

Arizona's K-12 Funding: Talking Points

Summary

There is a stark disconnect in Arizona between the Republican-controlled legislature, which has consistently underfunded the state's schools, and the voting public who consider education funding to be one of the top issues facing the state. As a result of years of tax cuts, and voter expansion measures, Arizona's K-12 education system is in a sorry state of disrepair: low teacher pay, teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, 55K missing students that left school during early COVID-19 (of which only 18K returned to school), and poor resources all make it extremely difficult for many of Arizona's students to receive a quality education. This is especially true for low-income and special needs students. In addition, student achievement has declined, with just over a third of third-graders proficient in language and arts and 27% of eighth graders ready for high school math. In 2021, Arizona's classrooms were 44% larger than the national average.

How would Arizona voters spend the state's funding surplus?

Question	Response
Specifically, voters were asked if they would invest in education, prefer a tax cut, or use it for a different purpose.	54.4% would invest more funds into education.
	17.6% would offer a tax cut.
	13.2% would use it for a different purpose.
	11.2% would use it for multiple purposes.

Rich Nickel, President and CEO of Education Forward Arizona, offers the following advice to candidates for the state legislature: **"It's clear that voters want to see candidates prioritizing and offering solutions to address our teacher shortage, to help our kids learn key subjects and ensure they have opportunities to pursue pathways that lead to education attainment and good careers."**

See the complete Report: [K-12 Education in Arizona](#)

K-12 Funding Increases

Republicans, under pressure, agreed to increase education spending. This year's budget does add \$650 million in school funding, hence its Democratic support. But even when that is applied to the current education budget, it only raises the state's rank in per-pupil spending from 49th in the country to, at best, 45th.

Unless lawmakers lift the spending cap, the increase in education spending is meaningless. Arizona has a **state aggregate expenditure limit** amended to the Arizona Constitution in 1980 by voters.

Republicans continue to fight K-12 spending repeatedly by eliminating the **Statewide Equalization Tax Rate (SETR)**, a property tax that raised approximately \$335 million/year and by fighting **Prop 208** till its final demise in 2022.

Voucher Program

Despite the clear need to increase public-school funding and raise teacher pay so certified teachers stay on the job, Republicans just massively increased eligibility for vouchers. As a result, the parents of any of the state's 1.1 million public school students can receive \$7,000 for tuition at private or parochial schools with no accountability as to how the money is spent. By passing the universal voucher program, Republicans ignored the 2018 statewide vote rejecting an earlier attempt to expand vouchers.

Quality teachers and principals

In a poll taken this spring, Arizonans overwhelmingly supported ensuring state schools "have quality teachers and principals."

Arizona ranks 43rd among the states in teacher pay.

Teachers are abandoning the classroom. The 19% turnover rate is twice the national average.

The teacher vacancy rate is 31%. Teachers without full credentials now lead many classes.