

2026

NEEDS AND ASSETS REPORT



 **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Colorado River Indian Tribes Region

Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council 2026 Needs and Assets Report

Funded by the

First Things First Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council

Prepared by the

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INTRODUCTION

Ninety percent of a child's brain growth occurs before kindergarten, and the quality of a child's early experiences impacts whether their brain will develop in positive ways that promote learning. Arizonans created First Things First (FTF) to help ensure that Arizona children have the opportunity to start kindergarten prepared to be successful. Understanding the critical role the early years play in a child's future success is crucial to our ability to foster each child's optimal development and in turn, impact all aspects of well-being in our communities and our state. This Needs and Assets Report for the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region helps us in understanding the needs of young children, the resources available to meet those needs and gaps that may exist in those resources.

The 2026 report has been redesigned in response to stakeholder feedback. The main report is structured around four domains relevant to young children, their families, and the professionals who support them in the region:

- Child, Family & Community Characteristics
- Early Education
- Education & Workforce
- Child Health & Development

This main report uses an infographic and figure-based approach to analyze regional-level data trends, as well as how these regional trends compare to statewide trends. The FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council recognizes the importance of investing in young children and ensuring that families and caregivers have options in supporting the healthy development and education of young children in their care. It is our sincere hope that this information will help guide community conversations about how we can best support school readiness for all children in the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region. To that end, this information may be useful to local stakeholders as they work to enhance the resources available to young children and their families and as they make decisions about how best to support children birth to age 5 in communities throughout the region.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council wishes to thank all of the federal, state and local partners whose contributions of data, ongoing support and partnership with FTF made this report possible. These partners included the Arizona Departments of Administration (Employment and Population Statistics), Child Safety, Economic Security, Education and Health Services; Child Care Resource and Referral; Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System; and the U.S. Census Bureau. We also want to thank parents and caregivers, local departments and service providers and members of the public who provided local data, attended regional council meetings and voiced their opinions, as well as all the organizations working to transform the vision of the regional council into concrete programs and services for children and families in the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region. Lastly, we want to acknowledge the current and past members of the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council whose vision, dedication and passion have been instrumental in improving outcomes for young children and families within the region. As we build upon those successes, we move ever closer to our ultimate goal of creating a comprehensive early childhood system that ensures children throughout Arizona are ready for school and set for life.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The experiences in the first few years of a child's life lay the foundation for their future. Safe and healthy neighborhood environments, accessible educational opportunities, economically stable families and nurturing social contexts for young children have long-term, positive impacts.¹ This Needs and Assets Report examines the current conditions for young children and their families—including social and economic contexts, early learning systems, education and workforce indicators, health outcomes and supports for children with special needs—in the First Things First (FTF) Colorado River Indian Tribes Region.

Sources and Data: The data in this report come from a variety of sources including federal and state agencies and local agencies or service providers. Federal government sources include publicly available data from the 2020 Census and American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (primarily 2019-2023). Data in this report from the ACS summarize the responses from samples of residents taken between 2019 and 2023. Because these estimates are based on samples rather than the entire population, ACS data should not be considered exact. Estimates for smaller geographies, such as regions or sub-regions, are less accurate than estimates for larger geographies, such as the state, because they are based on smaller sample sizes.

Data were provided to FTF by state, federal and Tribal agencies including the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), the Indian Health

Service (IHS) and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA). FTF strategy data related to quality early education, professional development and home visiting were also provided. FTF partnered with the Arizona State University Center for Health Information and Research (CHiR) to create custom tabulations of claims data for young children from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). In most cases, the data in this report were calculated specifically for the Needs and Assets process and are more detailed than the data that are published by these agencies for the general public. Whenever possible, this report will use data tailored to the region, but in some cases, there are only county-level or statewide data available to report. This report also includes publicly available data for the county and state, including from state agencies such as the Arizona Department of Commerce's Office of Economic Opportunity, Arizona Department of Education (ADE), and the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) semi-annual child welfare reports.

Local data were also requested from multiple Colorado River Indian Tribe Departments and programs for inclusion in this report. The Colorado River Indian Tribes Enrollment Office, Colorado River Indian Tribes Department of Health & Human Services and Tiny Cactus Child Care all generously provided data to include in this report. When more recent data from public, state agency or Tribal datasets were not available, this report cites data from past Regional Needs and Assets Reports for the region.

The data in this report are as complete as possible, but there are cases when data for specific years were unavailable or unable to be reported. State agencies have varying policies about reporting small values. Labels such as <10, <6 or "DS" indicate that a count has been suppressed to protect privacy. When data were not available for a given year or geography, the label "N/A" is used.

Color-coding: This report uses color-coding to indicate the relevant geography for each number or percentage discussed in the text as follows: **Colorado River Indian Tribes Region**, **Colorado River Indian Tribes (entire)**, **all reservation lands located within Arizona**, **La Paz County**, **Arizona**, and the **U.S.** Additional important numbers in the text that do not correspond to one of these geographies have been **bolded**.

Data Interpretation Session: The data compiled in this report reflect one way of knowing about the status of young children and their families, but local perspectives on what works well and what needs improvement from community experts who live, work and care for children in the region provide another vital source of information about the needs and assets in the region. First Things First Regional Partnership Council members and other key community experts participated in a facilitated data discussion in the beginning of 2026 to review the data included in this report. During this session, participants shared local knowledge and perspectives to help interpret the

data and add additional context about the region. These insights are included throughout the report, attributed to “local key informants” and “local community experts.”

Limitations: It is important to note the limitations of this style of report for Tribal contexts given the kinds of data that are readily available to include. Many indicators of health, educational and economic wellbeing used in the U.S. are grounded in white Western perspectives and normative baselines that do not reflect Indigenous realities, worldviews or values which are often more holistic and tied to land, culture, language and community. As a result, these indicators may overlook strengths, resilience, and locally defined priorities while emphasizing deficit-based comparisons to non-Indigenous populations.² For example, considerable disparities in which communities reach Healthy People Objectives indicates the need to examine the validity of measures like this for low-income, racially/ethnically diverse and immigrant populations as well as to interpret findings from a sociocultural perspective.³ Wherever possible in this report, locally collected data are included along with publicly available and state agency data, and community interpretation is sought to understand what the data mean within the local context.

Additionally, this report was compiled in the fall of 2025 and spring of 2026 during a time of rapid changes in federal funding and policy. The data presented here reflect a particular moment in time. Where possible, potential impacts of currently known policy decisions grounded in high-quality research have been included, but the full extent of the impact of policies implemented in 2025 and 2026 on early childhood well-being will not be fully clear for years to come.

Throughout this report, state-level data is included to help understand how the region is doing in comparison to Arizona overall. For a more comprehensive discussion of needs and assets at the state level, please see the First Things First 2025 Statewide Needs and Assets Report – Building Bright Futures.^a

Analysis of data and reporting of findings contained in this report were completed by Kara Haberstock Tanoue, Rachel Leih, Madeleine deBlois, Deirdre Avery, Vicki Brown, Terrace Ewinghill, Rachel Gildersleeve, Anvi Bhakta, Beatriz Reyna, Deshawna Yazzie, April Horne, Lauren Moxley, Dora Valencia, Claudia Vega and Felicia Zhang from the Community Research, Evaluation & Development (CRED) team in the John and Doris Norton School of Human Ecology at the University of Arizona.

^a The full report can be found at <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-State-Needs-and-Assets-Report.pdf>

THE COLORADO RIVER INDIAN TRIBES REGION

The First Things First regional boundaries were initially established in 2007, creating 31 regions which were designed to (a) reflect the view of families in terms of where they access services, (b) coincide with existing boundaries or service areas of organizations providing early childhood services, (c) maximize the ability to collaborate with service systems and local governments and facilitate the ability to convene a Regional Partnership Council and (d) allow for the collection of demographic and indicator data. The regional boundaries are reviewed every two years. In state fiscal year 2015, the boundaries were modified using census blocks, creating 28 regions.

When First Things First was established by the passage of Proposition 203 in November 2006, the government-to-government relationship with federally recognized Tribes was acknowledged. Each Tribe with Tribal lands located in Arizona was given the opportunity to participate within a First Things First designated region or elect to be designated as a separate region. The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region was one of 10 Tribes that chose to be designated as its own region. This decision must be ratified every two years, and the Colorado River Indian Tribes has opted to continue to be designated as its own region.

Geographically, the First Things First (FTF) Colorado River Indian Tribes Region is defined as the Arizona part of the Colorado River Indian Reservation, including the town of Parker. The region lies entirely in La Paz County. The Colorado River Indian Reservation covers about 420 square miles, of which about 84% lies in Arizona. The remainder is across the river in California.

The Colorado River Indian Tribes include four distinct Tribes - the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi and Navajo. The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region encompasses a unique and diverse area. The primary communities in the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region are Parker, Arizona, which is located on a combination of Tribal land, leased land that is owned by Colorado River Indian Tribes and land owned by non-tribal members, as well as Poston, Arizona, which is located entirely on Tribal land. Therefore, the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region serves both Tribal members and non-members on the Arizona portions of the Colorado River Indian Reservation and in the Town of Parker. There are programs managed by the Colorado River Indian Tribes, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Colorado River Indian Tribes Library and the Joint Venture Sewer Project that serve the population of all of La Paz County.

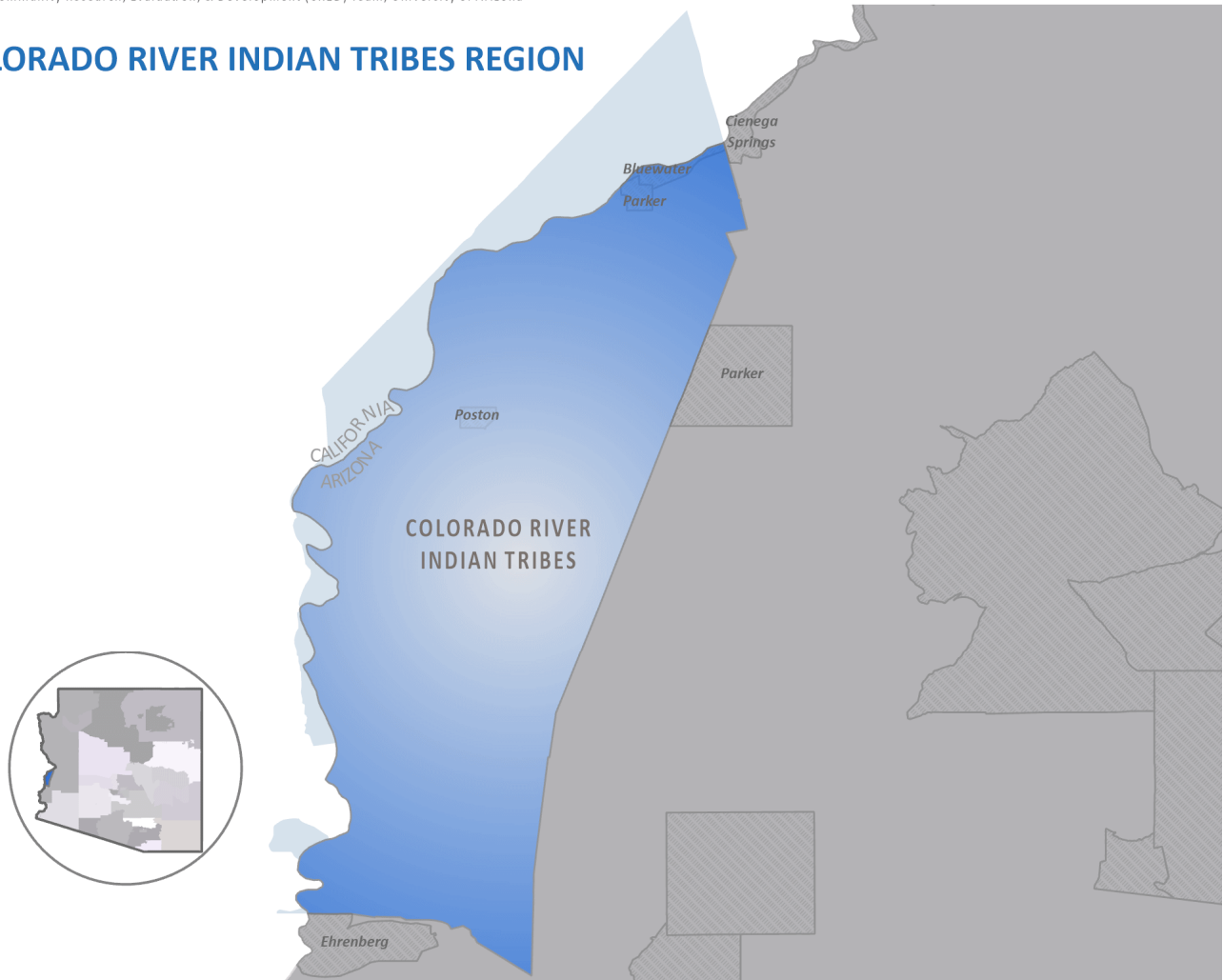
The map that follows shows the geographical area covered by the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region. Additional information is available at the end of this report, including a map and table of

the region's zip codes and a map of Arizona public school districts in the region in the *Maps & Methods* Appendix.

The First Things First Colorado River Indian Tribes Region

Map by Community Research, Evaluation, & Development (CRED) Team, University of Arizona

COLORADO RIVER INDIAN TRIBES REGION



Source: 2020 TIGER/Line Shapefiles prepared by the U.S. Census. Map produced by CRED.

FAMILY, CHILD & COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Young children in the region

While young children make up a small proportion of the overall population, their well-being has wide-reaching impacts on families, social service systems and the state's future population. Continued investment in children's well-being and the well-being of their families has been deemed by the National Academy of Sciences as "the most efficient strategy" for strengthening the future workforce and supporting a thriving community.^{4, 5} According to the 2020 Census, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region was home to about **703** young children birth to age 5. Between 2018 and 2023, births in the region generally declined, from a high of **135** births in 2019 to a low of **89** in 2023.^b Statewide, births were also generally on a downward trend.

The 2020 Census faced major challenges during the data collection process, which led to an undercount of the population identifying as American Indian living on reservations and young children birth to age 4.⁶ In light of these limitations, Tribal enrollment data provides a vital source of information about the population in the region as well as eligibility for certain resources. According to the Colorado River Indian Tribes Enrollment Office, there were **4,079** enrolled Colorado River Indian Tribes members in 2024.^c This included **2,194** members residing on reservation lands, **33** of whom were young children (birth to age 5). This means that a small portion of young children in the region are enrolled as members of the Colorado River Indian Tribes (about 5%), which according to local key informants, is due to a number of factors, including the substantial non-Native population living in Parker, parents choosing to enroll their children in another Tribe, and requirements and eligibility for enrollment in the Colorado River Indian Tribes. Additionally, access to programs can be an incentive for parents to enroll their young children, but many programs in the region are open to non-Tribal members. Total membership increased slightly from 2022 (n = **4,016**) to 2024 (n = **4,079**), while the total enrollment of young children declined slightly, from **54** in 2022 to **50** in 2024.

^b Note that births are assigned to the region based on the address that parents list on the birth certificate form. This means that babies born to families residing in the region should be counted in regional birth numbers regardless of the location of the hospital where they were born.

^c According to the Colorado River Indian Tribes Enrollment Office, total membership was **4,648** as of October 24, 2025.

Figure 1.

Young children in the region

The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region is home to

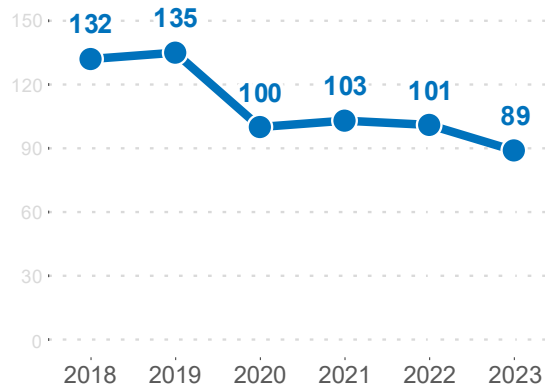
703

children birth to age 5 (2020)¹

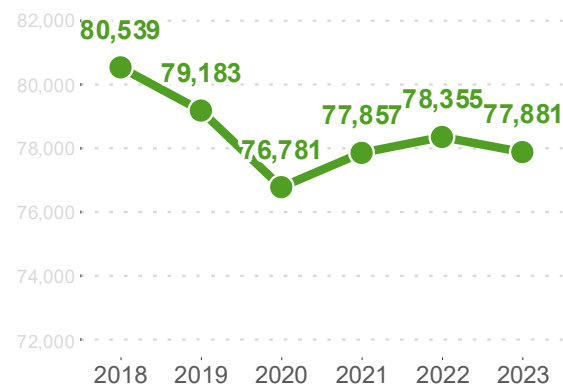


Number of births per calendar year²

Colorado River Indian Tribes Region



Arizona



Colorado River Indian Tribes Enrollment³

	2022 (Total)	2024 (Total)	2024 (On-reservation)
Children birth to age 5	54	50	33
Birth to age 2	42	38	25
Age 3 to 5	12	12	8
School-age (ages 6-17)	12	17	2
Total Children (under 18)	66	67	35
Adults (age 18 and older)	2,708	2,921	1,546
Total Membership	4,016	4,079	2,194

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). 2020 Decennial Census, Demographic and Housing Characteristics (DHC).

² Arizona Department of Health Services. (2024). [Vital Statistic dataset].

³ Colorado River Indian Tribes Enrollment Office (2025). [Enrollment dataset].

Characteristics of young children and the population

According to the 2020 Census, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region had a total population of **7,036** people in **2,322** households. About one in five (**19%**) households in the region included a young child birth to age 5, a similar proportion to that across all reservation lands located within Arizona (**20%**), though a higher proportion than the entire Colorado River Indian Tribes reservation (**16%**), La Paz County (**10%**), Arizona (**13%**) and throughout the U.S. (**13%**).

Understanding the racial-ethnic composition of communities can inform efforts to increase access to services and resources. According to the 2020 Census, close to half of Colorado River Indian Tribes Region residents identified as American Indian (**44%** of the total population, **55%** of young children birth to age 4). Young children in the region were more likely to be identified as Hispanic or Latino (**47%**) compared to the overall population (**38%**). The region had notably lower proportions of American Indian residents compared to the population on all reservation lands across Arizona (**93%**), while the proportions of Hispanic or Latino residents were notably higher in the region (compared to **8%** of young children and **6%** of the total population across all reservation lands within Arizona). Much of this difference can be attributed to the town of Parker, parts of which are non-Tribal land or land leased from the Colorado River Indian Tribes.

Native languages provide an important connection to family, community and culture. Language preservation and revitalization are crucial for safeguarding traditional knowledge and promoting Indigenous self-determination, social unity and educational equity.^{7, 8} While more than two-thirds (**69%**) of individuals in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region reported speaking only English at home, **25%** spoke Spanish at home, a much higher proportion than seen across all Arizona reservations (**3%**). The remaining **6%** reported speaking a language other than English or Spanish (most likely a Native North American language) at home. The Colorado River Indian Tribes are made up of four distinct tribes, each with their own language: Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi and Navajo.

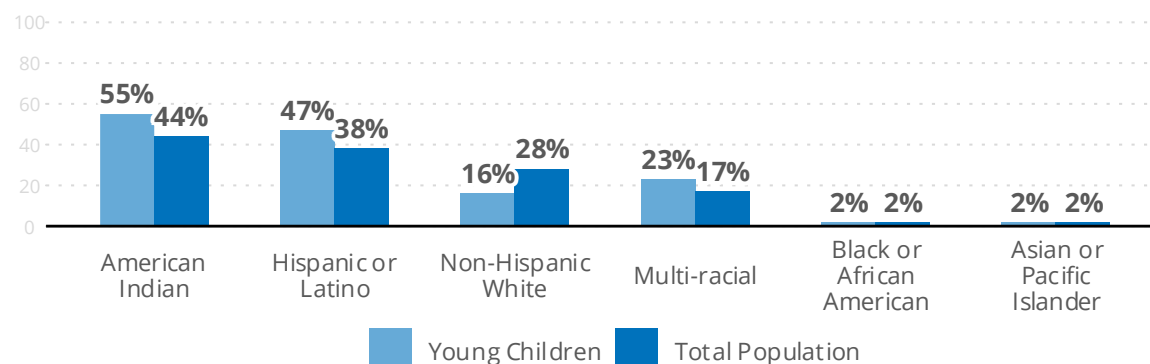
Local experts shared about efforts in the region to preserve these languages. The Colorado River Indian Tribes Library has been hosting classes in all four languages, but they are currently needing to replace several instructors. Additionally, the Colorado River Indian Tribes received a grant to support language preservation efforts and provide resources such as Zoom classes and books. With this grant, there have been classes for all four languages, focusing on adult instruction but with some opportunities for children to participate. Classes are offered at different locations throughout the region (e.g., the library, St. Vincent's Hall, Manatee Park and the University of Arizona Extension Office). For young children specifically, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start Program integrates Tribal languages and books, culture and traditions into their curriculum. Every week they feature one Tribe's traditional foods such as Hopi stew, Navajo Three Sisters stew,

Figure 2.

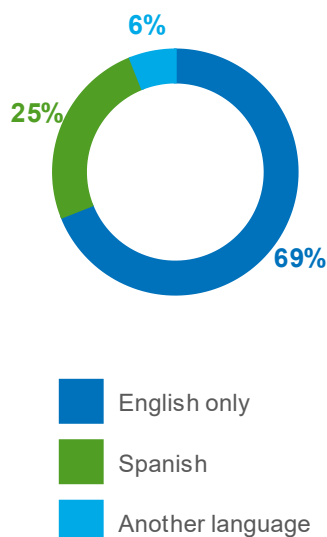
Characteristics of young children and the population

7,036 people live in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region (2020)¹

Race and ethnicity in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region (2020)¹



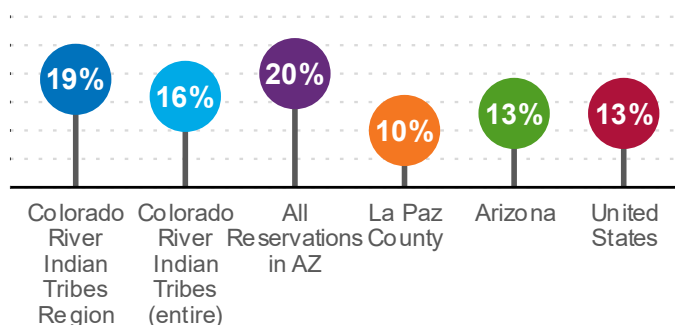
Language spoken at home in the region (2023)²



The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region has

2,322 households (2020)¹

Households with young children (2020)¹



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). 2020 Decennial Census, Demographic and Housing Characteristics (DHC).

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

Notes: Race and ethnicity data are non-exclusive, meaning that individuals are counted in each category in which they identify. Language data are for the population ages 5 and older. The American Community Survey (ACS) no longer specifies the proportion of the population who speak Native North American languages for geographies smaller than the state. In Arizona, Navajo and other Native American languages (including Apache, Hopi, and O'odham) are the most commonly spoken (2%), following English (73%) and Spanish (20%).

beans and blue cornbread. They also hold cultural celebration days and invite community members from different Tribes to come in and present lessons with the children.

Caregivers for young children

According to the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), **36%** of children birth to age 5 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region lived with two married parents, a larger proportion than in all reservation lands across Arizona (**27%**).⁹ Half of young children in the region were estimated to reside with one unmarried parent^d (**50%**) compared with **63%** of children across all reservation lands in the state. Local key informants shared that it is common among the younger generation to cohabitate and have a family together without being married, and these cohabitating couple-families are counted as one parent families by the ACS due to the way family relationships are mapped on the survey. Young children were more likely to live with relatives other than parents (e.g., grandparents, aunts or uncles), or unrelated caregivers (such as foster parents) (**14%**) compared to children across all reservation lands in Arizona (**11%**).

Though varying from one community to another, multigenerational households and kinship care are common in Native communities.^{10, 11} The strengths associated with the extended family structure, including mutual help and respect, can provide family members with a network of support that can be valuable, including when dealing with socio-economic hardships.^{12, 13} About one in five (**20%**) young children in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region lived in a grandparent's household as of the 2020 Census. Grandparents can be central to multigenerational households and vital caregivers for children, in many cases sharing and strengthening Native language, history and culture.^{14, 15, 16} In the region, there were **165** grandparents who reported that they were responsible for one or more grandchildren birth to age 17 according to the 2023 ACS.

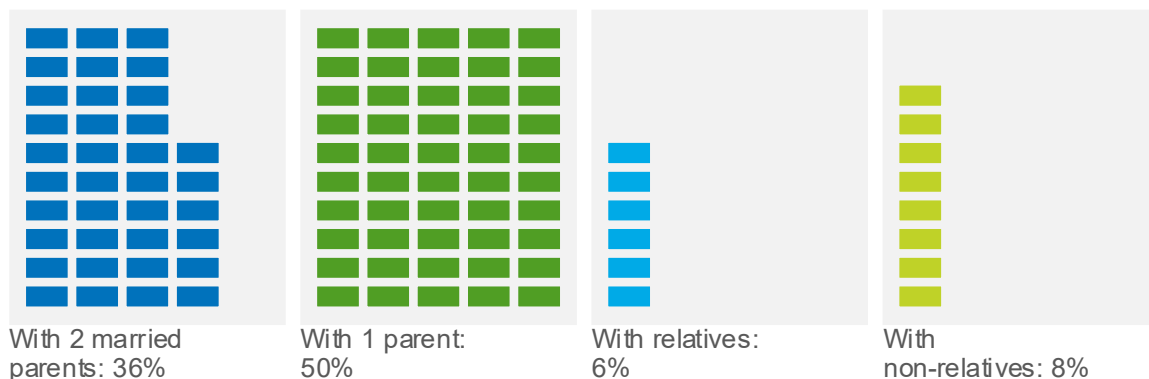
Participation in the labor force can impact families in ways that affect children's health and well-being. For example, unemployment can limit access to resources that support children's physical and mental health.¹⁷ An estimated **92%** of young children birth to age 5 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region lived in families with at least one parent in the labor force. Almost two-thirds (**65%**) of young children in the region lived with all parents in the labor force, making it likely that these families need some form of child care.

^d The term "parent" includes stepparents. Please note that due to the way the ACS asks about family relationships, children living with two unmarried, cohabitating parents are not counted as living with two parents (these children are counted in the 'one parent' category).

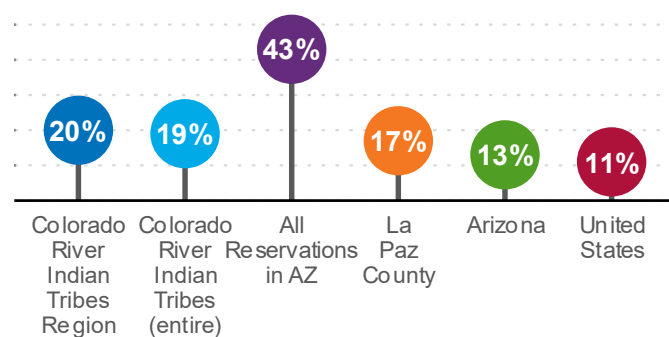
Figure 3.

Caregivers for young children

Living arrangements for children birth to age 5 in the region (2023)¹

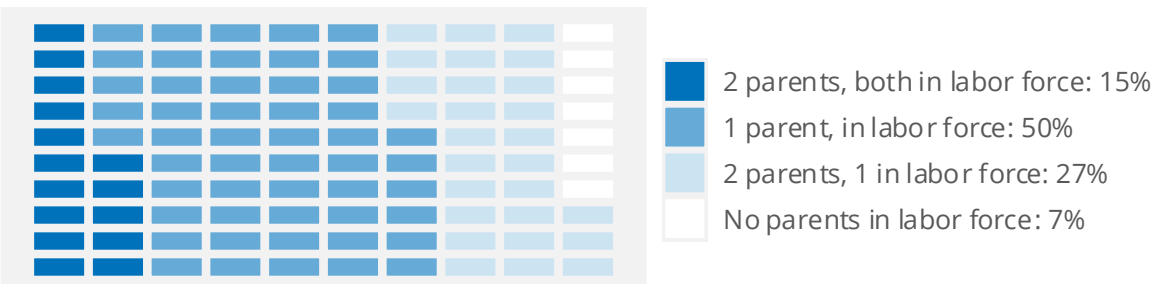


Grandchildren birth to age 5 living in a grandparent's household (2020)²



165
grandparents in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region are responsible for a grandchild (birth to age 17) (2023)¹

Children birth to age 5 by their parent's employment status in the region (2023)¹



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). 2020 Decennial Census, Demographic and Housing Characteristics (DHC).

Notes: The 4 percentages for living arrangements and employment status should sum to 100% but may not because of rounding. The term "parent" here includes stepparents. Due to the way the ACS asks about family relationships, children living with two unmarried, cohabitating parents are not counted as living with two parents (these children are counted in the 'one unmarried parent' category).

Income and poverty among families with children

Poverty is associated with reduced access to nutrition, green space and health care and greater exposure to psychosocial stress and environmental toxins; together, these factors may have implications for children's growth and brain development.^{18, 19, 20} Economic circumstances in Tribal communities have been shaped by a long history of inequitable policies and federal disinvestment.^{21, 22} The resulting economic disparity between Native and non-Native communities affects rates of employment, poverty, food security and housing stability. In 2025, a family of two adults and two children was considered to be in poverty if their income fell below \$32,150, while for a single parent with one child it was \$21,150.²³ According to the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), almost one-third (**31%**) of children birth to age 5 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region lived in poverty, a large decrease from the region's child poverty rate in the 2018 ACS (**44%**). Young child poverty rates also decreased statewide (**25%** to **18%**) and throughout the U.S. during this time, a phenomenon largely attributed to pandemic relief funding and policies.²⁴ With these declines, the 2023 young child poverty rate in the region was lower than across all reservation lands in Arizona (**44%**) and La Paz County (**37%**), though it was still well above young child poverty statewide (**18%**).

Consistent with these young child poverty trends, median family incomes in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region (**\$57,348**) were slightly higher than La Paz County (**\$55,530**) but much lower than the state (**\$89,366**). This is largely reflective of the notable gap in income between married couples with children in the region (**\$75,385**) and La Paz County (**\$71,650**) compared to the state (**\$116,574**). In contrast, single-parent families in the region and county had more comparable incomes to single-parent families across the state, with single-male-headed family incomes in the region (**\$67,214**) and county (**\$66,250**) even exceeding those statewide (**\$57,566**). Local experts reflected that these income estimates for the region are skewed by families living and working in Parker and are less accurate to the incomes of families in other parts of the region. However, they also indicated that living costs are lower outside of towns like Parker in more rural parts of the region and La Paz County.

While median family income is a measure of how much families earn, the self-sufficiency standard^e attempts to estimate how much families actually need to earn to fully support themselves. These standards vary by family type and differences in costs of housing, transportation, child care and other budget items across counties and states.^{25, 26} The Arizona self-sufficiency standards were updated in 2025 and reflect a significant increase in the cost of basic

^e For more information on the Arizona 2022 Self-sufficiency standard, please see https://womensgiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AZ2022_SSS_Web.pdf

needs across Arizona since they were first published in 2002.²⁷ In 2025, the self-sufficiency standard for two parents, one preschooler and one infant in La Paz County was **\$79,710**, a 2.5% increase from 2022 (**\$71,928**).²⁸ The self-sufficiency standard for one parent and one preschooler in La Paz County was **\$50,410**, a 10.8% increase from 2022 (**\$49,168**).²⁹ For married couple families and single-male-headed families in the region with children, median incomes were slightly higher than the self-sufficiency standard, indicating that more than half of families are potentially earning enough income to be considered self-sufficient. However, median incomes for single-female-headed families with children in the region (**\$35,357**) and county (**\$28,673**) were well below self-sufficiency standards, pointing to a group that may face particular challenges supporting their families' basic needs. However, when thinking about the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, it is important to remember that monetary income is one way that families meet their basic needs. In Native communities, subsistence-based activities such as hunting, gathering, farming and ranching are important cultural practices that can also meet families' basic needs and are not captured in standard poverty measures.³⁰ Reservation economies also differ in that a large portion of households rely on home-based enterprises for cash income, with many businesses related to traditional crafts, artistry and food vending.³¹

When housing costs consume a large percentage of family income, this can result in limited funds for basic needs, such as food and utilities, and can negatively affect young children's development.^{32, 33, 34} Traditionally, housing has been deemed affordable for families if it costs less than 30% of annual household income. About one in six (**17%**) households in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region was considered housing cost-burdened according to the 2023 ACS. This is slightly higher than the proportion across all reservation lands in Arizona in 2023 (**14%**), indicating that affordable housing may be a greater challenge in the region than in other Tribal communities statewide. Local key informants confirmed that there is a long waitlist to access to affordable housing in the region, and it is common for families to "double up" and share housing. One reason for the waitlist is that the septic system cannot accommodate new homes being built.

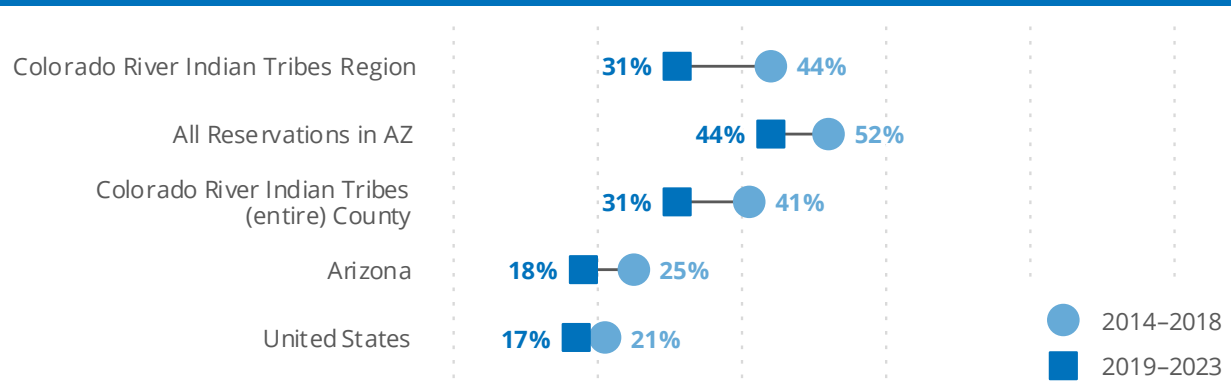
Internet access can be a vital utility in homes. Reliable broadband enables access to education, employment, telehealth and social connection, highlighting its importance as a "super determinant" of health.³⁵ In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, **85%** of households with children under age 18 had access to a computer^f and internet at home. This is a much higher proportion than across all reservation lands in Arizona (**67%**), but lower than La Paz County (**96%**).

^f 'Computer' includes tablets and smartphones.

Figure 4.

Income and poverty among families with children

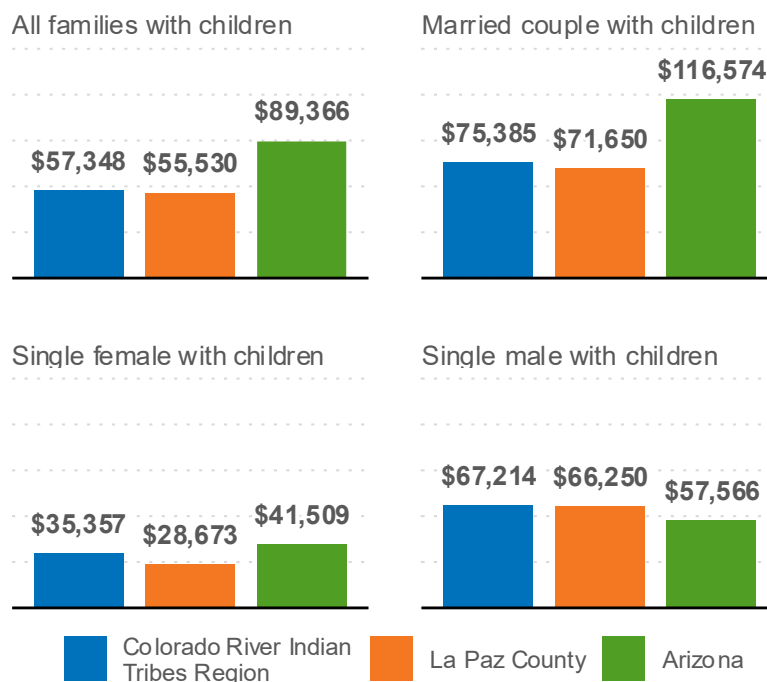
Change in poverty rates for young children birth to age 5^{1,2}



Self-Sufficiency Standard (2022)³ La Paz County

2 parents, 1 preschooler & 1 infant	\$71,928
1 parent & 1 preschooler	\$49,168

Median family income for families with children birth to age 17 (2023)²



17% 
of households in the region spend 30% or more of their income on housing (2023)²

85% 
of children under age 18 in the region have a computer and internet access at home (2023)²

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

³ Kucklick, A., Manzer, L., and Mast, A. (2022). [Arizona 2022 Self Sufficiency Standard dataset].

Food security among young children and families

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children, known as WIC, provides food assistance, breastfeeding support, nutrition education and referral to other health and community services for women and children, starting in pregnancy until children turn age 5.^g WIC, along with other programs like free and reduced-price school meals, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), can be a resource to help low-income families access affordable, nutritious food that promotes well-being.

Families in Arizona are financially eligible for WIC if their income is at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.^{h, 36} In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region there were **303** children birth to age 5 living in households with qualifying incomes for WIC according to the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS). This equates to more than half (**56%**) of young children in the region. The region had a much larger proportion of young children whose households financially qualified for WIC compared to the state (**38%**), but a smaller proportion compared to all reservation lands in Arizona (**69%**) and La Paz County (**60%**).

The Colorado River Indian Tribes WIC program is administered by the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona but is open to all residents of La Paz County as well as some communities in California including the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe. The number of young children (birth to age 4) enrolled in this WIC program declined notably from 2021 (n = **663**) to 2022 (n = **594**), then increased slightly to **604** children in 2024. Local experts shared that more children and families in the region are eligible for WIC than enroll in the program, primarily due to stigma and transportation issues. In contrast with previous years when WIC providers and retailers were seen to be more accessible than other parts of the state,³⁷ there have been lasting changes in the program since the COVID-19 pandemic including current understaffing. However, participation rates among young children enrolled in the Colorado River Indian Tribes WIC program have been consistently high in recent years, with nearly all children enrolled in WIC participating in the program through attending appointments and receiving benefits between 2021 (**100%**) and 2024 (**99%**).

The Colorado River Indian Tribes Department of Health Services administers the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) in the region, through which eligible households can receive a monthly box of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) foods.ⁱ Like other

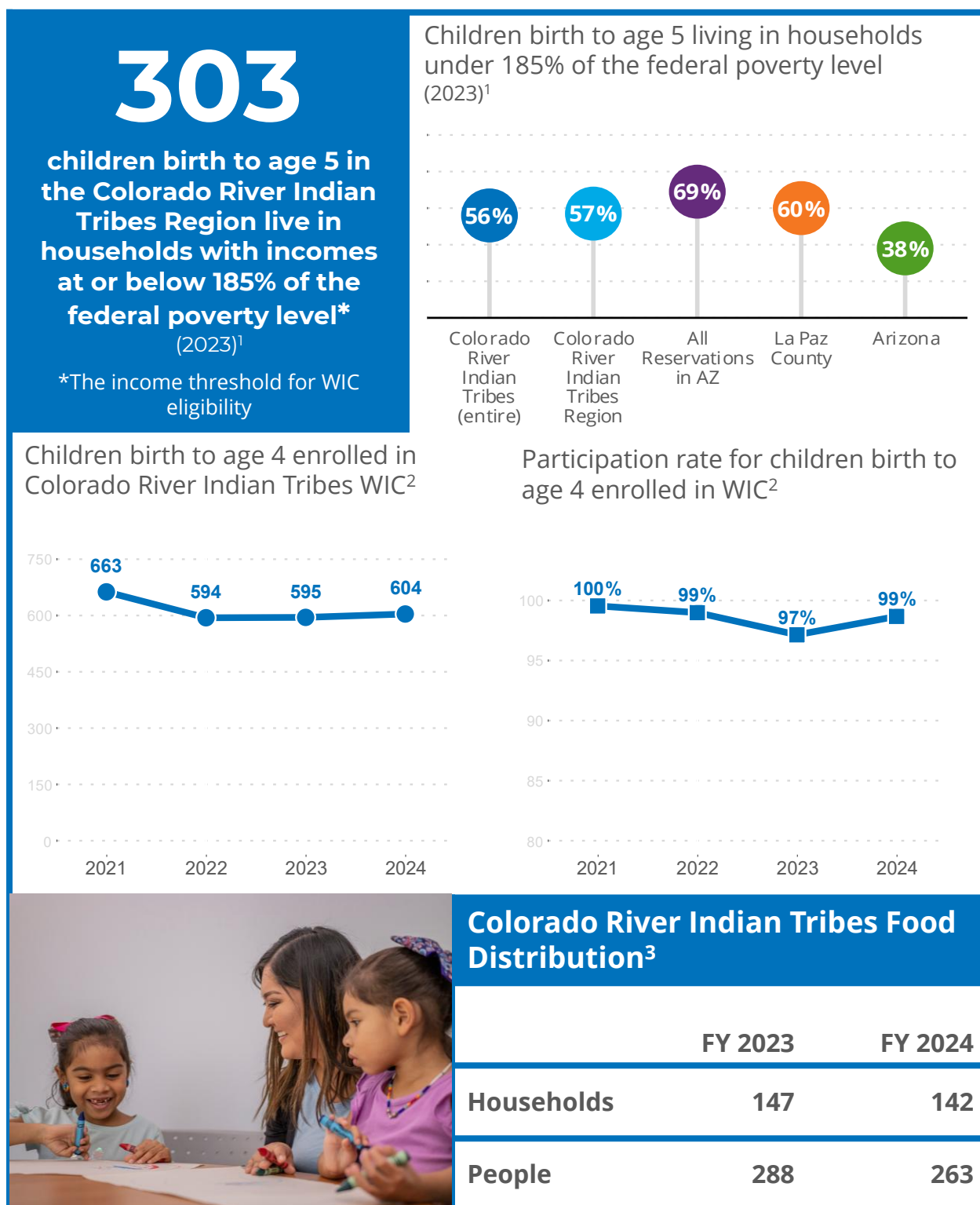
^g For more information see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>

^h In 2026, the 185% FPL threshold was \$61,050 for a family of four and \$40,034 for a family of two. For more information, see <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/b1bfa16b20ae9b89d525bc35de7c1643/detailed-guidelines-2026.pdf>

ⁱ For more information see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpir/food-distribution-program-indian-reservations>

Figure 5.

Food security among young children and families



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

² Inter Tribal Council Arizona. (2025). [WIC dataset].

³ Colorado River Indian Tribes Dept of Health & Human Services. (2025). [Food Distribution dataset].

Note: WIC participation rates reflect the percent of children already enrolled in WIC who attend visits and receive benefits. These do not reflect the share of potentially-eligible children enrolled in WIC.

programs in the region, FDPIR is available to both Tribal and non-Tribal members; however local key informants indicated that the program and its requirements are not well-known throughout the community. In fiscal year (FY) 2024, a total of **263** people from **142** households in the region received FDPIR benefits, with about 50 of these households receiving home delivery. Participation was relatively evenly split between Tribal member (n = **69**) and non-Tribal member (n = **74**) households. Participation in FY 2024 was slightly lower than FY 2023 (**288** people from **147** households). It was shared that more residents in the region choose to participate in SNAP, making them ineligible for FDPIR. Local key informants shared that Tribal Council was also seeking funding for community gardens and to provide community food demonstrations.

Child maltreatment response and family support

Traumatic or stressful life events experienced in childhood, referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs,^j can have lasting impacts on health and life trajectory beyond childhood, with risk increasing as an individual's number of adverse childhood experiences increases.³⁸ In situations where the harm in remaining with their family is determined to be too great to a child, they may be removed from their home, either temporarily or permanently. In accordance with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA), nearly all tribal governments set their own child welfare laws and manage their own child welfare systems.³⁹ Child welfare services in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region are provided by the Colorado River Indian Tribes Department of Health and Social Services. Child welfare data from Colorado River Indian Tribes were not available for this 2026 report, but data from the 2022 Regional Needs and Assets Report indicates that between 2019 and 2021, referrals to social services increased, especially for cases of neglect (increasing from **31** in 2019 to **99** in 2021). Over a quarter of these referrals (28%) were substantiated.⁴⁰ In 2021, **137** children birth to age 17 were removed by Tribal Child Protective Services and placed in out-of-home care. Of these children, **31** were birth to age 5. There were additionally **15** children birth to age 17 in ICWA placements, and over half of these placements were for children birth to age 5.⁴¹

Parenting education and home visitation programs can provide important sources of support for young children and their caregivers. Head Start is a federally funded, locally-managed program that delivers a framework for quality early child care and education services, with programming to assist family members in helping their child reach developmental milestones.⁴² Within Head Start,

^j Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include eight categories of traumatic or stressful life events experienced before the age of 18 years. The eight ACE categories are sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, household adult mental illness, household substance abuse, domestic violence in the household, incarceration of a household member, and parental divorce or separation.

parenting education programs that include familial engagement plans help boost confidence and parenting skills (e.g., promoting regular attendance, literacy and positive parent-child relationships), which in turn positively impact child development.⁴³ In federal fiscal year 2024, **92** families received research-based parenting education through Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start. With a new Head Start location opening soon in the region,⁴⁴ local key informants expected more families to begin accessing services like this.

Home visitation programs are a proven strategy for equipping families with needed resources and referrals to promote healthy child development, reduce parental stress and prevent future child maltreatment.^{45, 46, 47, 48} In state fiscal year 2025, **35** families in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region participated in a home visitation program, with most families participating in the Healthy Families Arizona and the First Things First (FTF)-funded Parents As Teachers programs.

Figure 6.

Child maltreatment response and family support

Referrals to Social Services ¹	2019	2020	2021	
Child abuse	22	33	26	▲
Child neglect	31	96	99	▲
Alcohol or substance use involved	33	79	51	▲
Removals & placements, 2021 ¹	Children birth to age 5		Children birth to age 17	
Children removed by Tribal Child Protective Services	31		137	
Children in out-of-home placements	31		137	
ICWA placements	<10		15	

92

families in the region received research-based parenting education through Head Start (2024)²

35

families in the region participated in home visitation programs (2025)³



¹ First Things First. (2022). *First Things First Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Needs & Assets Report*.

² Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].

³ First Things First. (2025). [Home Visitation & Screenings Reach datasets].

Note: Home visitation program data reflects families in the Healthy Families AZ, High-Risk Perinatal Program and Parents as Teachers programs. Families may participate in more than one program (and be counted more than once).

EARLY LEARNING

Availability of quality early care and education

Participating in quality preschool programs can result in between one-third to a full year of additional early learning gains in language, reading and math skills, increasing the academic readiness of children when they enter kindergarten.⁴⁹ In 2024 and 2025, **262** young children (birth to age 5) were enrolled in early care and education centers in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, including **30** children birth to age 2 and **232** children ages 3 to 5. This equates to about 37% of the total estimated young child population^k enrolled in an early care and education program, which jumps to 63% of the children ages 3 to 5.^l Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start had the highest enrollment at **157** children ages 3 to 5. Blake Primary School had a total enrollment of **48** children ages 3 to 5. In addition to preschool-age children, Early Learning Academy and Tiny Cactus Child Care provided care for children birth to age 2 in the region. Early Learning Academy serves infants, toddlers and preschool-age children and had a total enrollment of **36** children, including **16** children birth to age 2. Tiny Cactus Child Care, a new provider in Parker, had a total enrollment of **21** young children (including **14** children ages 1-2) in 2025. This program also offers after-school care for 6- to 12-year-olds.^m

An area is labeled a child care desert if there are three times as many children as there are available child care slots (a ratio of **3.0** or more).⁵⁰ While many communities in both urban and rural areas of Arizona face a gap between the number of young children and licensed child care slots,^{51, 52, 53} the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region was not considered a child care desert for children birth to age 5 in 2025, with a ratio of **2.7** children birth to age 5 per available slot. However, when focusing on the youngest children in the region, the ratio of children to slots jumped to **10.6** children birth to age 2 per available slot. Local key informants confirmed that it is most challenging to find care in the region for infants and toddlers, noting that some parents need to quit their jobs in order to care for their young children. Outside of child care centers, there are no licensed home-based providers, so families rely on kinship care and unregulated options. Often, unregulated providers care for more children at a time than is allowed by DES to make better money and fill the community need, and they also avoid fees and other certification requirements by remaining unlicensed. Because of the regularity of informal care, local experts

^k Based on the 2020 Census estimate of 703 children birth to age 5.

^l Based on an estimated 367 3-5-year-olds in the region from ADHS birth certificate data.

^m For more information about Tiny Cactus Daycare, see <https://tinycactusdaycare.com>.

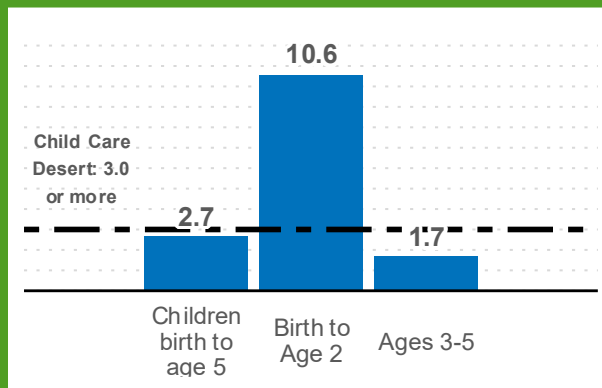
Figure 7.

Availability of quality early care and education

Enrollment in early care and education providers in the region

	Total enrollment	Birth to age 2	Ages 3 to 5	QF rating ³
Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start (2024) ¹	157	0	157	★★★
Tiny Cactus Child Care (2025) ²	21	14	<10	Not participating
Early Learning Academy (March 2025) ³	36	16	22	★★★★★
Blake Primary Preschool (2025) ⁴	48	0	48	Not participating
Region total	262	30	232	

Ratio of children to slots in early education centers in the region³



73%

Share of regional early care and education enrollment that are in Quality First quality-rated programs

(2024-2025 combined)³

1 New early care and education program opened in the region in 2025²

¹ Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].

² Tiny Cactus Child Care. (2025). [Child care dataset].

³ First Things First. (2025). [Quality First dataset].

⁴ Arizona Department of Education. (2025). [October 1 Enrollment, Graduation Rates, Dropout Rates, State Assessment datasets].

⁵ Arizona Department of Health Services. (2025). [Child Care Licensing dataset].

Note: Head Start data reflect federal fiscal year 2024. School data for Blake Primary School reflects academic year 2024-25.

felt it could be useful to provide additional support for home-based caregivers such as through programming at the library.

One way that the quality of early child care and education is measured in Arizona is through the Quality First (QF) program.⁵⁴ The QF program rates child care providers and preschools on a scale from one to five stars, with “high quality” providers receiving a 3-star rating or higher.⁵⁵ As of June 2025, **2** providers in the region were participating in the QF program, and both were considered high-quality – Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start and Early Learning Academy. Based on their combined enrollment, nearly three-quarters of young children in early care and education centers in the region were attending QF quality-rated programs (**73%**).

Cost of early care and education

The cost of formal early care and education can be a determining factor in whether families access care for their children. In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, two programs provide care at low or no cost to families— Blake Primary Preschoolⁿ and Head Start— both of which serve children ages 3 to 5 in the region. From 2022 to 2024, participation in both programs increased. Blake Primary School participation increased from **32** in 2022 to **40** in 2024, while Head Start participation jumped from **93** to **157** during this same time. Beginning in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start program was only open to 4-year-olds, with 3- and 5-year-old classrooms reopening in 2024. A new Head Start facility with more classroom space and updated amenities is currently under construction.⁵⁶

At Tiny Cactus Daycare in 2025-26, families paid **\$880** per month for 1- to 3-year-olds and **\$820** for 4- to 5-year-olds, equating to **17-18%** of the median family income in the region.^o This was more expensive than the median cost of care at licensed center across Western Arizona^p in 2024, which ranged from **\$735** for a 3- to 5-year-old to **\$788** for a 1- to 2-year-old, equating to **10-13%** of the regional median family income.^q Costs for care in Western Arizona varied by setting and child age, with group homes (**\$798** to **\$840**) being second-most expensive and family homes being least expensive (**\$556** to **\$630**). The cost of care in Western Arizona has also risen in recent years, with the cost of care for both infants and 3- to 5-year-olds increasing **13%** and care for 1- to 2-year-olds increasing **10%** between 2022 and 2024. Local key informants felt that the prohibitive cost of care

ⁿ Blake Primary School provides free preschool for children with special needs but charges \$15 per day for typically-developing children. They operate 4 days a week.

^o Costs for care were not available for Early Learning Academy.

^p Western Arizona includes Mohave, La Paz & Yuma counties.

^q Across the state families paid 13-17% of the median family income for center-based care.

both inside and outside of the region was contributing to lower workforce participation among parents and other young couples deciding not to have children.

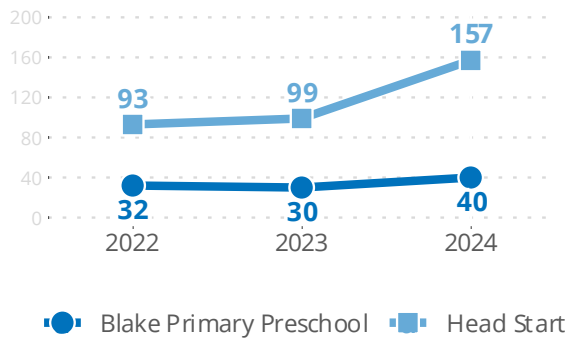
The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) also provides child care assistance to financially eligible families, including specific funding for families involved with the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS).⁵⁷ Across Arizona, DES child care assistance among non-DCS-involved families recently reached record highs due to recent statewide investments,^{58, 59} with eligibility in the region peaking at **48** children birth to age 5 in 2021. While the number of young children eligible for assistance in the region was smaller in 2024 (n = **36**) than 2021, the proportion of eligible children actually receiving subsidies increased during this time, from **44%** in 2021 to **78%** in 2024. Unfortunately, due to insufficient funding, the DES child care assistance waitlist was reinstituted statewide in August 2024, which may affect the availability of assistance for children in the region.^r

^r As of May 1, 2026, there were more than 12,000 children waitlisted statewide. For more information, see <https://des.az.gov/services/child-and-family/child-care/how-apply-for-child-care-assistance>

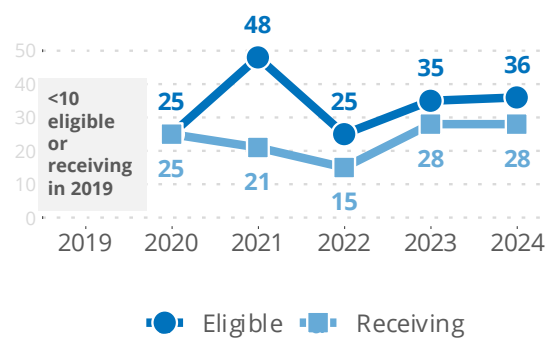
Figure 8.

Cost of early care and education

Participation in low-/no-cost ECE programs in the region^{1,2}

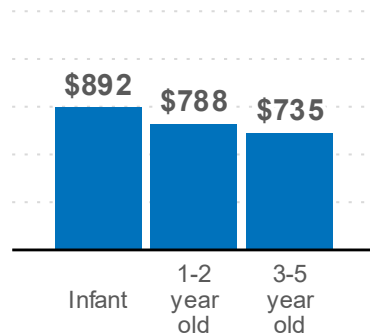


Children receiving DES child care assistance in the region³

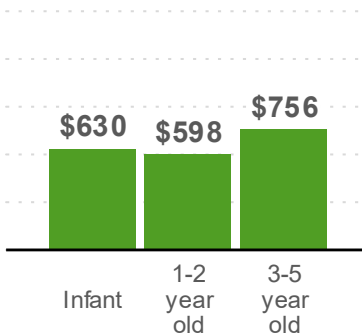


Median monthly charge for full-time child care in Western Arizona (2024)⁴

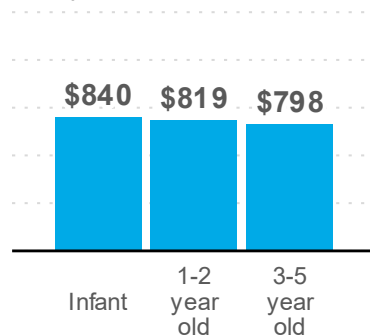
Licensed center



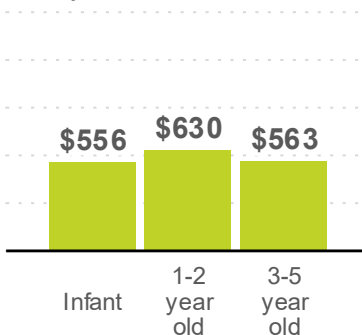
Public school



Group home



Family home



18%

Estimated cost of care for one child in a local child care center as a share of median family income (2026)^{4,5}

\$880

Estimated monthly cost of care for full-day care in local child care center (2026)⁶

¹ Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].

² Arizona Department of Education. (2025). [October 1 Enrollment, Graduation Rates, Dropout Rates, State Assessment datasets].

³ Arizona Department of Economic Security. (2024). [Child Care Assistance dataset].

⁴ Health Management Associates. (2024). 2024 Child Care Market Rate Survey. Arizona Department of Economic Security.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

⁶ Tiny Cactus Day Care. (2026). Tuition Prices 2025-2026.

Note: Western Arizona includes La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma counties.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

K-12 education attendance and achievement

In addition to a quality early childhood education system, a community's K-12 education system can support positive outcomes for children, families and the overall well-being of the community. Individuals who have higher levels of education tend to live longer and healthier lives, and graduating from high school, in particular, is associated with better health, financial stability and socio-emotional outcomes.^{60, 61}

While federal funding makes up a small portion of most U.S. school budgets, school districts on reservation lands rely on additional federal funds to make up for lost local tax revenue, fulfill the U.S. government's obligation to provide Native students with a quality education and close the achievement gap for minority and disadvantaged students.^{62, 63, 64} Despite federal trust responsibility, Tribal education systems have been chronically underfunded compared to non-Tribal schools, resulting in inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure, un-competitive teacher compensation, an inability to modernize and poorer student outcomes.^{65, 66} The COVID-19 pandemic response substantially increased funding distributed to Native Nations and their school systems, however current federal policies have cut or delayed the delivery of federal funds for the 2025-26 school year.^{67, 68, 69} For Native Nations in Arizona, this has already resulted in cutting after-school programs, halting needed construction projects and considering letting staff go or borrowing money to pay salaries.⁷⁰

The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region includes the Parker Unified School District (USD) and a small corner of Quartzsite School District. Parker USD has three elementary schools: Blake Primary School (serving preschool through 2nd grade), Wallace Elementary School (serving 3rd through 5th grade) and Le Pera Elementary School (serving kindergarten through 8th grade). Enrollment in kindergarten through 3rd grade in Parker USD has been declining from a recent high of **585** in the 2021-22 school year to a low of **497** in the 2024-25 school year, slightly steeper than the decline in births per year from 2018 to 2023. A small number of students in the region also attend private Christian academies^s in the region or are homeschooled. While some families in the region are well-equipped to provide homeschooling, according to local key informants, some homeschooled children enter public schools in 3rd grade very behind on basic reading and math skills. Staff from Blake Primary School shared that they offer meetings and curriculum support to homeschooling caregivers.

^s Parker Apostolic Christian Academy (4th through 11th grades) and Parker Pentecostal Christian Academy (kindergarten through 12th grade).

Children's 3rd grade reading comprehension and proficiency skills can predict their future academic success, such as their likelihood of graduating high school and attending college.⁷¹

Although they remain very low, 3rd grade math assessment passing rates increased for students in Parker USD from **33%** in the 2021-22 school year to **37%** in the 2023-24 school year. In the 2023-24 school year, this math assessment passing rate was 16% higher than for American Indian students across Arizona (**21%**) and 5% lower than for all Arizona students (**43%**). Reading assessment passing rates were lower in Parker USD, increasing slightly from **23%** of 3rd graders in the 2021-22 school year to **24%** in the 2023-24 school year. In the 2023-24 school year, this was 7% higher than for all American Indian students in Arizona (**17%**) and 15% lower than for all Arizona students (**43%**). It is important to note that standardized tests have been found to have lower cultural relevancy to non-White students, which has contributed to a disparity in achievement on standardized tests across racial and ethnic groups.⁷²

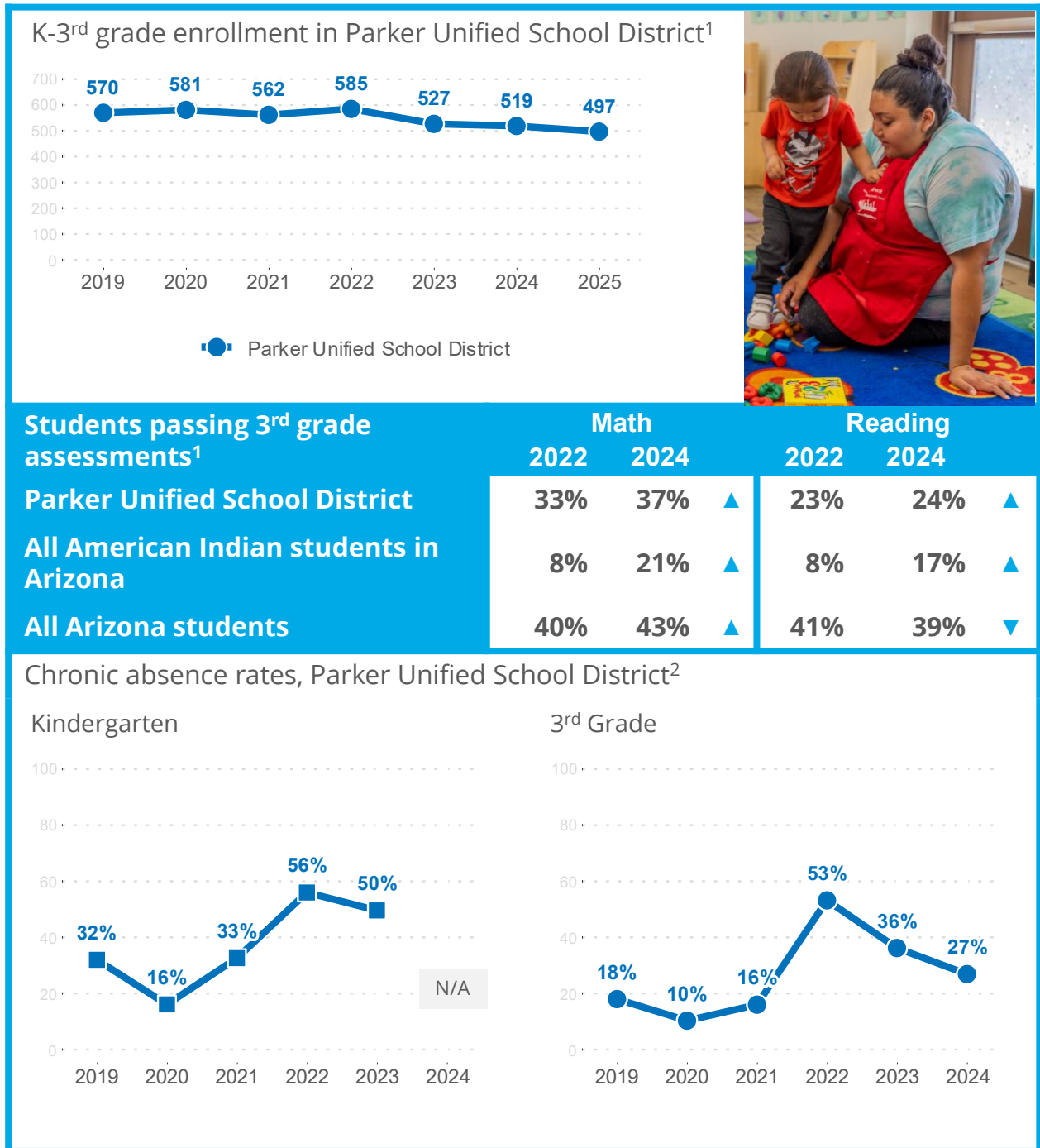
School attendance, particularly in the early grades, is another important factor in predicting academic performance, school engagement and connectedness. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% of school days in a school year, can result in a student experiencing academic difficulties and even dropping out of school entirely.⁷³ Elementary school absenteeism among Native youth may be influenced by a number of factors including a historically-rooted distrust of educational institutions, low use of culturally-relevant teaching methods and curricula as well as infrastructure-related issues (e.g., road conditions, bus availability and distances to schools).^{74, 75, 76} In addition, increasing attendance among kindergarten students presents a particular challenge because the state mandated age of school enrollment is 6 years, so absences in kindergarten are often not considered truancy, meaning schools have fewer resources to address them. In Parker USD, chronic absence rates peaked in the 2021-22 school year at over half of both kindergarteners and 3rd graders (**56%** and **53%**, respectively), and declined markedly to **27%** of 3rd graders in the 2023-24 school year. Across Arizona, chronic absenteeism was slightly lower in the 2022-23 school year (at **26%** of kindergarteners and **24%** of 3rd graders), but still higher than pre-COVID rates.⁷⁷ According to local key informants, absences among kindergarten students in the region have been consistently higher because some students are entering the school system for the first time and experience increased illness and behavioral challenges. Additionally, caregivers may not understand the importance of kindergarten. Blake Primary School employs a parent attendance liaison, and staff shared that absences have continued to decline into the 2025-26 school year by 12% across all elementary grades, which is a promising improvement.

Graduation and adult educational attainment

Understanding current high school graduation and dropout rates provides insight into the assets and challenges faced by a community and its future workforce. In contrast to adults who dropped out of high school and even those that received a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma, adults

Figure 9.

K-12 education attendance and achievement



¹ Arizona Department of Education. (2025). [October 1 Enrollment, Graduation Rates, Dropout Rates, State Assessment dataset].

² Maricopa Association of Governments. (2026). [ReadOn Arizona MapLIT dashboard reports: enrollment, chronic absences, assessments].

Notes: Chronic absences are defined as children missing 10% or more school days. Schools reported absences data very differently in school year 2019-20 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote learning. Statewide absences data were not available for kindergarteners in school year 2023-24.

who graduated from high school have higher rates of employment, higher incomes and better overall health.⁷⁸ In the Parker Unified School District (USD), the four- and five-year graduation rate declined steadily from the 2018-19 (**88%** and **91%**, respectively) to 2022-23 (**78%** and **82%**) school year before increasing again in the 2023-24 school year (**83%** and **87%**). In the 2023-24 school year, Parker USD had higher graduation rates than the state, for both four-year (**83%** compared with **78%**) and five-year graduations (**87%** compared with **81%**).⁷⁹

In comparison to the U.S. as a whole, Arizona has a larger proportion of disconnected youth, defined as teenagers ages 16 to 19 who are neither attending school nor employed,[†] which has been linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes and higher rates of unemployment.⁸⁰ Native youth, both nationally and in Arizona, are disproportionately disconnected and therefore particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes and may need additional outreach and supports.⁸¹ Dropout rates for 7th to 12th grade students in Parker USD doubled from **3%** in the 2019-20 school year to **6%** of students in the 2023-24 school year. Across Arizona, dropout rates increased more steeply from **3%** in the 2019-20 school year to **10%** in the 2021-22 school year but have since decreased back to **6%** in the 2023-24 school year.⁸² According to local key informants, some students may drop out but eventually return to finish the credits needed for their high school diploma. Several factors can influence this decision, including encouragement from a mentor or job opportunities. Within the last decade, Colorado River Indian Tribes began requiring a high school diploma or GED for employment, which is seen to be helping with educational attainment in the region. There is also an adult correctional education program offered in the jail.

Education is a key mechanism for upward economic mobility. As educational attainment in a population increases, wages increase and rates of unemployment decrease.⁸³ Of U.S. adults working full time in 2021, median earnings for those with a bachelor's degree were \$29,000 higher than those with a high school degree.⁸⁴ Of adults ages 25 and older in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, **82%** have at least a high school education and **13%** have a bachelor's degree or more, less than half the rate of Arizona adults with a higher education degree (**33%**).⁸⁵ More than one-quarter (**27%**) of adults in the region, had some college but no degree; this includes individuals who received a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or other similar post-secondary credential. There are a number of barriers to Native American students completing higher education degrees, including academic under-preparation, poor financial assistance options, cultural isolation and invalidation, few Native American staff or faculty to act as mentors and familial conflicts about staying in their home community versus leaving for school and career

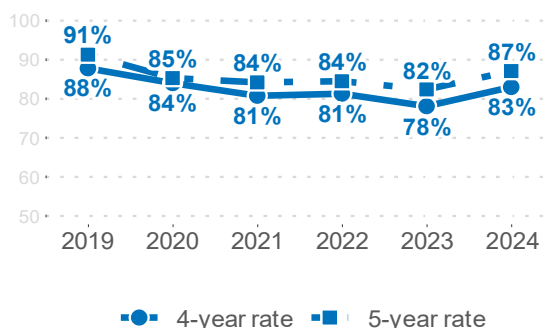
[†] Age ranges used for 'disconnected youth' vary by source, with some estimates including both teenagers ages 16-19 and young adults ages 20-24 and others focusing on only teenagers or young adults.

Figure 10.

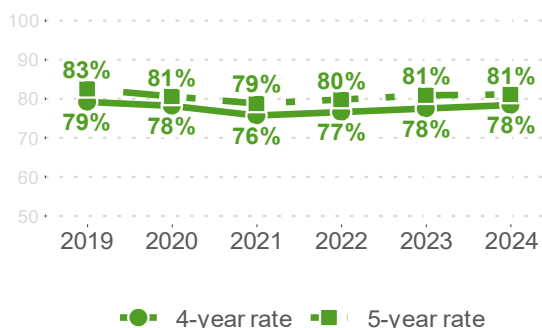
Graduation and adult educational attainment

Trends in 4-year and 5-year graduation rates¹

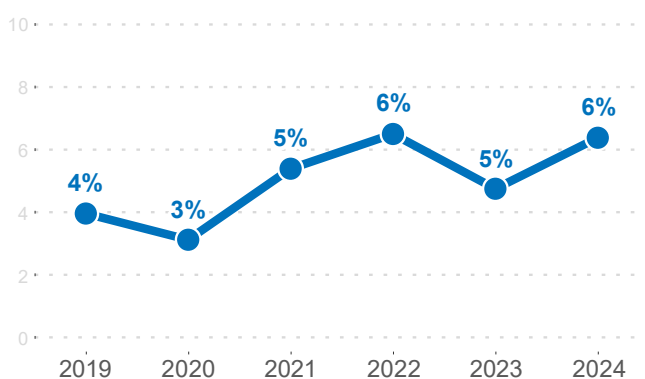
Parker Unified School District



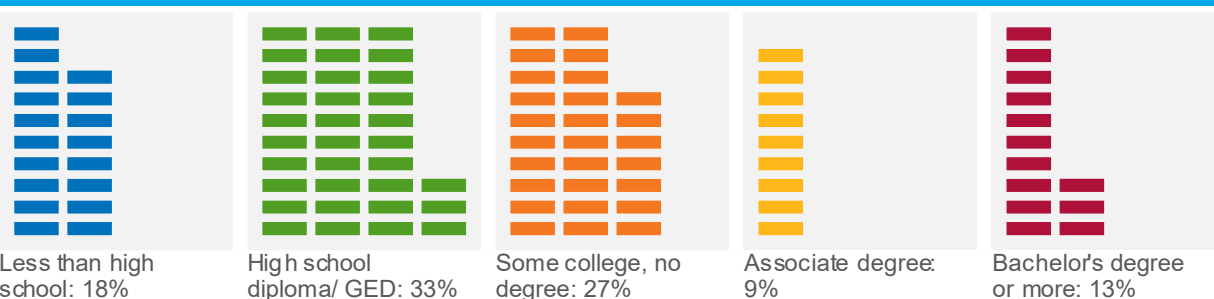
Arizona



Trends in 7th to 12th grade dropout rates, Parker Unified School District¹



Level of education of adults in Colorado River Indian Tribes Region (2023)²



¹ Arizona Department of Education. (2025). [October 1 Enrollment, Graduation Rates, Dropout Rates, State Assessment dataset].

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

Notes: Graduation rates are calculated as the percentage of students in a cohort (typically those who enter ninth grade together) who graduate within 4 or 5 years. "Dropouts are defined as students who are enrolled in school at any time during the school year, but are not enrolled at the end of the school year and did not transfer, graduate or die" [State of Arizona Department of Education Graduation, Dropout & Persistence Rate Technical Manual].

needs.⁸⁶ Within the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, local key informants felt that many teenagers and young adults are not interested in or willing to pursue higher education degrees. The **27%** of adults in the region with some college but no degree may be taking specific courses at Arizona Western College (AWC) that they need for a job or credential, and AWC also offers certificate programs which are growing in popularity. Students at the high school can also take up to 20 credits for free through AWC dual-enrollment.

Adult employment

Unemployment and underemployment^u can impact families in ways that affect children's health and well-being.⁸⁷ Unemployment can limit access to resources that support children's physical and mental health, like health insurance, and can also contribute to family stress, conflict, homelessness and child abuse.^{88, 89} Children with parents who have lost their jobs may also experience poorer school performance and behavioral issues, resulting in grade repetition, suspension or expulsion.⁹⁰ In recent years, unemployment rates in La Paz County have followed the same trend as the state, although 2-3% higher each year. Both La Paz County and Arizona saw a spike in unemployment in 2020 (**10%** and **8%**, respectively) related to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, La Paz County had an annual unemployment rate of **6%** compared with **4%** across the state. Self-report data from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) indicated that unemployment rates for the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region were slightly lower than La Paz County (**8%** compared with **11%**) and slightly lower than those across all reservation lands in Arizona (**13%**). Local key informants shared that the Colorado River Indian Tribes recently raised the minimum wage from \$15 to \$17, and that there are sufficient minimum wage jobs available in the region.

The labor force participation rate includes all people who are working (employed) or looking for work (unemployed). People not in the labor force are largely students, stay-at-home parents, retirees and people who are institutionalized. According to ACS estimates, **62%** of the population ages 16 and older was participating in the labor force in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, which was 19% higher than La Paz County (**43%**). Unemployment estimates for the region from 2018-23 combined.

According to the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the major employers in the region are BlueWater Resort & Casino, Amat Kuhwely (previously known as CRIT Farms), Colorado River Building Materials, and CRIT Sand & Gravel.⁹¹ Over the past several years, Tribal Council has secured funding to upgrade, increase water efficiency and greatly expand its farming enterprise as an

^u Underemployment means that someone works fewer hours than they would like or is in a job that does not require the skills or training that they have.

economic driver for the region.^v Many residents are also employed by the Colorado River Indian Tribes (e.g., in the library, courts, fire department, police, groundskeeping), or at Walmart, Safeway and other, personally-run farms. An assessment performed by the National Center for American Indian Development indicates that federal actions taken in 2025 will negatively impact economic development and growth on Tribal Nations. Impacts include eliminating, decreasing or deprioritizing programs that support small and Indian Country businesses, increasing operational costs related to tariffs and reducing access to jobs in the clean energy, research and public sectors, among others.⁹²

Quality early care and education programs rely on a strong workforce, but factors like low pay make it difficult to recruit and retain these educators. Early care and education is also a field with notable pay disparities, with those working as a home care provider, in a Head Start program or a public pre-K program getting paid varying amounts despite performing similar work.^w For example, the average kindergarten teacher's salary in Arizona is about twice that of an early childhood educator.⁹³ In Arizona, there were **13,260** early education professionals active in the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry^x in November 2025. The median wage for registered early education professionals in the state was **\$17/hour**, ranging from **\$21.91/hour** for directors to **\$16/hour** for assistant teachers. Notably, all of these median wages fell below the 2025 self-sufficiency standards for one adult and one infant in La Paz County (**\$24.05/hour**)⁹⁴, pointing to the reality that single parents working in early care in the region are likely to struggle to meet their basic needs. Since these rates are not higher than other jobs without higher education requirements, there is little incentive for residents to pursue early education careers. However, Head Start is able to pay for needed credentials, and there were some teachers enrolled in coursework in 2025-26. Additionally, local high school students can get their early care and education credentials through a specific dual enrollment program, with six high school students placed in classrooms and more students enrolled in their coursework in 2025-26. This program is a joint effort between Parker Unified School District and Head Start to increase the number of paraprofessionals in the region.

^v For more information about Amat Kuhwely, see <https://www.amatkuhwely.com>

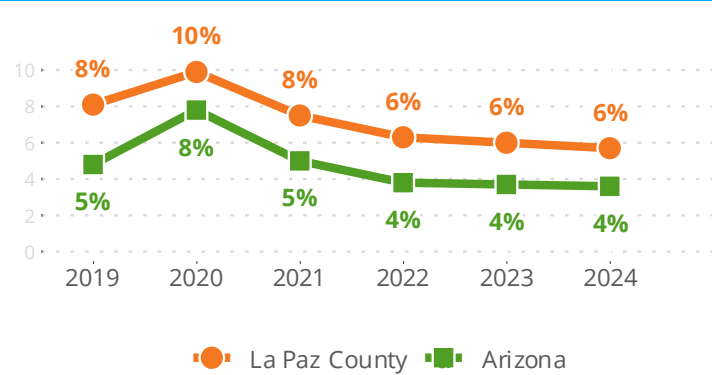
^w Programs such as Head Start and public pre-K programs receive federal funding supports that often allow for better wages and compensation in these settings compared to child care settings that don't receive these funds.

^x The Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry is Arizona's online hub for early childhood educators to track their employment, formal education, and professional development opportunities throughout their career. Early childhood educators access the registry to explore a directory of training, conferences, and other learning opportunities to support career development; fulfill state regulatory training requirements; apply for scholarships to pursue credentials, certificates, and degrees in early childhood education; and to establish career and professional development goals.

Figure 11.

Adult employment

Average annual unemployment rates in La Paz County (not seasonally adjusted) (2025)¹



Labor force participation (LFP) & unemployment (UE) rates (2023)²

	LFP	UE
Colorado River Indian Tribes Region	62%	8%
La Paz County	43%	11%
All reservations in AZ	45%	13%
Arizona	61%	5%

Major employers in the region³

BlueWater Resort & Casino

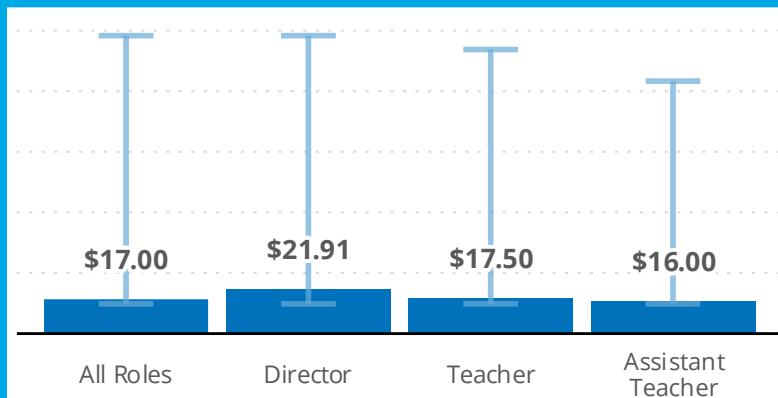
Colorado River Building Materials

Amat Kuhwely (CRIT Farms)

CRIT Sand & Gravel

Early education workforce wages in Arizona (Nov 2025)³

Median hourly wage by role for early education professionals in the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry (n = 13,260)



¹ Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity. (2025). [Local Area Unemployment Statistics & Industry Employment datasets].

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). 2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2019-2023.

³ Colorado River Indian Tribes. (2025). Business Opportunities webpage.

⁴ First Things First. (2025). [Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry dataset].

Notes: The "labor force" is all persons who are working (employed) or looking for work (unemployed). The "labor force participation rate" is the fraction of the population who are in the labor force, whether employed or unemployed. Persons not in the labor force are mostly students, stay-at-home parents, retirees, and institutionalized people. The "unemployment rate" is the fraction of the civilian labor force who are unemployed. Educator wage data from the Early Childhood Workforce Registry reflect wages from a sample of early educators active in the registry including teachers (n=6,054), assistant teachers (n=5,535), and directors (n=1,671).

CHILD DEVELOPMENT & HEALTH

Maternal and infant health

Access to quality health care can promote positive health outcomes for mothers and infants.⁹⁵ Prenatal care is associated with reduced complications during pregnancy and birth, while also providing expectant parents with an opportunity to engage with health professionals.^{96, 97} In rural Tribal communities, challenges such as hospital and specialist access, staff shortages and transportation may present barriers to receiving timely prenatal care.⁹⁸ There is also growing evidence that disparities in birth outcomes can be linked to social, structural, and environmental inequities in Indigenous communities, with disparities growing after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically.^{99, 100} In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, Tribal members can seek prenatal care services at Parker Indian Health Center, and other residents are referred to La Paz Regional Hospital or care options outside of the region. There is no labor and delivery unit within the region, so parents give birth in Lake Havasu City (40 miles), Phoenix (155 miles) or Blythe, California (50 miles). According to local key informants, Colorado River Indian Tribes Community Health Representatives program provides transportation to these locations.

The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region saw a steady, positive increase in the rate of timely prenatal care (care initiated in the first trimester) between 2019 (**40.7%**) and 2023 (**58.4%**). While these rates were consistently lower in the region than statewide (ranging from **68.9%** to **71.7%**), the gap decreased notably, from a 28.2% difference in 2019 to a 13% difference in 2023. The proportion of births to mothers in the region with no prenatal care fluctuated during this time, from a low of **3.7%** in 2019 to a high of **6.9%** in 2022. Local key informants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic likely impacted prenatal care access, especially in 2020 to 2022, due to restrictions and caution around in-person contact.

Outside of access to adequate prenatal care, other risk factors like low birth weight and preterm birth can impact child health outcomes.¹⁰¹ Low birth weight births (weighing less than 5 pounds and 8 ounces or 2,500 grams) and preterm births (those delivered before 37 weeks of pregnancy) can result in cognitive, respiratory and gastrointestinal issues as well as increased risk of diabetes and are one of the largest drivers of infant mortality in the U.S.¹⁰² Between 2019 and 2023, with the exception of 2021, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region had a higher proportion of low birth weight births (**9.0% - 12.4%**) and preterm births (**11.9% - 17%**) than Arizona (**7.4% - 8.1%** and **9.3% - 10%**, respectively). The region did not meet the Healthy People 2030^y target for preterm

^y Healthy People identifies science-based targets to guide national health promotion and disease prevention efforts. For more information see https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/healthy_people/index.htm

births (no more than **9.4%**) during this period, while Arizona only met the target in 2019 (**9.3%**). Local experts drew a connection between poor birth outcomes and other health disparities in the region including nutrition, poor living conditions, substance use and the transient nature of the community as people move for jobs.

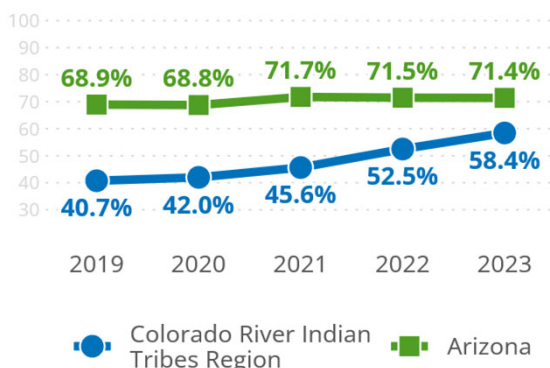
Teenage parents often experience increased stress and hardship in comparison to older parents and other non-parent teenagers. They are less likely to complete high school or college and more likely to maintain a lower socioeconomic status and require public assistance to make ends meet.^{103, 104, 105, 106, 107} In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, births to teenaged mothers increased from 2021-2022 (**8.9%**) to 2022-2023 (**10%**),^z remaining above the statewide trend in the same time period (**4.9%** to **4.5%**). This is consistent with a recent Health Profile of American Indian and Alaska Native population, which shows that births to teenaged mothers are more common among American Indian/Alaska Native populations in Arizona than in the overall population.¹⁰⁸

^z Please note that the total number of births in the region each year is small (between 49 and 69 from 2018-2023), so percentages may appear to vary more from year to year.

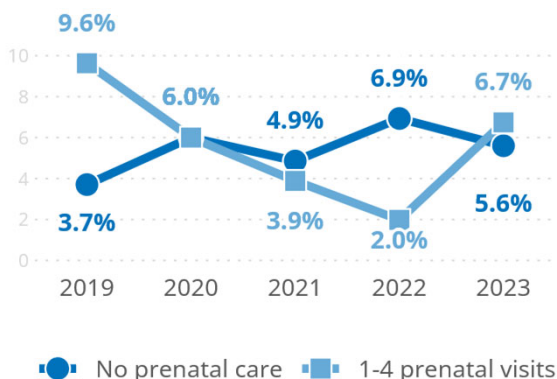
Figure 12.

Maternal and infant health

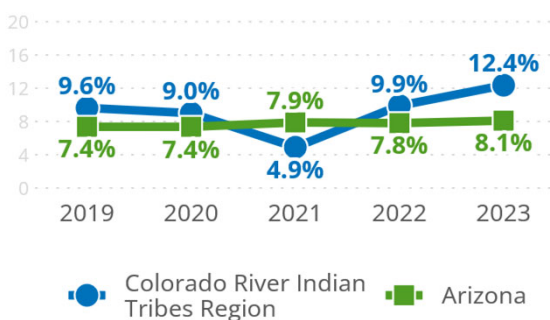
Births to mothers who began prenatal care in the first trimester¹



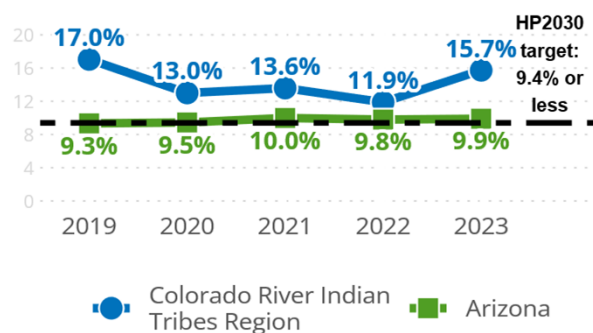
Births to mothers with inadequate prenatal care¹



Low birth weight births (less than 2,500 grams)¹



Preterm births (less than 37 weeks gestation)^{1,2}



Births to teenaged mothers¹ (ages 19 and younger)

	2020-2021	2022-2023	
Colorado River Indian Tribes Region	8.9%	10.0%	▲
Arizona	4.9%	4.5%	▼

¹ Arizona Department of Health Services. (2025). [Vital Statistic dataset].

² Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). [Healthy People 2030 Objectives: MICH-02, MICH-07].

Access to care and service navigation

In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, health care services are available through the county-operated La Paz Regional Hospital and the Indian Health Service (IHS)-operated Parker Indian Health Center. In 2024, Parker Indian Health Center served **369** children birth to age 5 and provided **524** well-care visits for children and adolescents ages 3 to 21. These numbers likely include children enrolled in other tribes, because Parker Indian Health Center also serves members of Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Havasupai Tribe and Moapa Paiute Tribe (in Nevada).¹⁰⁹ Besides Parker Indian Health Center, Colorado River Indian Tribes members access care at Phoenix Indian Medical Center or another contracted, private provider in the area.

Health insurance coverage is an important indicator of whether families can access, afford and utilize medical care. This includes access to well-child visits and developmental screenings at a lower cost. Members of federally-recognized Tribes can access health care services provided through IHS and/or Tribally-administered health care facilities without needing insurance. However these services are estimated to be underfunded in relation to the per capita need—higher rates of Medicaid enrollment can help supplement funding through services reimbursement and provide members with more care options.¹¹⁰ Arizona’s Medicaid program, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) is a major source of health insurance in the Colorado River Indian Tribes region. In 2023, the majority of births (**70.8%**) in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region were paid for by AHCCCS.¹¹¹ However, the number of children birth to age 5 enrolled in AHCCCS in the region has declined in recent years, decreasing from a high of **541** children in 2021 to **369** children in 2024. Even with this decline, these data suggest that more than half of all young children in the region have AHCCCS insurance coverage. According to local key informants, Parker Indian Health Center has AHCCCS coordinators to assist patients with enrolling in the program, providing participants with more options for care and increasing services reimbursement for the IHS facility.

Well-child visits provide scheduled opportunities for pediatricians to monitor growth and development, administer immunizations, observe familial dynamics and provide guidance to caregivers on essential topics and emerging milestones.^{112, 113, 114} In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, only about a third (**36%**, $n = 133$) of young children birth to age 5 with AHCCCS insurance coverage had a claim for a comprehensive well-child visit in 2024. However, **204** children had at least one appointment with a primary care provider (PCP) billed to AHCCCS. The number of children with PCP visits has declined slightly in the region from a high of **273** in 2021, mirroring declines in the overall number of children with AHCCCS insurance coverage.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that providers ask parents about developmental concerns at all infant and well-child visits and have parents complete a

standardized developmental screen at the 9-, 18- and 30-month appointments.¹¹⁵ Developmental challenges are more frequently undiagnosed and untreated among American Indian and Alaska Native children, partly due to the lack of screening tools that incorporate cultural, economic and geographic context.¹¹⁶ In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, **43** young children were provided developmental screenings through a Head Start program in program year 2024, and **38** children birth to 5 had a developmental screening covered by AHCCCS.^{aa} Local experts indicated that Parker Indian Health Center currently contracts out developmental screenings to private providers due to a shortage of IHS providers.

Oral health is a fundamental component of overall health, well-being and self-confidence. Children with dental pain and lower oral health-related quality of life have more school absences and worse academic performance.^{117, 118, 119} Preventative dental care services, such as the application of topical fluoride and dental sealants, are recommended for children to prevent tooth decay.^{120,121} Required for federal agencies, the IHS sets target performance indicators related to oral health. The targets support the Healthy People 2030 oral health conditions targets.¹²² The Colorado River Indian Tribes Region met and far exceeded IHS targets for topical fluorides (at least **21.2%**) and dental sealants (at least **9.9%**) in 2023 and 2024, with close to one-third of children receiving topical fluorides (**33.6%** and **31.4%**) and around one-fifth of children receiving dental sealants (**18.6%** and **21.7%**). Local key informants attributed these positive trends to home visitation programs, Head Start, border health events and even a partnership with Arizona Public Broadcast Services (PBS) to improve young child oral and physical health. Among children birth to age 5 with AHCCCS coverage in the region, **21%** had an annual dental visit and **19%** had a topical fluoride application billed to AHCCCS in 2024.

^{aa} Please note that developmental screenings are frequently included in well-child visits and may not always be billed for separately. There may be additional children who received developmental screenings as part of well-child visits who are not reflected in this number.

Figure 13.

Access to care and service navigation

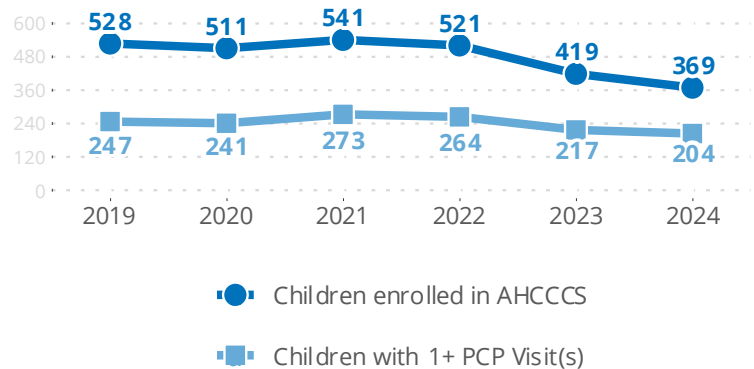
369

children birth to age 5 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region were served at IHS facilities in Parker (2024)¹

524

well-care visits for children and adolescents at IHS facilities in Parker (2024)¹

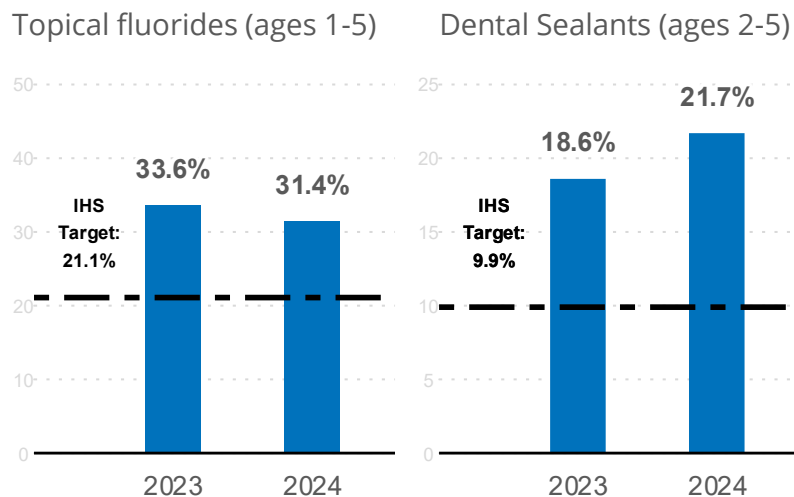
AHCCCS-enrolled children birth to age 5 and children with 1+ primary care provider (PCP) visit(s) billed to AHCCCS²



36%

of children birth to age 5 enrolled in AHCCCS in the region had a well-child visit claim in 2024 (claims data, 2024)²

Oral health services provided at IHS facilities¹



Developmental screenings for children birth to age 5 in the Colorado River Tribes Region

Head Start (2024) ³	43
AHCCCS (claims data, 2024) ²	38

¹ Indian Health Service. (2025). [Maternal and Child Health dataset].
² ASU CHiR. (2025). [AHCCCS claims dataset].
³ Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].
Note: AHCCCS data reflect children birth to age 5 with approved insurance claims– these data may not reflect all care provided in the region.

Immunization and child mortality

Immunization serves as the best method to prevent communicable childhood diseases in children and their communities. When enough children are immunized, the protection even extends to those who are unable or who choose not to be vaccinated.¹²³ In the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, the proportion of children ages 19-35 months seen at Parker Indian Health Center with all recommended immunizations decreased from fiscal year (FY) 2023 (**36.6%**) to FY 2024 (**31.1%**). The region's immunization rates were also lower than those seen by IHS facilities operating throughout the Phoenix Area in FY 2023 (**43.3%**) and FY 2024 (**47.2%**). However, it appears that many young children in the region catch up on their required immunizations in later years. Eighty percent (**80%**) of children ages 3-4 who were enrolled in Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start were reported to be fully up-to-date on all required immunizations in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2024, and just **3%** of children had exemptions.

In Arizona, one of the required immunizations to enroll in preschool and kindergarten is measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).¹²⁴ Both the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region and Arizona had declining MMR immunization rates in kindergarteners between the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. Arizona's coverage declined slightly from **89.9%** (2022-23) to **89.3%** (2023-24), while the region's coverage declined from **93.9%** (2022-23) to **90%** (2024-25). While this is better immunization coverage than seen among younger children in the region, it also unfortunately means that MMR coverage in the region was below the threshold for herd immunity of **95%**, and neither the region nor the state met the Healthy People 2030 target of **95%** or higher.¹²⁵ This is especially concerning as Arizona has been experiencing an active measles outbreak.^{bb, 126}

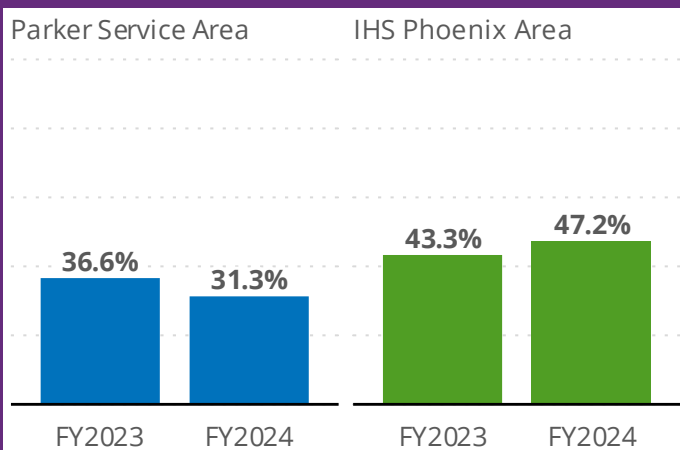
Healthy People 2030 set a target of no more than **5.0** infant deaths per 1,000 live births, which La Paz County (**12.4**) far exceeded, and the state (**5.7**) just fell short of meeting when combining data for the years 2021 through 2023. Colorado River Indian Tribes Region data were suppressed due to very small numbers of infant deaths (**fewer than 6** between 2021 and 2023). In the same time period, young child mortality was markedly higher in La Paz County (**119** deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-4) compared to the state (**29.8**). It is important to note that this rate is influenced by the small population of young children in La Paz County, just **648** children ages 1 through 4 according to the 2020 Census.¹²⁷ A very small number of deaths in the region can thus result in a much larger rate than in a region with a large number of young children.

^{bb} La Paz County had **0** cases of measles as of June 4, 2026. For more up-to-date case counts see <https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/measles/index.php>

Figure 14.

Immunization and child mortality

Children ages 19-35 months seen at IHS with all recommended immunizations¹



80%

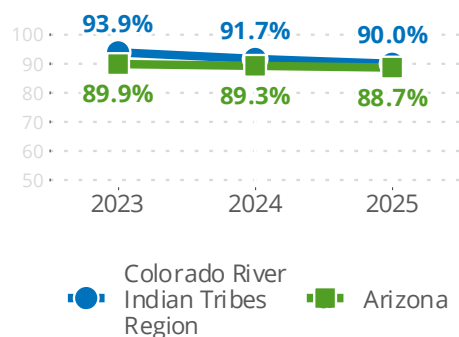
of children (ages 3-4) enrolled in Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start were reported to be fully up-to-date on all required immunizations

(2024)²

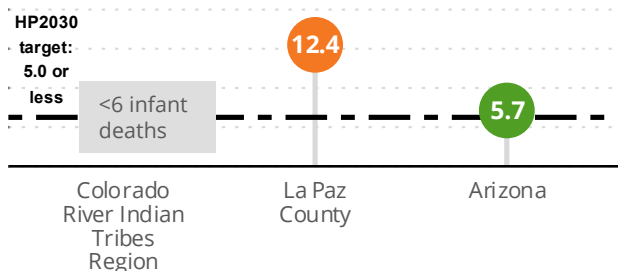
*3% of children had immunization exemptions



Kindergarten MMR immunization rates³



Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births (2021-2023 combined)^{3,4}



Young child mortality rate per 100,000 children ages 1-4 (2021-2023 combined)³

La Paz County

119.0

Arizona

29.8

¹ Indian Health Service. (2025). [Maternal and Child Health dataset].

² Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].

³ Arizona Department of Health Services. (2025). [Vital Statistics dataset].

⁴ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). [Healthy People 2030 Objectives: MICH-02, MICH-07].

Young children with special needs

Timely connection with early intervention services— such as speech, physical, occupational and behavioral therapy— can shape school readiness and the developmental path of young children with medical conditions, developmental delays and even certain risk factors for delays.¹²⁸ In Arizona, the Department of Economic Security's (DES) Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP), the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) Early Childhood Special Education Program each play a role in providing services to families with children who have special needs. AzEIP^{cc} provides early intervention and a variety of supportive services to families of children birth to age 2 with developmental delays or disabilities.¹²⁹ Children who receive a diagnosis of autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, cognitive or intellectual disability or down syndrome may also become eligible for services through DDD.^{dd} In state fiscal year (SFY) 2023 and 2024 combined, **10** children birth to age 5 were served by AzEIP and/or DDD in the region.

In SFY 2024, children birth to age 2 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region were most frequently referred to AzEIP by physicians (**67%**), with much smaller proportions referred by a hospital or health facility (**13%**), a health or service agency (**7%**), a parent or family member (**5%**) or the Department of Child Safety (DCS) (**4%**). Just over one-third (**36%**) of referred children were found eligible or received services, while **18%** were assessed and found not eligible. Often children who are not eligible for AzEIP could still benefit from services, but families in the region who are denied from AzEIP may not know where to go next.

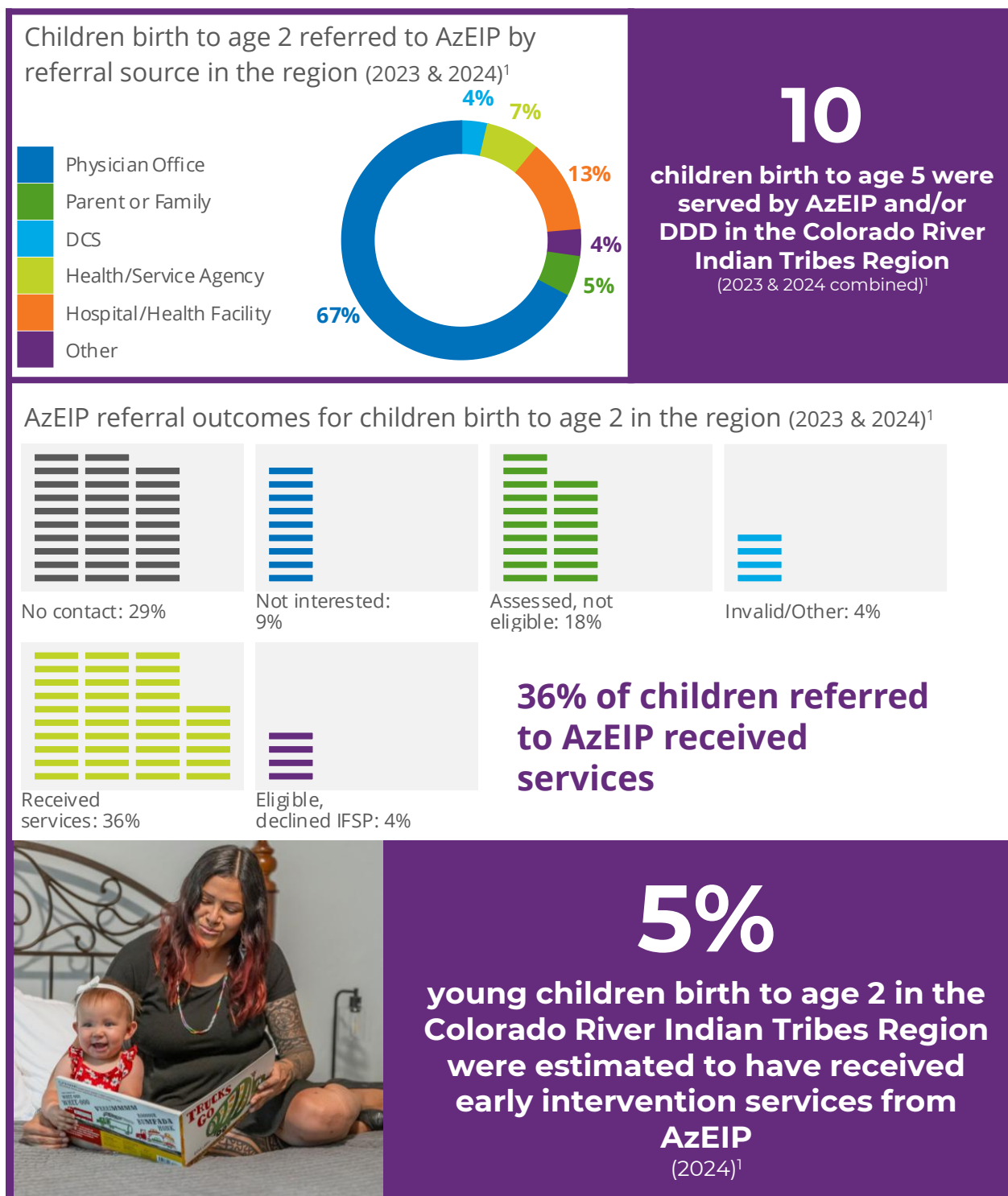
More than a third (**38%**) of referred families either could not be reached (**29%**) or were not interested in services when offered (**9%**). Across the state, a lower proportion (**19%**) of referred families could not be reached.¹³⁰ Local key informants indicated that many community members use prepaid phone plans, and when those run out their phone number changes. Other programs have had better success with asking for a backup contact as well as reaching out via Facebook messenger or other social media platforms. Even if children are found eligible, traveling to Phoenix, Lake Havasu City or Bullhead City for services poses a significant barrier for families. Finally, fear and stigma around having a child with special needs is still a common problem, within and outside of the region. Recent research on developmental screenings systems in Native communities emphasizes the importance of ensuring parents understand the goals and screening

^{cc} For more information on AzEIP (which is a division of the Department of Economic Security), visit <https://www.azdes.gov/azeip/>

^{dd} For more information on DDD (which is a division of the Department of Economic Security), visit <https://des.az.gov/services/disabilities/developmental-disabilities>

Figure 15.

Young children with special needs



¹ Arizona Department of Economic Security. (2024). [Arizona Early Intervention Program & Division of Developmental Disabilities datasets].

Note: Data on young children receiving services reflect the Oct 1 snapshot of AzEIP services, not a cumulative total throughout the year.

process, building trust between parents and screening providers and ensuring clear communication and cultural competency throughout the screening and referral process.¹³¹

Overall, in SFY 2024 **5%** of young children birth to age 2 in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region were estimated to receive early intervention services from AzEIP. This is a larger proportion than that seen across the state (**2.5%**) and surpasses national trends (**4.3%**),¹³² though national research suggests that closer to 15% of young children would benefit from early intervention.^{133, 134} Local experts felt that home visitation programs could help bridge this gap in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region. Home visitation can help by identifying delays that caregivers may be missing and providing needed intervention to children with mild to moderate delays. Young children missing out on early intervention services are more likely to require supports when they get to school, a pattern noted by school staff in the region.

Preschool to 3rd grade students with special needs

As a child with special needs approaches age 3, they can be transferred from AzEIP to the Early Childhood Special Education Program to receive services through their local education agency (LEA).^{ee} In Parker Unified School District (PUSD), Blake Primary School's Exceptional Student Services program employs a number of administrative, coordinating and service-providing staff,^{ff} and the kindergarten class is able to have a 1:1 ratio of teachers/aides to students with disabilities. Between the 2017-18 and 2021-22 school years, the number of preschool students enrolled in special education Blake Primary School ranged from **24** to **34** students.^{gg} Special education enrollment in kindergarten through 3rd grades increased during this time, from **97** students in the 2017-18 school year to **128** students in the 2021-22 school year.^{hh}

Of the preschoolers (ages 3-5) with disabilities enrolled during the 2021-22 school year, **75%** were diagnosed with a developmental delay (DD), **17%** with a speech or language impairment (SLI) and **4%** with preschool severe delay (PSD).ⁱⁱ Among kindergarten through 3rd grade students receiving special education services at PUSD schools in the 2021-22 school year, there was a more even

^{ee} For more information on ADE's Early Childhood Special Education program, visit <https://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/early-childhood-special-education> and <https://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/early-childhood-special-education-child-find>

^{ff} For more information about Exceptional Student Services, see <https://www.parkerusd.org/page/ess-department>.

^{gg} In the 2021-22 school year, this represented 75% of the total enrolled preschoolers at Blake Primary School.

^{hh} In the 2021-22 school year, this represented 22% of the total enrolled kindergarten through 3rd graders in Parker Unified School District.

ⁱⁱ Across Arizona in the 2021-22 school year, 43% of preschoolers with disabilities were diagnosed with developmental delay, 30% with speech or language impairment and 24% with preschool severe delay (up from 20% in 2019-20).

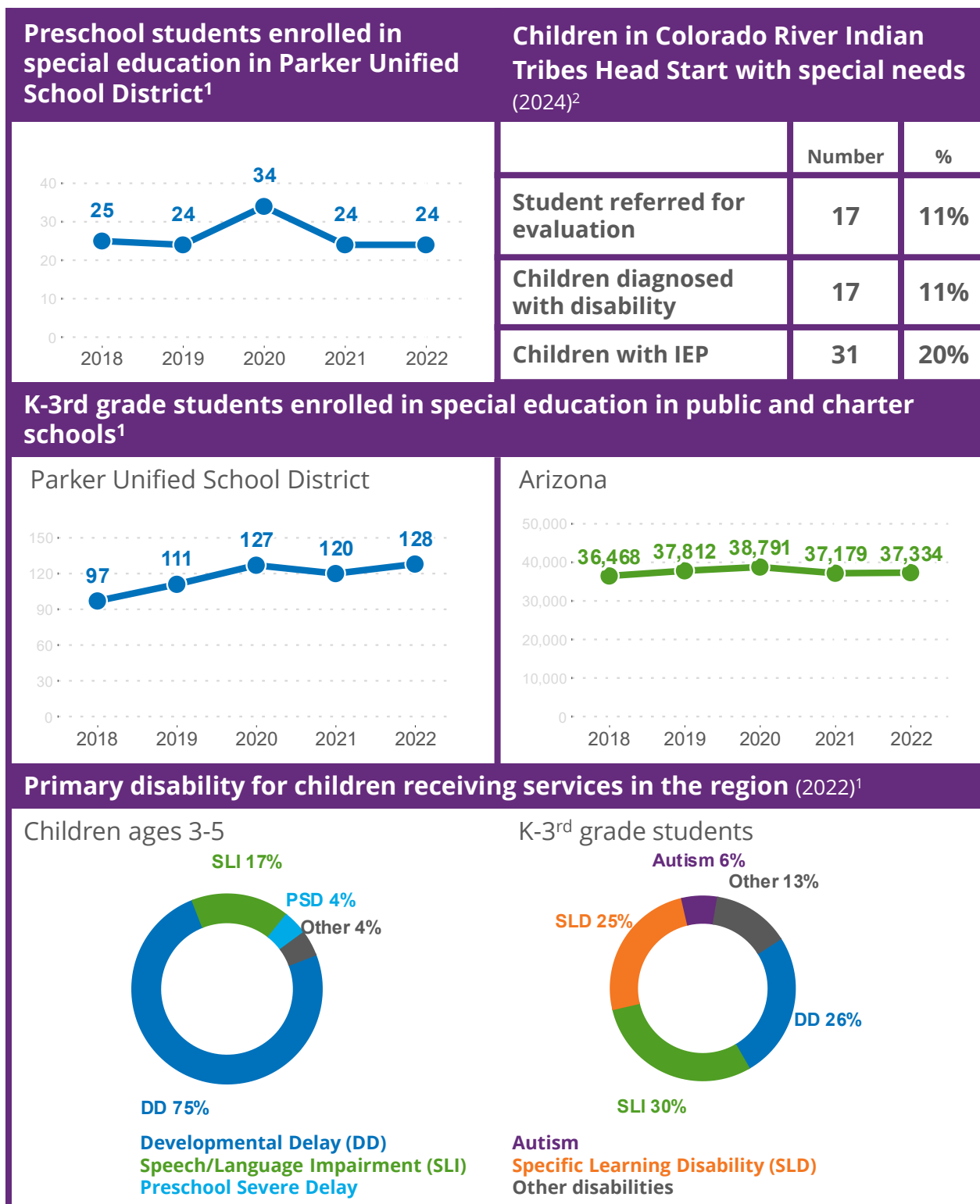
distribution of students with a developmental delay (**26%**), speech or language impairment (**30%**) and specific learning disability (**25%**), with a smaller proportion of children diagnosed with autism (**6%**).

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood education program for children whose families meet Department of Health and Human Services income eligibility guidelines. The program offers a broad range of individualized services in the areas of education and child development, special education, health services, nutrition and parent/family development.^{jj} When new preschool age students enroll in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Head Start program, they receive a developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, a widely-used and validated screening tool for young children. Students identified through this process can be further assessed and enrolled in an individualized education program (IEP) to provide specialized developmental and education supports to help them thrive. In federal fiscal year 2024, **31** children ages 3-5 were enrolled in Head Start with an IEP, representing **20%** of students cumulatively enrolled in the program. Notably, these numbers are much higher than the number of children receiving early intervention services through AzEIP, which again suggests that there may be more children who would benefit from early identification of developmental concerns and services who are currently not served until they enroll in Head Start or preschool.

^{jj} Office of Head Start, *Administration for Children and Families* (2026). 1302.33 Child screenings and assessments. Head Start Program Performance Standards. Accessed at <https://www.headstart.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-33-child-screenings-assessments>

Figure 16.

Preschool to 3rd grade students with special needs



¹ Arizona Department of Education. (2023). [Exceptional Student Services dataset].

² Office of Head Start. (2025). [2022-2024 Program Information Report].

Note: The "Other disabilities" category includes children with hearing impairment, visual impairment, or deaf-blindness for preschool and chronic medical conditions, intellectual disabilities, or multiple disabilities for children in K-12 settings.

MAPS & METHODS

Methods

U.S. Census and American Community Survey Data. The U.S. Census^{kk} is an enumeration of the population of the United States conducted every ten years, and includes information about housing, race, and ethnicity. The 2020 U.S. Census data are available by census block. There are about 108,000 inhabited blocks in Arizona, each with an average population of 66 people. The 2020 U.S. Census data for the region presented in this report were drawn from the Census Geography for the Arizona portion of the Colorado River Indian Reservation.

The American Community Survey (ACS)^{ll} is a survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau each month by mail, telephone and face-to-face interviews. It covers many different topics, including income, language, education, employment and housing. ACS data are available by census tract. Arizona is divided into approximately 1,750 census tracts, each with an average population of 3,900 people. ACS data for the region were drawn from the Census Geography for the Arizona portion of the Colorado River Indian Reservation. The most recent and most reliable ACS data are averaged over the past five years; those are the data included in this report. They are based on surveys conducted from 2019 to 2023. In general, the reliability of ACS estimates is greater for more populated areas. Statewide estimates, for example, are more reliable than county-level estimates.

First Things First (FTF) strategy data. Data related to FTF-funded strategies were provided for this report by FTF staff. These data included regional estimates of oral health indicators and hearing, vision, socio-emotional and developmental screening reach, zip code-level service data for home visitation programs, statewide workforce registry wage data and provider-level Quality First participation and enrollment data. The vendor used an apportioning file provided by FTF to create regional estimates of home visitation services from the zip-code level file.

Early education and service data from the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). Data related to child care assistance, Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) referrals, outcomes and services, and Division of Developmental Disabilities services were provided by DES. These data were geocoded to regions and sub-regions by staff at DES using a custom shapefile provided by the vendor.

Health data from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). Data related to births, infant and maternal health, immunization rates at child care and school facilities, infant and child

^{kk} For more information, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census.html>

^{ll} For more information, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html>

mortality and enrollment and participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) were provided by ADHS. All data apart from immunization data were geocoded to regions and sub-regions by staff at ADHS using a custom shapefile provided by the vendor. The vendor geocoded child care and school facilities to regions using addresses or coordinates provided in the immunization datasets to create custom immunization coverage estimates.

Health data from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). FTF partnered with the Arizona State University Center for Health Information and Research (CHiR) to create custom tabulations of health claims data for young children birth to age 5 enrolled in AHCCCS health care plans. These estimates, at the state, county, regional and sub-regional levels, were provided to the vendor for inclusion in this report.

Health data from the Indian Health Service (IHS). Data related to active users of IHS services and performance on select Government Performance and Results Act indicators related to child health were provided by the Indian Health Service Phoenix Area Office. Data for each region reflect the population seeking services in specific service units, clinics and service areas; these data do not reflect affiliation or membership with a particular Tribe (e.g., any individual identified as American Indian or Alaska Native descent and belonging to the community served by IHS seen within the last three years at a specific health facility or a facility within a specific service area or service unit was counted as an active user).

Service data from the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona. Data related to enrollment and participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) were provided by the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona for each local WIC program. These data were sent to local WIC program directors, who then shared the data with the vendor.

Employment and industry data from the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Data for unemployment rates^{mm} were obtained from the OEO for counties and multi-county areas (which combine 2-4 small counties to produce a more reliable estimate).

Education data from the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). For past FTF Regional Needs and Assets reports, regional estimates for education data were obtained through a custom tabulation of unredacted data files provided by ADE. Access to unredacted data files was not available for this report. Instead, publicly-available data files published by ADEⁿⁿ were used to examine trends in enrollment, assessment results, graduation and dropout rates, and data on chronic absenteeism were obtained via the Maricopa Association of Governments and ReadOn

^{mm} For more information, see <https://o eo .az.gov/labor-market/unemployment>

ⁿⁿ For more information, see <https://www.azed.gov/accountability-research/data>

Arizona MAPLit data tool.⁹⁰ Due to the frequency of data suppression in these files to protect student privacy, data could not be reliably aggregated across schools or districts to create regional estimates. Data on services for students with disabilities by grade are not publicly available for geographies smaller than the state, so custom regional estimates from the 2024 Regional Needs and Assets reports were used in this report.

Change calculations. Unless otherwise specified, changes in counts of data over time (i.e., percent increase or decrease) are calculated by subtracting the earlier number (e.g., a 2010 count) from the later number (e.g. the 2020 count) and dividing the result by the earlier number (e.g. the 2010 count). This calculation provides the percent change between the most recent count and the prior count, relative to the prior count.

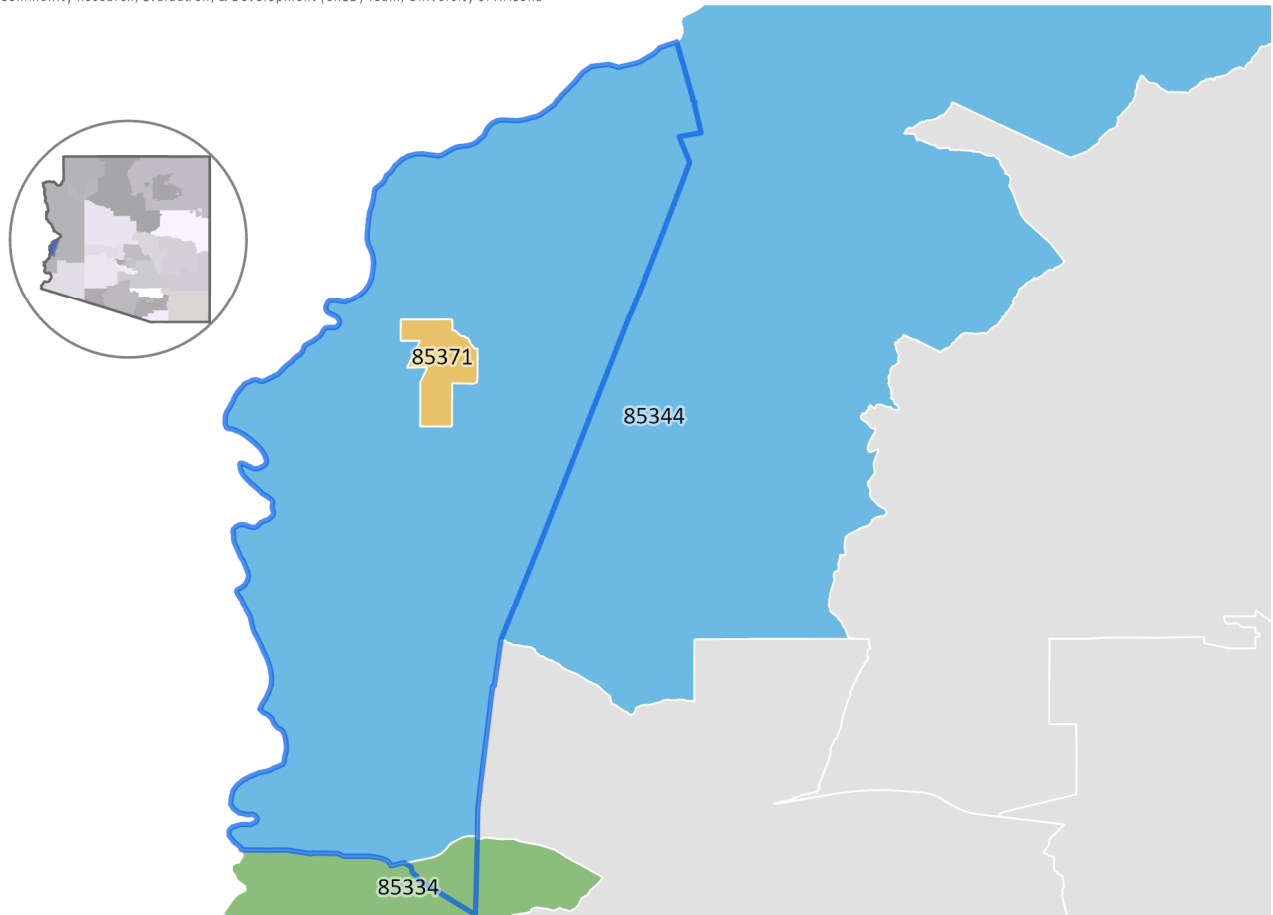
Data availability. State agency data in this report were provided to FTF by agency staff through a data request process initiated in February 2025 and extending to March 2026. Wherever possible, data were requested for multiple years to allow for the visualization of trends as well as for the most recent year available. However, due to both the constraints of agency staff and agency-maintained datasets as well as the timing of requests, not all data were available on the same time and geographic scales. This report attempts to include the most recent and complete data available, with notes indicating where data were not available for particular time periods or geographies.

Data suppression. To protect the confidentiality of program participants, the FTF Data Dissemination and Suppression Guidelines preclude reporting of social service and early education programming data if the count is less than 10 and data related to health or developmental delay if the count is less than 6. In addition, some data received from state agencies are suppressed according to their own guidelines. ADHS does not report counts between 1 and 5; DES does not report counts between 1 and 9; ADE does not report counts less than 11. Additionally, ADE requires suppression of the second-smallest value or the denominator in tables where a reader might be able to use the numbers provided to calculate a suppressed value. Throughout this report, information which is not available because of suppression guidelines is indicated by entries of "<6" or "<10" or "<11" for counts, or "DS" (data suppressed) for percentages. Data are sometimes not available for particular regions, either because a program did not operate in the region or because data are only available at the county level. Cases where data are not available will be indicated by an entry of "N/A", "NA" or a note that states "data not available."

⁹⁰ For more information, see <https://geo.azmag.gov/maps/readonaz/>

Map of Zip Codes in the Region

Map by Community Research, Evaluation, & Development (CRED) Team, University of Arizona



Source: Custom map by the Community Research, Evaluation & Development (CRED) Team using shapefiles obtained from First Things First and the U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (<https://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/geo/shapefiles/index.php>)

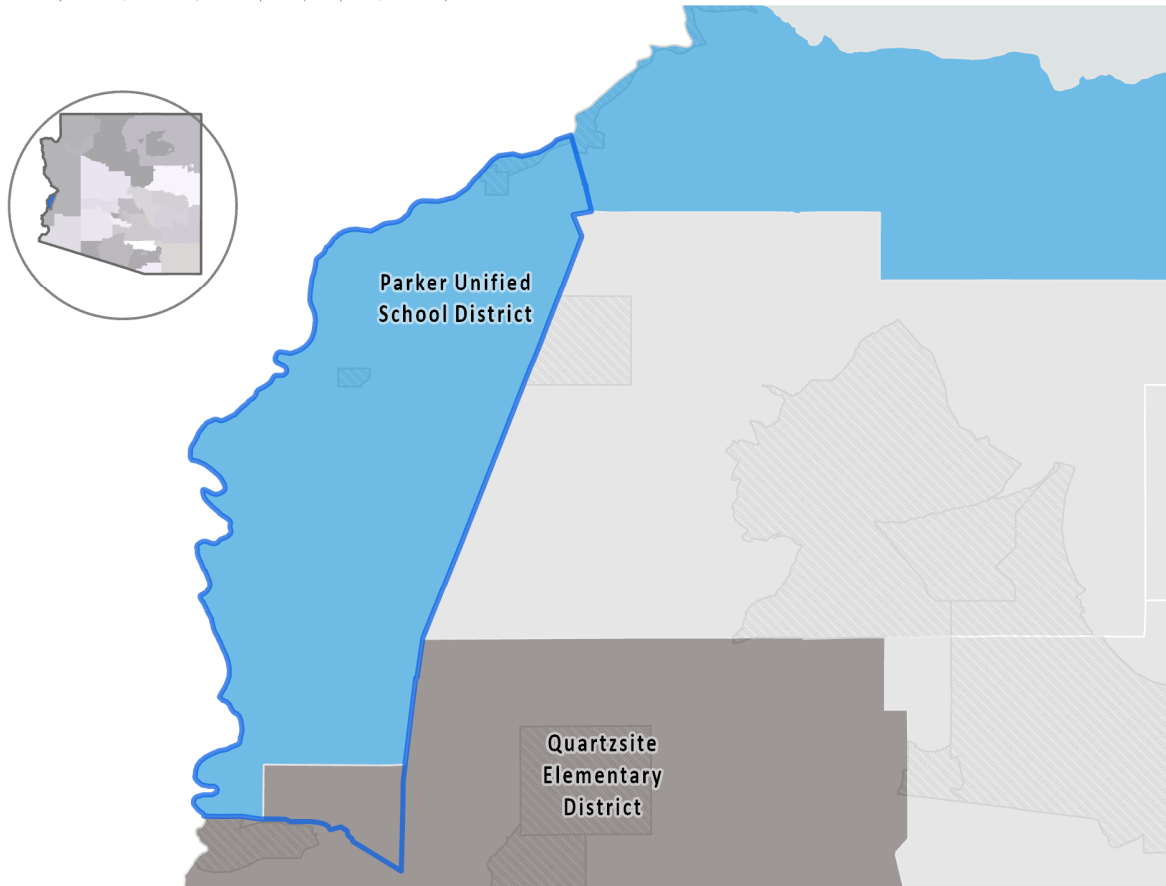
Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region

Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA)	Population (all ages)	Percent of this ZCTA's total population living in the Colorado River Indian Tribes Region	This ZCTA is shared with
Colorado River Indian Tribes Region	7,036		
85344	6,770	74%	La Paz/Mohave Region
85371	266	100%	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2023). 2020 Decennial Census, Demographic and Housing Characteristics, Table P1.

Map of School Districts in the Region

Map by Community Research, Evaluation, & Development (CRED) Team, University of Arizona



Source: Custom map by the Community Research, Evaluation & Development (CRED) Team using shapefiles obtained from First Things First and the U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (<https://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/geo/shapefiles/index.php>)

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