



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Case Study: Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPs)

Challenges

A growing number of Pima County households with children ages 3–5 were unable to afford early childhood education—either because of the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic or because they already struggled to afford it beforehand. The Pima County Board of Supervisors recognized the lasting negative economic impacts should families not have access to quality early childhood education.

Solutions

In 2021, the Pima County Board of Supervisors allocated \$30.2 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to fund PEEPs. Combined with county and town contracts, as well as Pima County Library District-allocated funding, these resources provide approximately \$10 million annually to sustain the program. PEEPs has been proven to be an extremely successful program and is considering how it can be expanded.

Improved Ratings

94% of preschools offering PEEPs have a 3-star rating or above from First Things First's Quality First program, making a 14% improvement since PEEPS launched¹.

Student Impact

More than 6,000 students have received high-quality early childhood education collectively through PEEPS and partners.

High Satisfaction

95% of parents were "Very Satisfied" with improvement in their child's motor, social, language and emotional skills and plan to keep their child in preschool until they enter kindergarten².

At a Glance

In 2021, Pima County established the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPs) to help income-eligible families with children ages 3–5 access high-quality preschool at more than 100 locations across the county. The program has benefitted more than 1,500 children annually.

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“PEEPS lowers costs for parents and provides every eligible child with access to quality preschool. Nearly 2,000 Pima County families will continue to receive access to preschool scholarships in the year ahead, with no cuts to student enrollment.”

Andrés Cano
Pima County Supervisor

Community Support

Multiple stakeholders joined forces to meet the expanding needs of Pima County:

Local Government

Pima County provides funding and oversight for the PEEPs program. Local city and town governments such as the City of Tucson, Town of Marana and Town of Oro Valley provide additional funding and support.

Private Funding

Private contributors donate to the United Way's Accelerate Quality program to help expand PEEPs.

School Districts

Various school districts provide at least one full-time classroom for preschool: Amphitheater, Flowing Wells, Sunnyside and Tucson.

First Things First

Provides classroom and staff support through Quality First, Arizona's Quality Improvement and Rating System, to improve the early care and education.

Download the Toolkit

First Things First offers resources to support your employees and examples of family-friendly workplace policies.

FirstThingsFirst.org/Business



Why It Matters

Early learning programs support the development of a skilled future workforce by building a foundation that leads to long-term academic and career success. Communities that invest in high-quality early learning see returns through increased workforce participation, reduced employee turnover and stronger local economic growth—benefits that extend well beyond individual families.

- For every \$1 invested, communities see up to \$16 in return.
- Children are more likely to graduate from high school.
- Children are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system.

And thanks to **First Things First** and their work in early childhood³, Arizona:

- Generates \$324 million in annual economic output.
- Sustains 2,800 jobs, annually.
- Produces nearly \$18.2 million in tax revenue (state + local).

FIRST THINGS FIRST

First Things First is Arizona's early childhood agency— supporting families with early childhood resources and partnering with businesses to shape a stronger, more resilient workforce that benefits everyone. Learn more at FirstThingsFirst.org/business.

¹ PEEPs FY2023-24 Annual Report: <https://content.civicplus.com/api/assets/0fc99afd-cef2-4d8b-b64a-d64257fa7810?cache=1800>

² Pima County Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds 2023 Recovery Plan: <https://content.civicplus.com/api/assets/1a7c757c-fe4a-4fd7-9cd5-1236baa5cca6>

³ Rounds Consulting Group survey: <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/2025/04/analysis-shows-ftf-investments-contribute-million>