



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Case Study: Tempe PRE

Challenges

In 2017, research showed many Tempe neighborhoods were experiencing high poverty rates, which contributed to **only one-third of Tempe children enrolled in preschool**. Limited access to early learning opportunities created gaps in school readiness long before children entered kindergarten. As a result, two-thirds of the city's kindergarteners scored below expected levels in reading and language development, highlighting a critical need for accessible, high-quality early education to support children and families in the community.

Solutions

That same year, Tempe invested \$6 million over two years to provide high-quality preschool for more than 400 3- and 4-year-olds, ensuring more children entered kindergarten prepared to succeed. Building on Tempe PRE's strong outcomes, the Tempe City Council approved \$1.5 million in ongoing annual funding.

Improved Outcomes

A 2024 evaluation showed that Tempe PRE students scored higher on social-emotional skills and receptive vocabulary than their non-Tempe PRE peers¹.

Small Class Size

9:1 student-to-adult ratio with a maximum of 18 students per class, allows teachers to provide individualized and small-group support.

Qualified Staff

Early childhood education-certified teachers. Instructional assistants also have early childhood experience.

At a Glance

Tempe PRE is one of Arizona's longest-running, high-quality preschool programs, serving 3- and 4-year-old children from income-eligible families that live or work in the city of Tempe. The program is designed to enhance family quality of life by providing access to excellent early learning while also supporting parents in pursuing employment and educational opportunities.



"Education is the launching pad for the next generation and the number one predictor of lifelong health outcomes for an individual. We want our children to live long, healthy lives here in Tempe, so it's critical that we play our part to support our education system."

Tim Burch
Tempe Community Health and Human Services Director



Community Support

Several key stakeholders worked together to meet the growing needs of the Tempe community:

- **City of Tempe**

Provides funding and oversight for the Tempe PRE program, as well as access to before- and after-school care for eligible families.

- **Tempe Elementary School District**

Provides physical space, classrooms, staff and training.

- **The Virginia G. Piper Foundation**

Provided seed funding for professional development in the early years of implementation.

- **First Things First**

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

Advocate for Solutions

First Things First helps you take action to ensure families, employers and communities have the supports they need to thrive.

FirstThingsFirst.org/Advocate



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.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

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

¹ Tempe PRE: Insights into a New Publicly Funded Preschool Program:

<https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdf2024/tempe-pre-policy-report-2024.pdf>

² Rounds Consulting Group survey: <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/2025/04/analysis-shows-ftf-investments-contribute-million>

³ US Chamber roadmap <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/education/ece-employer-roadmap>