax revenues support a limited number of scholarships offered by Arizona's First Things First quasi-state agency. Federal funding passed through the Arizona Department of Education to school districts also supports part-time preschool for children with special needs. The State's contribution from the State General Fund for preschool and child care subsidies dropped in 2008 (at the beginning of the recession) from about \$84 million to \$7 million and has remained at that level. In Pima County, about two-thirds of children age three and four from families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty rate do not have access to free or subsidized high quality preschool.

3. Q: What is the income for a family under 200 percent of the federal poverty level?

A: It depends on family size. For a family of 4, an income of about \$50,000 a year is considered to be at 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

4. Q: What makes a preschool high-quality?

A: The State defines quality as an accreditation from a national organization or a state-approved quality indicator. "Quality First" is Arizona's early learning Quality Improvement and Rating System. Preschools and child care providers with a 3 to 5-star rating are considered high-quality. There are also nationally accredited centers in Arizona. Head Start centers are also considered high quality. In Pima County, there

are approximately 200 preschool/child care providers that are considered high quality, 22 percent of which are connected to school districts. There may be many more that are high-quality but have not been assessed and rated. There is a waiting list of 36 providers who have applied to First Things First for the rating assessment, but First Things First does not have the resources to assess these providers. Providers can pay for the assessment, but either cannot afford to, or choose not to. High-quality programs typically include teachers trained in early childhood education and development, programs that provide certain health and safety measures, curriculum that follows certain state requirements or recommendations, appropriate class sizes and materials, regular child assessments, etc.

5. Q: What does the research say about the benefits of high-quality preschool for low income and minority children and families?

A: There is growing recognition in Pima County, across the State, and beyond that high-quality, early childhood education and preschool is effective at increasing a child's readiness for kindergarten, and when combined with continued supportive education, may result in long-term benefits to that child, their parents, employers and taxpayers. These long-term benefits include increased high school graduation rates and incomes, better health, lower special education and teen birth rates, and reduced involvement in the criminal justice system. These impacts are especially noted for economically disadvantaged, minority and dual language children. Working parents also benefit from full day, full year preschool for their children as they are better able to enter and remain in the workforce, or enroll and remain enrolled in postsecondary educational programs.

6. Q: How do parents find high-quality preschools?

A: <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/resources/find-programs/>

7. Q: Are there other local efforts in Arizona to provide more funding for child care, including preschool?

A: There have been local efforts to provide more funding for preschool in Tucson, Pima County, Tempe and Flagstaff, Arizona. State legislation has been introduced to increase certain types of assistance, but would still fall short of the need even if they were approved. Short-term federal emergency funding has been approved to assist the child care sector, in Arizona and other states, with surviving and recovering from the pandemic.

8. Q: Didn't voters vote against funding for preschool in 2017?

A: Yes, the Strong Start initiative was on the ballot for voters within the City of Tucson in 2017, and failed. It would have raised the City of Tucson sales tax by a half cent, with no end date, and would have funded preschool for some 3 and 4 year olds regardless of income/need.

9. Q: Does the State fund full-day kindergarten?

A: Arizona school districts are required to provide free half-day kindergarten. Children must turn five before September 1 of the school year to be eligible for kindergarten. Half-day programs typically end around 12:00 p.m. The State temporarily provided funding to cover the cost of free full-day kindergarten between 2007 and 2010. In Pima County, some schools offer free full-day kindergarten, others offer a tuition-based full-day program. Full-day is generally defined as a 6-hour program, ending about 3:00 p.m. Some schools then offer after-school care, which is typically tuition based and ends somewhere between 5:00 p.m. -6:00 p.m. Since 2012, the State has mandated a curriculum for kindergarten.

10. Q. Hasn't the cost to provide childcare and preschool gone up because of the pandemic?

A: Yes. Health and safety guidelines to reduce the spread of the virus have resulted in more costs for cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment. Additional costs also result from guidance to reduce class sizes, reduce sharing of materials, etc. In addition, with enrollment 40 percent lower than prior to the pandemic, many child care providers have less revenue. It is unknown how long after the pandemic these increased costs and lost revenue will continue.

11. Q. Does Pima County have anything to do with child care or preschool, currently?

A: The Pima County Public Library has an 8-week school readiness program for parents and children, and offers additional early childhood learning opportunities. The Health Department conducts routine facility and food service inspections of child care centers, is paid by First Things First to implement the Child Care Health Consultation Program to Quality First child care centers, and provides a variety of additional support to child care centers. Pima County One-Stop is in partnership with First Things First and others to provide workforce training to eligible parents and a limited number of childcare scholarships to those that need them. The Pima County School Superintendent provides professional training to preschool and elementary school professionals, focused on STEAM. Natural Resources Parks and Recreation offers a 6-week program for three-five year olds at several community centers. Pima County also provides limited funding to outside agencies for early childhood education and child care for parents working or in school. Note some of the programs listed above shifted to virtual during the pandemic, or have been temporarily suspended. The pandemic has increased the Health Department's involvement in the child care sector. Two child care liaisons regularly provide child care providers with health and safety guidance, vaccine and testing information, case reporting assistance, access to personal protective equipment, and more.