

PROJECT WORKFORCE

A Call for Business Leadership, Action, and Advocacy: A 20-Year Education-to-Work Action Plan

Executive Imperative for Business and Industry Leaders

Talent is now a limiting resource for Arizona’s economy. As the state experiences historic growth in industries of regional, national, and global significance, the availability of a skilled, ready, and resilient workforce will determine whether this growth is sustained—or constrained. Our fastest growing and most significant industries are high skill fields, **with labor shortages leading to debilitating financial impacts and hindering critical workflows** for key sectors across the state. To meet large and growing demands in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, construction, digital technology, energy, healthcare, mining, etc., we must get more people through the largest and most widespread talent development system we have: the PreK-20 education system.

Ninety percent of Arizona’s future workforce is developed through the public education system, beginning at birth and extending through post-secondary credentials. The most efficient workforce pipeline is a **cradle-to-career system**, and today Arizona’s pipeline is leaking badly. Currently, **63 out of every 100 potential homegrown workers fall through the cracks before completing any post-secondary credential of value**. Late-stage interventions leave these workers on the sidelines, while early interventions keep them right where we need them: in the talent pipeline.

This plan reframes workforce development as a **shared enterprise starting at birth**—one in which business and industry move from being consumers of talent to **co-owners of the education-to-work system**. It is designed for business leaders who understand that long-term workforce competitiveness requires sustained leadership, capital, advocacy, and accountability.

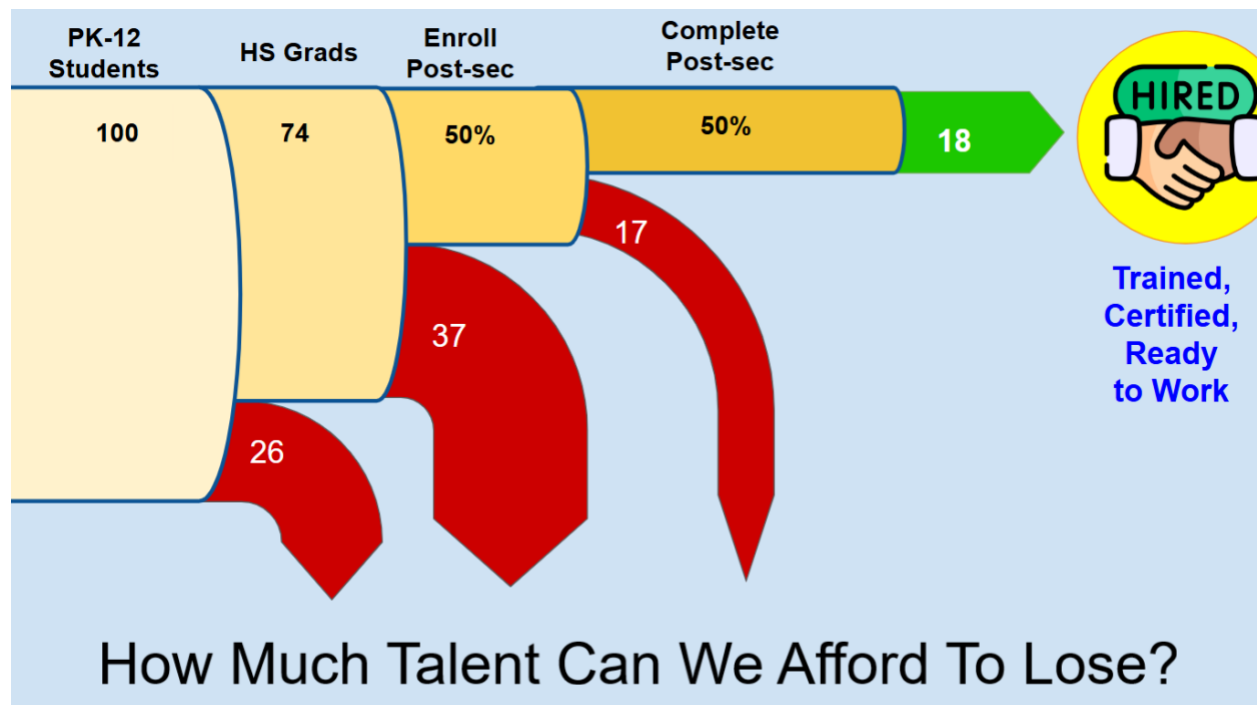
The Five Crucial Educational Milestones That Determine Workforce Outcomes

Research and data are clear: workforce readiness is largely determined by student success across the following milestones:

1. Post-Secondary Credential Completion (industry certifications, degrees)
2. High School Graduation
3. Foundational Math by 8th Grade
4. Foundational Literacy by 3rd Grade
5. Quality Early Childhood Education (Birth–Age 5)

Historically, the business community focuses their investment and engagement where students are already at or near their transition to work, or even midcareer reskilling. **This strategy overlooks the impact and cost efficiency of earlier intervention.** Further, it shrinks the roster of workforce candidates: Failures in the system at earlier stages dramatically reduce the size of the potential workforce pool downstream. **Late-stage strategies without upstream interventions can never have impacts at the scale our growth industries require.** In a market defined by workforce shortages and forecasting significant, large scale growth across high skill industries, **we are leaving talent on the table.**

Arizona's Workforce Pipeline:



A 20-Year Vision, Delivered Through Four Phases

This plan is intentionally long-term. Workforce systems, like energy or infrastructure systems, are not fixed in election cycles or quarterly earnings—they are built over generations. Each phase builds on the previous one, with escalating expectations for leadership. This vision focuses on the role and opportunity for business leadership to co-create the solutions they need for the workforce they rely on.

Phase I: Stop the Bleeding

Phase II: Align Learning Pathways with Industry

Phase III: Increase Readiness For and Attainment of Skills.

Phase IV: Position Arizona as a National Model for Education-to-Work Alignment.

PHASE I (Years 1–5): Stabilize the Talent Pipeline

Goal: Stop the bleeding. Address the most urgent breakdowns in early education, foundational skill development, and school-to-work transitions.

Actions: Immediate Steps

- Invest in **industry-aligned CTE and post-secondary curriculum development and programming**, particularly with community colleges and CTEDs.
- Fund **last-mile supports** (tuition gaps, transportation, basic needs) that directly address obstacles to credential completion.
- Expand access to **high-quality early childhood education** through:
 - Employee child care stipends,
 - Employer-sponsored classrooms,
 - Partnerships with trusted providers,
 - Full throated support and expansion of programs like Pima County’s PEEPS.

Advocacy: Use Your Platform

- Demand increased public education funding aligned with workforce needs, including supporting Prop 123 and accountability measures for ESAs.
- Support an expanded, revised funding model for First Things First.
- Advocate for competitive teacher and support staff compensation.
- Demand transparent data systems that align K12, post-secondary, labor and employment data.

What to Measure, and What to Watch:

- School funding legislation
- Accountability legislation around ESA spending.
- Early Childhood Education access, and funding for First Things First
- CTE participation rates
- Post Secondary Completion rates
- Credential Completion rates (CTE, Post-Secondary, etc.)

PHASE II (Years 6–10): System Supports that Align School to Industry

Goal: Pull the levers that matter to ensure learning pathways clearly connect to real careers.

Actions: System Alignment

- Continue to grow **target CTE and Post-Secondary programs**.
- Support **articulated partnerships** and bridge programs from K-12 to Post-Secondary to work.
- Engage with and support robust **Middle School career exploration**.
- Support a **career and industry savvy teacher pipeline**: provide industry experts as adjunct instructors, mentors, and externship hosts.
- Demand and support **early literacy and early numeracy** focus from K12, municipal, and sector organization leadership.
- Co-design **skill-based career maps** that span middle school through post-secondary and career paths.
- Partner on data systems that track cradle-to-career outcomes.

Advocacy: Use Your Platform

- Champion policies that incentivize credential attainment tied to high-demand industries.
- Give full throated support to early literacy and numeracy interventions **as a foundational component** of workforce and economic development initiatives.
- Tie CSR and corporate philanthropic efforts to early literacy and numeracy interventions.
- **Platform trusted education policy voices** at industry and sector convenings, to articulate the impact of foundational educational milestones and share effective interventions.
- Demand **data-backed foundational skill development** (such as the Science of Reading literacy framework, training, resourcing, and program fidelity) from public PreK-12 education.

What to Measure, and What to Watch:

- High School Graduation Rates
- Literacy rates in 3rd Grade
- Math proficiency rates in 8th grade
- CTE participation rates
- Quality Early Education participation and partnerships
- Post Secondary Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion rates

PHASE III (Years 11–15): Accelerate Credential Completion

Goal: Dramatically increase readiness for and attainment of high demand workplace skills.

Actions: Investment and Accountability

- Fund targeted **scholarships, internships, and last-mile grants** tied to high-need sectors.
- Support large scale, **on-the-job skill attainment programs** (internships, apprenticeships, etc.).
- Demand and support **early literacy and early numeracy** interventions from PreK-12, municipal, and sector/ industry organization leadership.
- Engage with school-to-work programs and pathways.
- Share hiring/ job data to help education partners continuously improve alignment.

Advocacy: Use Your Platform

- Support **sustained funding** for CTEDs and Post-Secondary institutions delivering workforce credentials.
- Advocate for statewide credential attainment goals, including around **post-secondary persistence and completion**.
- Give full throated support to early literacy and numeracy interventions **as a foundational component** of workforce and economic development initiatives.
- Demand and utilize transparent data systems that align PreK-12, post-secondary, labor and employment data

What to Measure, and What to Watch:

- High School Graduation Rates
- Literacy rates in 3rd Grade
- Math proficiency rates in 8th grade
- CTE participation rates
- Quality Early Education participation and partnerships
- Post Secondary Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion
- Credential completion

PHASE IV (Years 16–20): Sustain and Lead Nationally

Goal: Position Arizona as a national model for education-to-work alignment.

Actions: Legacy Leadership

- Endow long-term education-to-work partnerships.
- Institutionalize work-based learning, CTE, and Post-Secondary engagement as a core business practice.
- Mentor the next generation of CEO champions for education.

Advocacy: Use Your Platform

- Defend and protect public education funding gains.
- Promote Arizona’s model nationally to attract talent and investment.

What to Measure, and What to Watch:

- Workforce competitiveness
- Economic resilience
- Educational attainment rates
- Labor Participation rates

The Bottom Line for Business Leaders

Workforce development is not a downstream problem—it is a **supply chain issue**. Businesses that actively co-own the education-to-work system will secure the talent they need. Those that do not will increasingly compete for a shrinking pool.

This plan calls on business leaders to move beyond episodic philanthropy toward **sustained leadership, investment, and advocacy**—because the future workforce is being built today, one milestone at a time.