

 **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Phoenix North Region



2022

NEEDS AND ASSETS
REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
Population Characteristics	i
Economic Circumstances	ii
The Early Childhood System	iii
Educational Indicators.....	iv
Health	iv
Family Support	v
Conclusion.....	v
BACKGROUND AND APPROACH.....	1
Introduction	1
Description of the Region	2
Data Sources and Methodologies.....	4
Population Characteristics.....	6
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS	7
Why it Matters	7
Intersection with Poverty.....	7
What the Data Tell Us	8
Total Population	8
Race/ Ethnicity and Language.....	10
Family Composition.....	12
Key Takeaways	14
Economic Circumstances	16
ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES	17
Why it Matters	17
What the Data Tell Us	17
Income and Poverty	17
Employment.....	23
Housing.....	25
Transportation	28
Economic Supports	29
Key Takeaways	33
The Early Childhood System	34
THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM.....	35
Why it Matters	35
Intersection with Poverty.....	35
What the Data Tell Us	36
Early Care and Education	36
Families with Children with Special Needs.....	41
Key Takeaways	42
Educational Indicators.....	44
EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS	45
Why it Matters	45
Intersection with Poverty.....	45
What the Data Tell Us	46

K-12 Enrollment.....	46
Third Grade Test Scores.....	46
Educational Attainment.....	48
Key Takeaways.....	49
Health.....	51
HEALTH.....	52
Why it Matters.....	52
Intersection with Poverty.....	52
What the Data Tell Us.....	53
Mothers Giving Birth.....	53
Infant and Child Health.....	55
Behavioral Health.....	58
Key Takeaways.....	59
Family Support.....	60
FAMILY SUPPORT.....	61
Why it Matters.....	61
Intersection with Poverty.....	61
What the Data Tell Us.....	61
Child Welfare.....	62
Family Support Programs.....	63
Community Risk.....	65
Key Takeaways.....	67
Summary and Conclusions.....	68
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	69
Appendices.....	71
Appendix A – Population Characteristics.....	A-1
Appendix B – Economic Circumstances.....	B-1
Appendix C – The Early Childhood System.....	C-1
Appendix D – Educational Indicators.....	D-1
Appendix E – Health.....	E-1
Appendix F – Family Support.....	F-1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Phoenix, the fifth-largest city in the United States and one of the fastest-growing large cities in the nation, now has nearly 1.7 million residents. Comprised of the portions of the city generally north of Thomas Road and the unincorporated areas of Anthem and New River, Phoenix North is the most populous First Things First region in Arizona with more than 830,000 residents, including 65,000 children under six years of age.

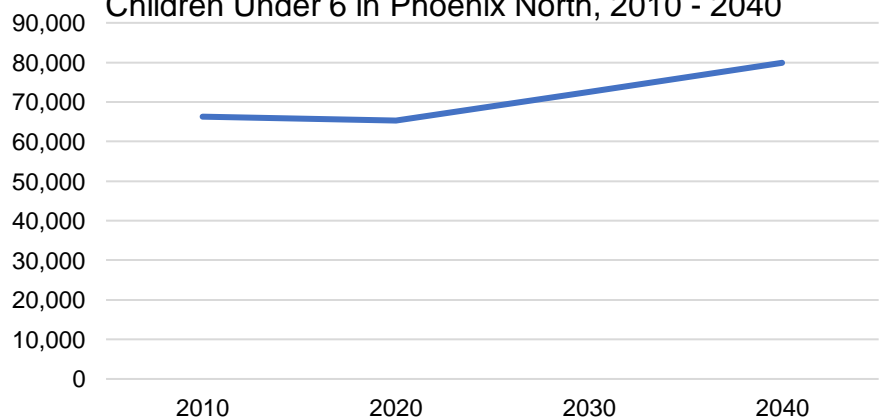
As part of a large metropolitan area, Phoenix North has a wide array of public and private resources for children and families, a variety of educational and employment options, and robust child care and health infrastructure. At the same time, the region also faces a variety of challenges common to large cities, including high costs for child care and rising housing expenses.

In many ways, the Phoenix North region is a microcosm of Arizona. For instance, the poverty rate among young children, the percentage of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in preschool, third grade English and math proficiency rates, and high school graduation rates in Phoenix North are all within one or two percentage points of the statewide figures. These statistics, however, mask significant differences across Phoenix North suggesting the need for targeted approaches to meet the varied needs across the region.

Population Characteristics

In contrast to overall population growth in the region, the number of young children declined slightly over the past decade, mirroring a nationwide decline in birth rates. Population forecasts for the next 20 years anticipate this trend will reverse and project the region will be home to nearly 80,000 children under six years of

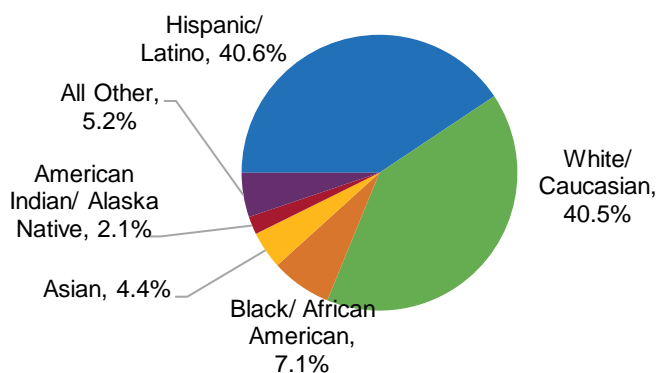
Figure 1-1: Current and Projected Population of Children Under 6 in Phoenix North, 2010 - 2040



age in 2040. Decisions regarding the types of programs funded and the design of these programs should take into account the characteristics of the region's young children and their families.

The children under the age of six years in Phoenix North are significantly more racially and ethnically diverse than the population as a whole, requiring that services be culturally appropriate. Nearly 60 percent of young children in the Phoenix North region are Hispanic/Latino, Black/ African American, Asian, or American Indian/ Native

Figure 1-2: Racial/ Ethnic Distribution of Children Under 6 in Phoenix North



Alaskan compared to 43 percent of the total population. Further, more than one-in-four residents in the region speak a language other than English at home while almost 15 percent of kindergarten through third graders attending public schools in the region are English language learners.

Given the high correlation between family composition and household income – households led by single females earn on average less than one-third of the income earned by two-parent households – service planning should take into account the varying needs of different families. In Phoenix North, almost three-quarters of households with minor children in the region include a married or cohabiting couple while 20 percent are led by single women.

Economic Circumstances

Overall, economic conditions in the region remain strong. Across the city, median family income increased from \$64,640 in 2014 to \$66,048 in 2019. Additionally, the unemployment rate in Phoenix reached a record low at the time of this publication following a surge in unemployment during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The strong economy has led to a significant decline in the percentage of young children living in poverty in the region, from 30.3 percent in 2014 to 24.4 percent in 2019. Despite this improvement, one-in-four children in Phoenix North are living in poverty, which has been shown to be associated with a large number of negative effects across most aspects of an individual’s life, including educational, employment, and health outcomes. Further, the poverty level understates the number of families in need. For example, one living wage calculator suggests that a family with two working parents and one child living in Phoenix need to earn \$55,000 to meet their needs, more than double the federal poverty level for a family of three.

Although incomes have increased and rates of poverty have declined, families in Phoenix North face surging housing costs. More than one-in-three households in the region are considered to be housing cost burdened, meaning they must spend more than 30 percent or more of their income on housing. Given an increase of more than 40 percent in rental costs since 2017, renters in Phoenix North are particularly impacted, with nearly half (47.2 percent) considered to be housing cost burdened.

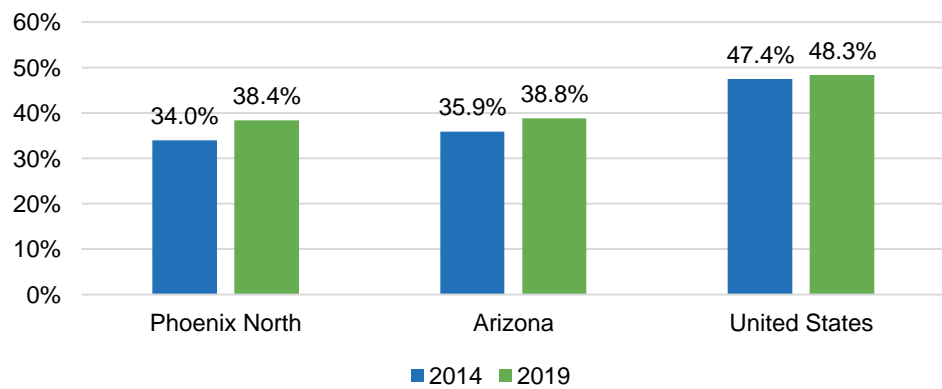
The Early Childhood System

Phoenix North benefits from a large child care provider network comprised of more than 300 licensed and certified providers with total capacity to serve more than 38,000 children under 13 years old. However, only 34 of these providers with a total of 180 slots are home-based programs, meaning families have limited access to these smaller, less costly providers. A significant share – almost 40 percent – of the total licensed and certified slots are associated with providers that participate in Quality First and have a rating of 3-Stars or higher, meaning they are considered high quality.

Since 2014, the preschool enrollment rate for three- and four-year-olds in Phoenix North increased by more than four percentage

points to 38.4 percent, a significant improvement in this key area. However, the region’s preschool enrollment rate remains significantly lower than the nationwide rate of 48.3 percent.

Figure 1-3: Preschool Enrollment Rates, 2014 - 2019



The high cost of child care continues to be a key barrier for many families. Federal guidelines suggest that child care is affordable when it does not exceed seven percent of a family’s income, but the median cost of child care in Phoenix ranges from 7 to 18 percent of the median income of Phoenix families. Publicly funded child care assistance programs, such as the DES child care subsidy and First Things First’s Quality First scholarship program, are important assets that help thousands of lower-income families in the region to afford formal child care. In 2020, these programs served more than 4,700 children in Phoenix North.

Educational Indicators

Phoenix North is home to 138 public elementary schools. This includes 93 district schools and 45 charter schools, ensuring that parents have access to a variety of educational options for their children.

Between 2014 and 2019, third grade proficiency levels within Phoenix North’s schools as measured by AzMERIT improved markedly from 41.8 percent to 46.2 percent for English language arts and from 40.5 percent to 52.3 percent for math. Despite these improvements, it remains concerning that nearly half of all thirds graders in Phoenix North do not meet minimum math standards and more than half do not meet minimum ELA standards.

High school graduation rates and college degree attainment in the region improved by more than four percentage points in recent years.

Additionally, between 2014 and 2019, the

percentage of adults 25 and older in the region with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased from 29.9 percent to 33.7 percent. Higher levels of educational attainment among adults are positively correlated with income and earning potential, which may further reduce poverty rates across the region.

Figure 1-4: Graduation Rates for the 2014 and 2019 Graduation Cohorts in Phoenix North

	4-Year	5-Year
2014 Class	75.1%	79.7%
2019 Class	79.6%	84.0%

Health

A review of health-related measures reveals both positive and troubling trends.

In terms of pregnancy and birth-related measures:

- The number of births to teen mothers declined
- NICU admissions declined
- The percentage of mothers giving birth who are overweight or obese increased from 59.1 percent to 62.3 percent
- The percentage of mothers who began prenatal care in the first trimester decreased by 3.0 percentage points

Child health indicators similarly demonstrate both negative and positive trends. Health insurance rates among children under six years-old in Phoenix North increased from 90.6 percent in 2014 to 95.6 percent in 2019. However, immunization rates decreased between 2018 and 2020. Nearly one-in-three children in Phoenix North were considered overweight or obese.

Family Support

Reports to the Department of Child Safety (DCS) for abuse and neglect in Maricopa County decreased 5.7 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021. However, this reduction is attributed to reduced contacts with mandatory reporters rather than a decline in need; in fact, the CDC reports that risk for child maltreatment has increased during the pandemic. Additionally, the overall reduction in reports was attributed only to neglect cases, while reports for physical, sexual, and emotional abuse increased by 10.1 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021.

Another concerning trend in the child welfare system is the decrease in licensed foster care homes. Between 2018 and 2021, there was a 13.7 percent decrease in the number of licensed foster care homes, with more homes closing than opening in each year. This trend may make it more challenging to place children in a family-like setting when out-of-home placement is appropriate.

Continuing a long-term trend, the violent crime rate in Phoenix decreased 5.6 percent between 2017 and 2019 and the property crime rate decreased by 7.2 percent. However, the number of calls for service related to domestic violence doubled between 2016 and 2020.

There are a number of programs that offer services and resources to families in Phoenix to strengthen their families, access parental training, and provide other supports. In general, however, these programs are only able to reach relatively modest numbers of families.

Conclusion

Many indicators have improved since the 2018 Regional Needs and Assets report, although a smaller number have experienced fewer positive trends. These findings illustrate opportunities for stakeholders in early childhood health and development systems to build on existing strengths and respond to emerging needs. With the leadership of the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council and the many assets and committed stakeholders in the community, the region is positioned to continue to build on positive trends and ensure all children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Introduction

From birth to five years, a child’s brain grows and develops more than at any other time in life. Early brain development has lifelong impacts on health, education, employment, and other outcomes. Arizona First Things First (FTF) administers programs and coordinates resources to support the development, well-being, health, and education of all Arizona’s children from birth to age five. Recognizing that every community in Arizona has its own unique strengths and challenges, the statutes establishing FTF created a regional system through which local regional partnership councils decide the areas of early childhood on which to focus their region and how to allocate the funds that flow through FTF to each region. The Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council’s priorities include:

- Improving the quality of child care and preschool programs
- Scholarships for children to access high-quality early learning
- Improving the quality of family, friend and neighbor care
- Oral health screenings and fluoride varnishes
- Developmental and sensory screenings
- Strengthening families through voluntary home visiting and family resource centers

Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 8-1161 requires each regional partnership council to publish a biannual report detailing early childhood assets, coordination opportunities, and unmet needs in their region. These regional needs and assets reports inform councils’ planning and funding decisions.

The 2022 Regional Needs and Assets Report for the Phoenix North Region has been prepared to comply with this statutory requirement. The report provides detailed, data-driven information about regional needs and assets organized around six topical domains:

- Population Characteristics
- Educational Indicators
- Economic Circumstances
- Health
- The Early Childhood System
- Family Support

Each domain is prefaced with a ‘Why it Matters’ section that highlights the importance of the domain in the context of early childhood development. Additionally, given the impact that poverty has on all aspects of children’s health and development, these sections include specific discussion of this issue.

Each domain then includes discussion of key indicators within the ‘What the Data Tells Us’ sections. As discussed below, information is gathered from multiple federal, state, and local government sources as well as other secondary sources to illustrate the needs and assets pertinent to each domain. Where possible, regional and sub-regional data are presented within the ‘What the Data Tells Us’ sections. Supplemental information for each domain is presented within the detailed appendices to this report.

Description of the Region

The Phoenix North Region consists of the portions of the City of Phoenix generally north of Thomas Road as well as the unincorporated areas of Anthem and New River.

Phoenix North is comprised of diverse neighborhoods with varying demographic compositions, strengths, and needs. Recognizing these differences, when feasible and appropriate data are presented at subregional levels that follow elementary school district boundaries.

Given its size, the Deer Valley Unified School District (DVUSD) is further divided by zip code. Figure 2-2 illustrates the sub-regional school district boundaries used in this report.

Figure 2-1: First Things First Regions

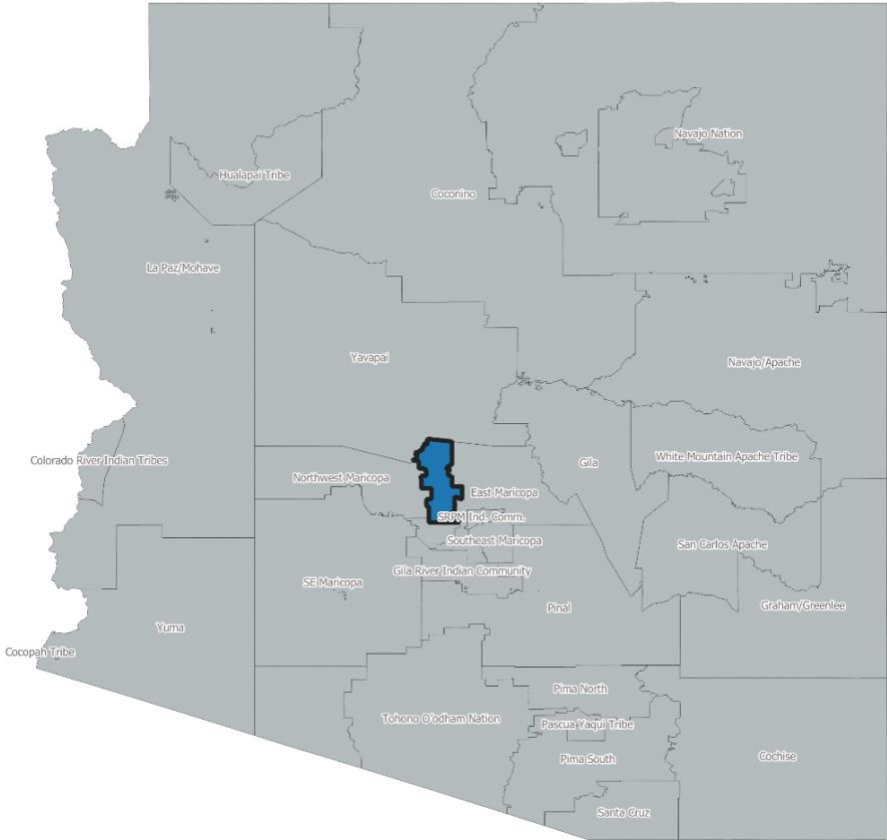
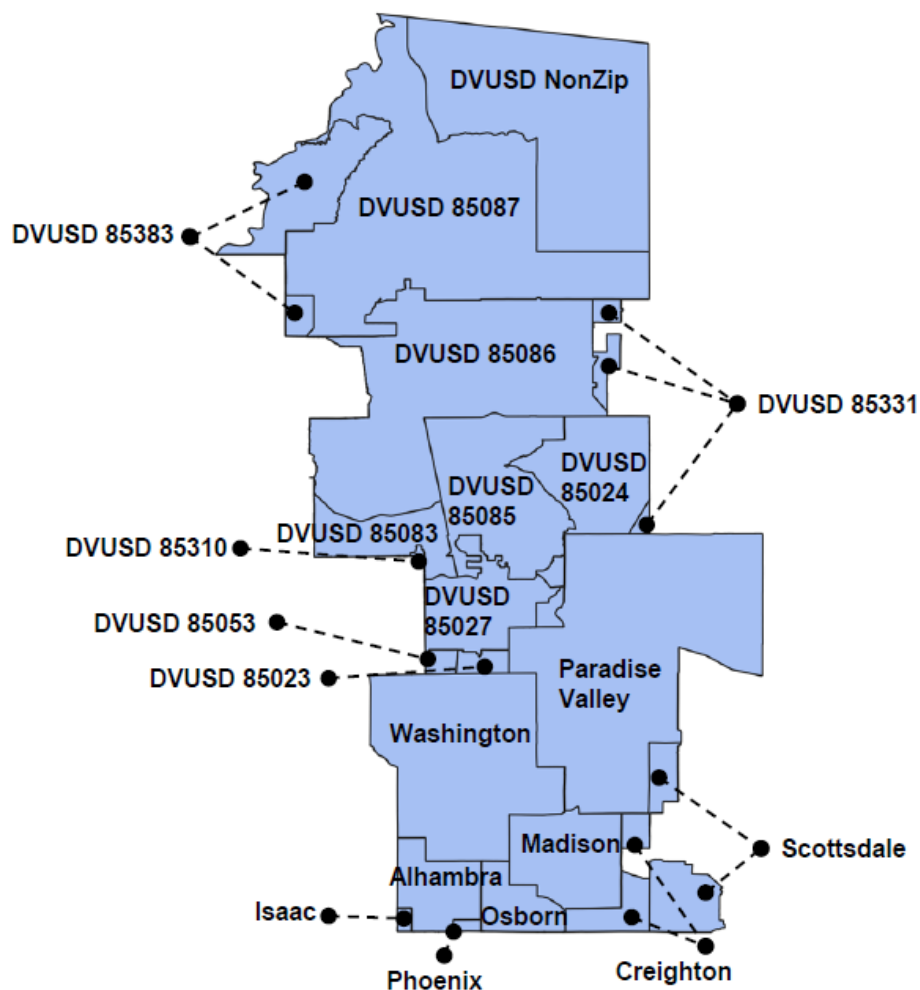


Figure 2-2: Subregional Map of Phoenix North



Large and varied communities directly impact early childhood health and development within the region, including:

- The parents and caregivers who are the primary teachers and advocates for the 65,304 children in the region
- Elected officials and government program administrators from the 10 school districts in the region, the City of Phoenix, and multiple state agencies that are responsible for establishing policy, overseeing funding, and coordinating services
- Organizations and their staff that provide early care, health, nutrition, education, and other services to young children and their families
- Businesses that may – or may not – adopt family-friendly policies for working parents

- Nonprofit organizations, which provide resources and research materials to support improvements to the system of early childhood health and development

Data Sources and Methodologies

The region's population demographics are described using data from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates (2015-2019). The ACS is conducted annually and provides detailed information at the census tract level, enabling calculations and estimates at the regional and subregional levels. However, the five-year estimates by definition reflect averages over that period, meaning data is between three and seven years out-of-date at the time of reporting.

Additional information about service levels, eligibility, caseloads, and other pertinent information was gathered by First Things First from a variety of state agencies, including the Departments of Child Safety (DCS), Economic Security (DES), Education (ADE), and Health Services (DHS).

Since many FTF regions do not follow jurisdictional boundaries, FTF developed keys to apportion data reported by census tract or zip code FTF to regions based on the land area that falls within a given region. For example, if 40 percent of a census tract's land area falls within a region, 40 percent of the population within that tract is apportioned to that region. A similar process was employed for allocating data to subregions. For caseload data from state agencies, FTF provided maps of the regions and subregions and asked the agency staff to plot their data against these maps.

A variety of other secondary data sources were identified to provide more insight into program requirements, service levels, and benchmarks. These sources are noted throughout the report.

Data and conclusions included in this report are subject to a number of limitations. Although efforts were made to report current data, some data sets (including ACS data and certain state agency caseload data) reflect 2020 or earlier and may not represent current trends that could influence decision making. In particular, the impacts of COVID-19 on the early childhood system, educational system, child health, and other dimensions have been profound, but data is not always available to quantify these impacts. Efforts were made to describe the impacts of COVID-19 across the domain areas to assist the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council with decision making and resource planning.

In some cases, data are not available at the regional or sub-regional levels. In these instances, the report provides information at the lowest level of geography possible. For example, some data are presented

for the entire City of Phoenix, Maricopa County, or even Arizona overall when lower levels of geographic data were not available.

The data presented in this report provides quantitative and qualitative information that is indicative of the state of early childhood in the Phoenix North region, but may not always represent the experience of all children within the region due to the diversity of neighborhoods and families. Additionally, the underlying causes of certain outcomes are not always known, though care was taken to conduct and report findings from supplemental research or follow-up efforts with state agencies to better understand a trend or outcome.

Given these limitations, care should be given in the interpretation of the data presented. The 2022 Regional Needs and Assets report should inform decision making, but additional resources should be leveraged as needed, including input from families, research partners, grantees, and other stakeholders.



Population Characteristics

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Why it Matters

Phoenix North is the most populous First Things First region in the State, with more than 830,000 residents, including 65,000 children under six years of age.

Strategic planning requires an understanding of the unique characteristics of these residents – their cultural preferences; their linguistic needs, ensuring services are accessible to all community members; and the broader needs of families with young children, recognizing socio-economic differences across these families. Different groups have different needs and bring varied strengths and opportunities.

The Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council can best tailor service delivery to the region by understanding “the culture of the community and...the relationships among individuals and groups within it.”¹ and assessing “how young children and their families are currently being served and prepar[ing] locally-appropriate strategies to help more children enter school ready to learn.”²

Intersection with Poverty

Although poverty cuts across large segments of society, poverty rates are higher for certain demographic groups. For example, 27 percent of single-parent households live in poverty compared to 16 percent of cohabitating parents.³ Further, single-parent families have “experienced a deterioration in their economic well-being following the recession of 2007 – 2009, and have remained in a lower state of well-being post-recession compared to pre-recession,” a fact that disproportionately impacts single mothers who are more likely to live in poverty than single fathers.⁴ Poverty rates for children under five years of age vary substantially based on race and ethnicity. For example, 13.5 percent of White/Caucasian children under five live in poverty compared to 34.1 percent of children of Hispanic descent. Strategies that help individuals and families rise out of poverty can help address these inequities.

“We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community - and this nation”

-Cesar Chavez

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

- Total population trends
- Race/ ethnicity and language
- Family Composition

Total Population

The growth – or lack thereof – in the number of young children in the region and the specific neighborhoods where these changes are occurring has important implications for service planning, impacting the resources that will be available and the areas that may be targeted.

Phoenix continues to be one of the fastest-growing large cities in the country. Phoenix North is home to an estimated 831,549 residents, including 65,304 children under six years.⁵ Since the 2010 decennial census, Phoenix North added 78,078 residents. The region’s 10.3 percent growth rate is identical to the statewide rate over the same time period. Across the United States, Phoenix continues to be among the fastest growing large cities, with the second highest growth rate among the nation’s ten largest cities over the past decade as shown in Figure 3-1.

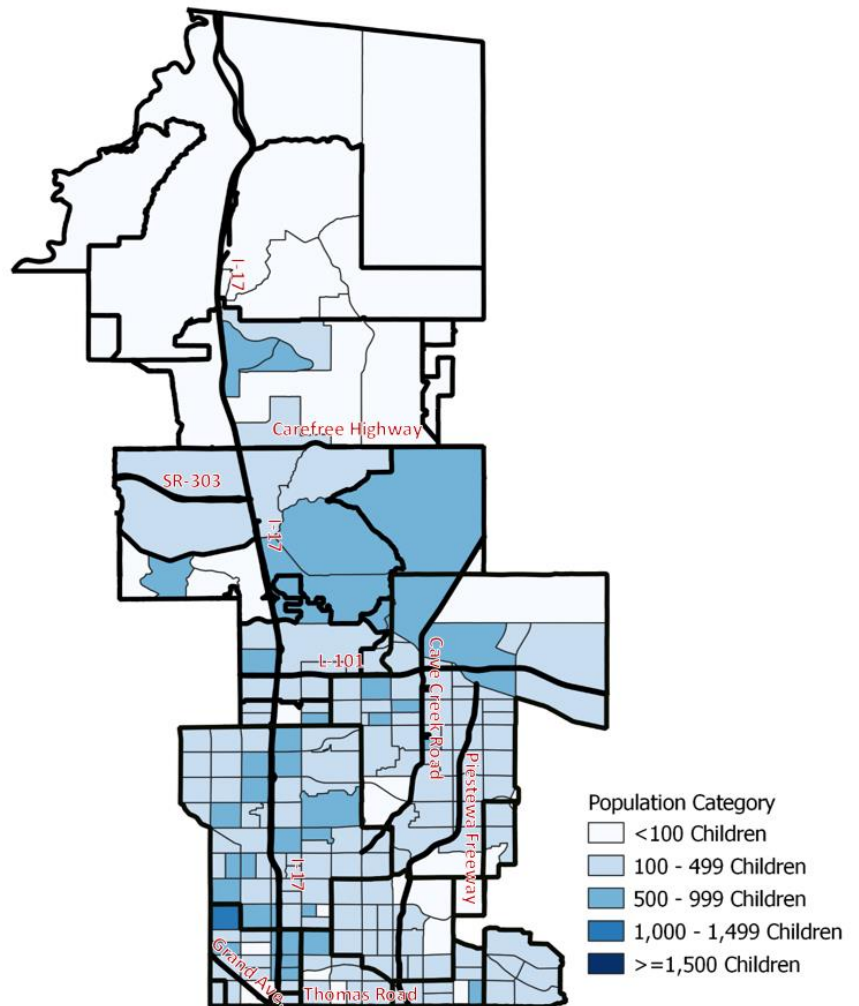
Figure 3-1: Growth Rate Among the Ten Largest Cities in the United States, 2010 - 2019

City	2010 Population	2019 Population	Growth Rate
New York, New York	8,175,031	8,336,817	2.0%
Los Angeles, California	3,793,139	3,979,576	4.9%
Chicago, Illinois	2,695,652	2,693,976	-0.1%
Houston, Texas	2,095,517	2,320,268	10.7%
Phoenix, Arizona	1,446,691	1,680,992	16.2%
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1,526,012	1,584,064	3.8%
San Antonio, Texas	1,326,161	1,547,253	16.7%
San Diego, California	1,301,929	1,423,851	9.4%
Dallas, Texas	1,197,658	1,343,573	12.2%
San Jose, California	952,528	1,021,795	7.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Cumulative Estimates of Resident Population Change for Incorporated Places of 50,000 or More 2010 - 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-total-cities-and-towns.html>.

While the region’s overall population increased, the number of young children declined. Phoenix’s population increases over the past decade have been attributed to increases in adult migratory populations including retirees as well as middle-class families from higher-cost parts of the country seeking more affordable housing in Phoenix.⁶ Despite the growth in the overall population, the number of births in the region has continued to decline, a trend seen across the country since the 2008-09 Great Recession. In particular, the number of births in Phoenix North between 2017 and 2019 totaled 9,228, compared to 9,963 births between 2014 and 2016.⁷ Since population growth has been driven more by in-migration than by births, the number of children under six years of age declined about 1.6 percent – 1,033 children – since 2010 to 65,304.⁸ The greatest numbers of young children reside in the southern portions of Phoenix North as shown in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2: Number of Children Under 6 by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019). Table B09001 – Population Under 18 Years by Age and Table S0101 – Age and Sex. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Despite the decrease in the population of young children over the past decade, this group is projected to increase in the coming years. According to population growth estimates provided by the Maricopa Association of Governments, the number of children under six years-old in the region is expected to grow 18.8 percent between 2020 and 2040. Figure 3-3 presents current and estimated populations by subregion. As the table demonstrates, the greatest growth is projected in the Paradise Valley and Osborn school districts and the 85085-zip code area of Deer Valley Unified School District.

Figure 3-3: Current and Projected Population of Children Under 6 in Phoenix North

Subregion	Current Population (2019)	Projected Population (2040)	Change	Subregion	Current Population (2019)	Projected Population (2040)	Change
Alhambra	7,752	8,342	590	DVUSD-85023	1,207	1,297	90
Creighton	2,292	2,354	62	DVUSD-85024	997	1,668	671
Isaac	330	396	66	DVUSD-85027	3,032	3,899	867
Madison	3,287	4,470	1,182	DVUSD-85053	695	593	(102)
Osborn	2,656	4,634	1,977	DVUSD-85083	1,407	1,860	453
Paradise Valley	14,010	17,959	3,949	DVUSD-85085	1,546	3,251	1,705
Phoenix Elem.	347	493	146	DVUSD-85086	2,602	3,721	1,119
Scottsdale	1,860	1,943	83	DVUSD-85087	313	736	422
Washington	20,774	21,813	1,039	DVUSD-85310	7	17	10
				DVUSD-85331	49	84	35
				DVUSD-85383	64	161	96
				DVUSD-Non-Zip	77	204	128

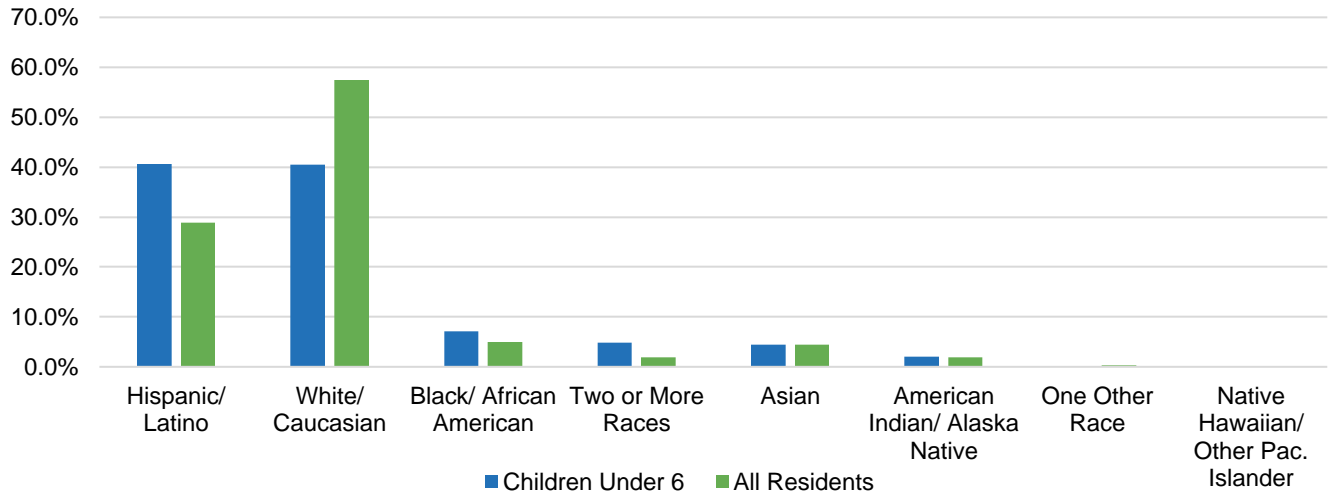
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019). Table B09001 – Population Under 18 Years by Age and Table S0101 – Age and Sex. Retrieved from data.census.gov; Maricopa Association of Governments Population Projections for Children Under 6.

Race/ Ethnicity and Language

Delivering culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services requires an understanding of the backgrounds of the children in the region.

Phoenix North is home to a diverse population, particularly amongst its youngest residents. Figure 3-4 compares the distribution of all residents and children under six years of age by race/ ethnicity. As the figure shows, the majority of residents in Phoenix North are White/ Caucasian. However, among young children, there are nearly equal numbers of young children who are Hispanic/ Latino and who are White/ Caucasian.

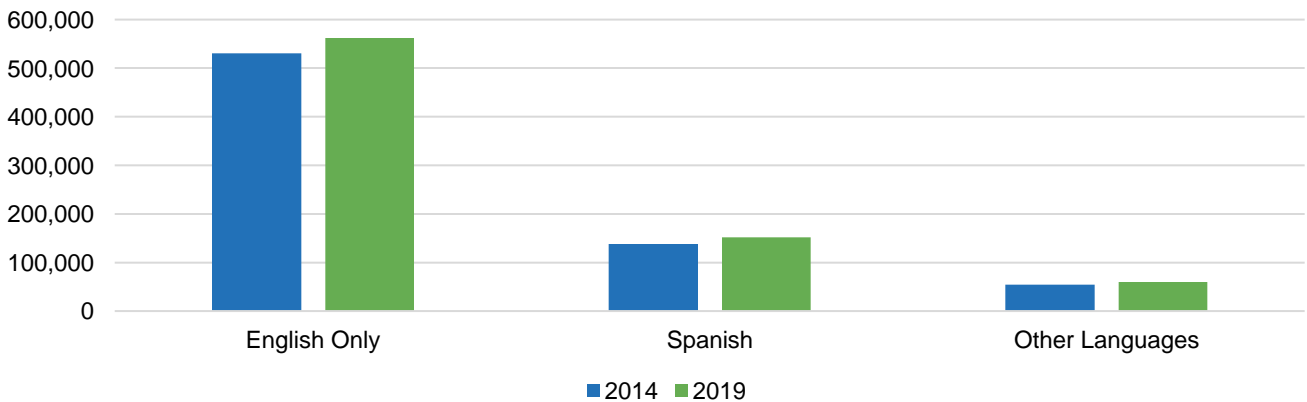
Figure 3-4: Comparison of Racial/ Ethnic Distribution for Children Under 6 to All Residents in Phoenix North



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019). Tables B17020A – B17020I – Population Under 18 Years by Age and Table S0101 – Age and Sex. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Nearly three-in-ten individuals primarily speak a language other than English at home. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of Phoenix North residents 5 years and older who primarily speak Spanish at home increased 9.4 percent (from 138,521 individuals to 151,489) and the number who primarily speak a language other than English or Spanish increased 10.7 percent (from 54,683 individuals to 60,508). Both growth rates exceeded the 5.8 percent growth among individuals who only speak English (from 530,726 individuals to 561,688). Figure 3-5 illustrates these counts.

Figure 3-5: Counts of Phoenix North Residents 5 Years and Older by Primary Language Spoken at Home

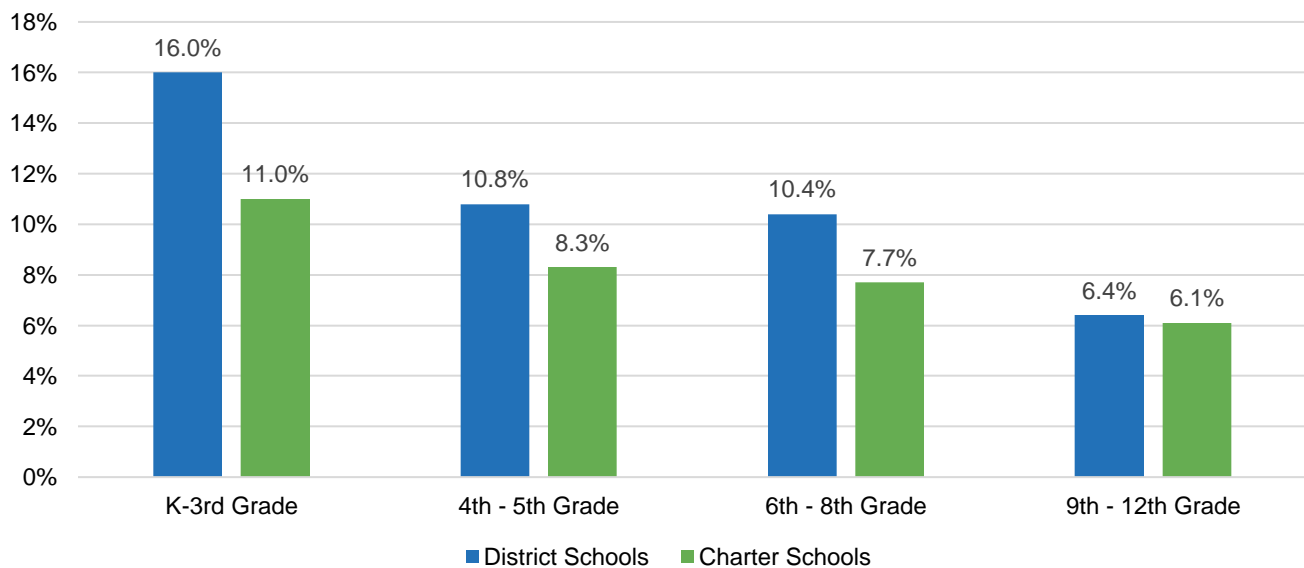


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2014), Table S1601 – Language Spoken at Home. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

About one-in-seven students in kindergarten through third grade are English language learners.

Figure 3-6 describes the proportion of students in district and charter schools in Phoenix North designated as English language learners. As the figure shows, there is a higher proportion of English language learners in district schools than in charter schools.

Figure 3-6: ELL Students in Phoenix North Schools, 2020



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education.

Test scores among English language learners fall substantially below all-student averages. ELL students are afforded testing accommodations as needed, including simplified instructions, translated directions in the student’s native language, a translation dictionary, and other reasonable accommodations at the request of the student or their guardian.⁹ However, across all public schools in Phoenix North in 2019, only 4.9 percent of third graders who were English language learners passed the AzMERIT English language arts test compared to 46.2 percent of all third grade students in the Phoenix North region. Similarly, 12.6 percent of ELL third grade students passed the AzMERIT mathematics test compared to 52.3 percent of all third graders. As Figure 3-6 shows, the proportion of children who are English language learners declines as students progress through school and become English proficient.

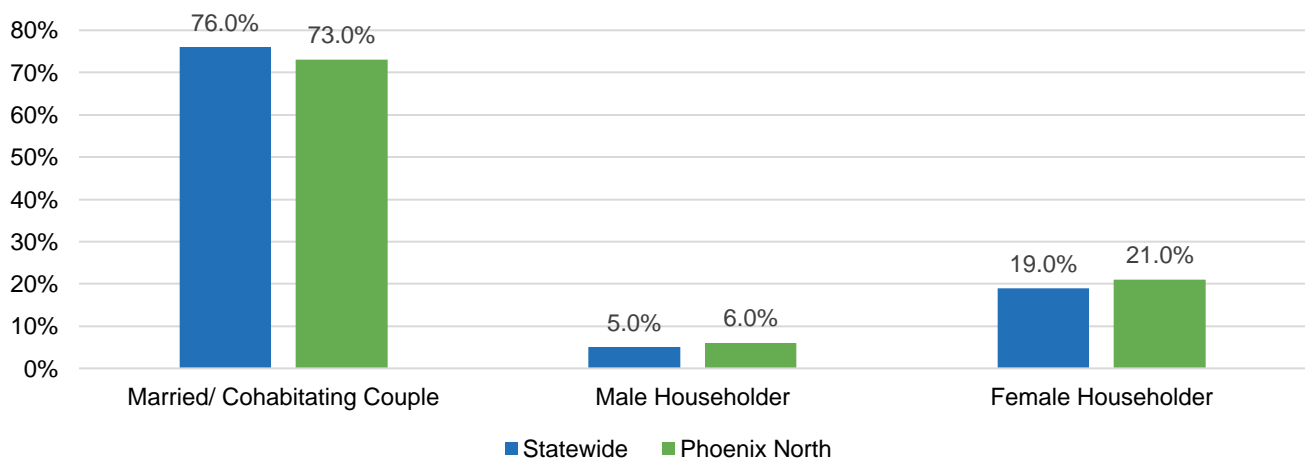
Family Composition

Families represent children’s primary “service provider” so the needs and assets of the overall family must be considered when planning to effectively serve children.

There has been little change in the number of households with young children over the past five years. There are nearly 322,000 households in the Phoenix North Region, an increase of 7.0 percent since 2015. However, the number of households with young children increased by only 1.0 percent during the same period.

The large majority of minor children live in two-parent households. However, the one-in-four households led by a single adult often have different needs than those led by two parents. In addition to having fewer opportunities to share childrearing responsibilities, single parent households have, on average, lower incomes. Considering households with children in the city of Phoenix overall, those led by a single female had a median income of \$29,505 in 2019 and those led by a single male had a median income of \$40,496, compared to those led by married couples that had a median income of \$88,491.¹⁰ The distribution of household compositions in the region and Arizona overall is illustrated in Figure 3-7.

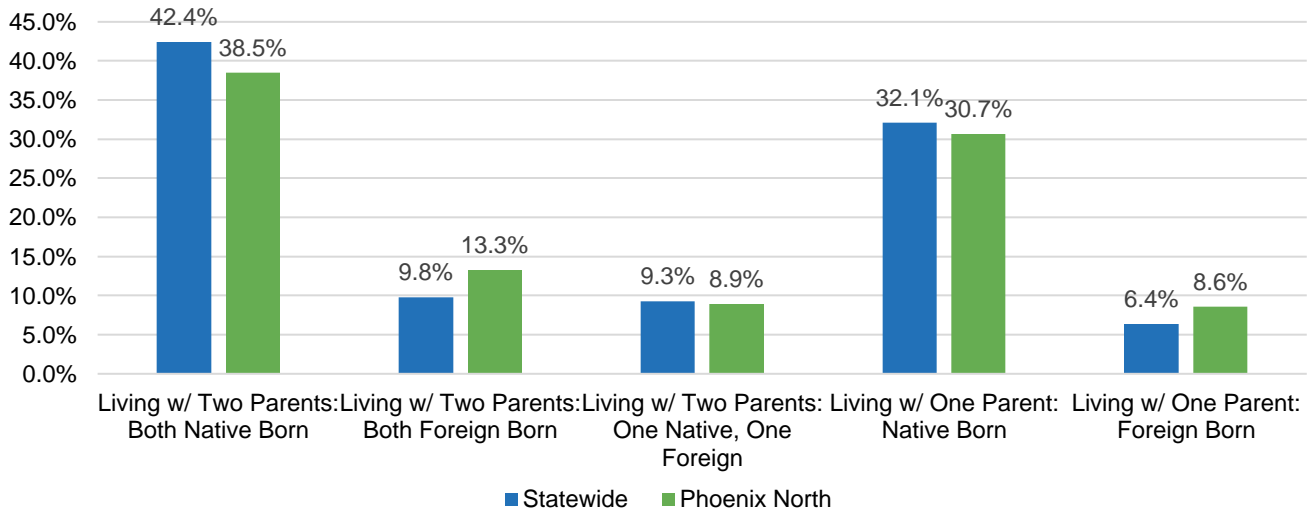
Figure 3-7: Household Compositions in Phoenix North and Arizona



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table DP02 – Selected Social Characteristics in the United States. Retrieved from data.census.gov. American Community Survey estimates do not report household composition of children under 6 specifically.

Almost one-third of children in the region have one or more parents who were not born in the United States. The proportion of children under six years of age living with one or two parents by nativity is displayed in Figure 3-8. As the figure indicates, nearly 31 percent of children in the Phoenix North region live with one or more parents who are foreign-born compared to a statewide rate of less than 26 percent.

Figure 3-8: Parents of Young Children by Nativity Status in Phoenix North and Arizona



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B05009 – Age and Nativity of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies by Number and Nativity of Parents. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Nearly 10 percent of young children in the region live with a grandparent. Some research indicates that children raised by their grandparents often experience a number of challenges, including greater risks for psychological, health, behavioral, and academic problems.¹¹ Across the Phoenix North region, 14,307 children under 18 years live in the household of a grandparent, including 6,216 children under six years. In more than half of the households in which a child under 18 years old lives with a grandparent, the grandparent is responsible for the child.

Key Takeaways

Approximately 65,300 children lived in the Phoenix North Region in 2019, a decrease of more than 1,000 children since 2010. Despite this downward trend over the past decade, the Maricopa Association of Governments estimates the region will be home to nearly 80,000 children by 2040.

The Phoenix North Region’s young children are racially and ethnically diverse and live in various family types, demographic facts that may be useful in future planning efforts. Services that are culturally and linguistically responsive are needs in the region, recognizing that more than 40 percent of the region’s young children are Hispanic/ Latino and more than 30 percent of the region’s residents speak a language at home other than English.

More than one-in-four of the region's young children live in a single-parent household, primarily in female-led households that, on average, earn incomes less than one-third of the incomes earned by two-parent households.



Economic Circumstances

ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

Why it Matters

Nearly one-in-four children in Phoenix North live in poverty. The impacts of living in poverty for children include a lack of safe or stable housing, limited access to healthcare, food insecurity, and a lack of access to quality child care and K-12 education.¹² The chronic stress of living in poverty impacts academic achievement, is affiliated with a dropout rate that is 4.5 times greater than children living in higher-income families, and contributes to the likelihood that a child from poverty will live in poverty their whole life.¹³ Further, children living in poverty are more susceptible to chronic illnesses and experience a shortened life expectancy.¹⁴ Even families with incomes that place them above the federal poverty level often struggle to make ends meet amid rising housing, healthcare, and child care costs.

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

- Income and poverty
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation
- Income supports

Income and Poverty

As noted above, poverty impacts nearly every aspect of a child’s life. Understanding the incidence of poverty across the region allows for targeted interventions in the areas with the greatest need.

Families in the City of Phoenix earn higher incomes than the statewide averages, but there are substantial differences in different parts of the region. The median family income for all families in Phoenix increased from \$64,640 in 2014 to \$66,048 in 2019. However, median family income is less

than 70 percent of the statewide median in four school districts in the region: Alhambra, Creighton, Isaac, and Phoenix Elementary. Figure 4-1 details median family income across the region.

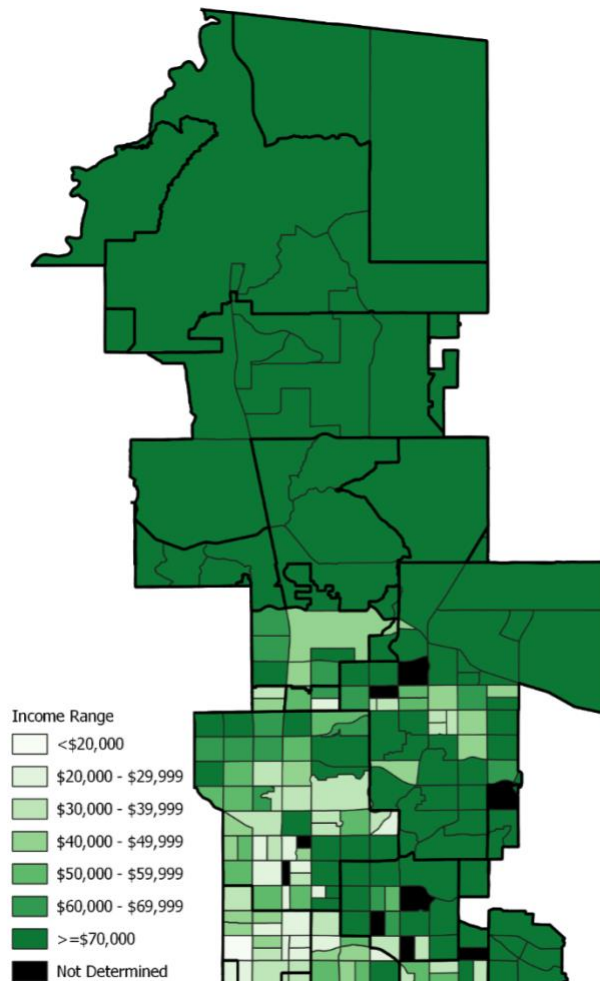
Figure 4-1: Median Family Income Based on Family Composition

Region/ Sub-Region	All families	Married couple	Married couple with children under 18	Male householders	Male householders w/ children under 18	Female householders	Female householders w/ children under 18
Arizona	\$70,184	\$83,360	\$88,352	\$42,113	\$42,884	\$38,576	\$30,416
City of Phoenix	\$66,048	\$84,491	\$80,918	\$49,270	\$40,496	\$38,476	\$29,505
Alhambra	\$39,108	\$49,533	\$46,639	\$39,396	\$29,120	\$25,169	\$19,694
Creighton	\$47,425	\$62,823	\$51,829	\$42,178	\$35,262	\$31,592	\$22,471
Isaac	\$36,819	\$46,095	\$39,505	\$31,310	\$30,907	\$25,056	\$22,458
Madison	\$98,072	\$127,906	\$136,161	\$62,670	\$37,979	\$48,328	\$27,306
Osborn	\$60,247	\$86,725	\$70,040	\$52,861	\$49,650	\$24,868	\$21,422
Paradise Valley	\$91,385	\$106,317	\$114,351	\$65,827	\$53,000	\$53,243	\$42,265
Phoenix Elem.	\$45,468	\$76,479	\$56,929	\$43,074	\$35,246	\$21,279	\$16,811
Scottsdale	\$114,252	\$134,451	\$159,551	\$76,838	\$74,915	\$58,491	\$47,813
Washington	\$58,102	\$74,364	\$70,014	\$43,798	\$35,640	\$37,233	\$27,272
Deer Valley	\$99,511	\$110,494	\$119,865	\$71,157	\$63,774	\$56,299	\$48,958

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B19126 – Median Family Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Family Type by presence of Own Children Under 18 Years. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Incomes tend to vary based on family composition with female householders with children under 18 years of age earning the lowest incomes on average. Across the school districts in the Phoenix North region, females with children under 18 years earn an average of 37 percent of the incomes earned by married couples with children under 18. Figure 4-2 demonstrates differences across the region, illustrating family income for married couples with children under 18 years. In general, incomes are high in the northern and eastern parts of the region and more modest in the southwestern areas.

Figure 4-2: Median Family Income of Married Couples with Children Under 18 by Census Tract



Source: Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B19126 – Median Family Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Family Type by presence of Own Children Under 18 Years. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Poverty rates have fallen markedly in recent years. The United States Department of Health and Human Services publishes the federal poverty guidelines used to determine eligibility for a variety of state and federal public benefit programs. Figure 4-3 compares the 2021 and 2022 guidelines by household size. Since the 2018 Regional Needs and Assets report, the percentage of Phoenix North

Figure 4-3: 2021 and 2022 Federal Poverty Levels

Household Size	2021	2022
1	\$12,880	\$13,590
2	\$17,420	\$18,310
3	\$21,960	\$23,030
4	\$26,500	\$27,750
5	\$31,040	\$32,470

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Poverty Guidelines for 2021 and 2022. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>.

residents living in poverty decreased 3.4 percentage points, while the percentage of children under six years living in poverty decreased by nearly six percentage points, as shown in Figure 4-4. During the same period, the statewide poverty rate declined 3.1 percentage points.

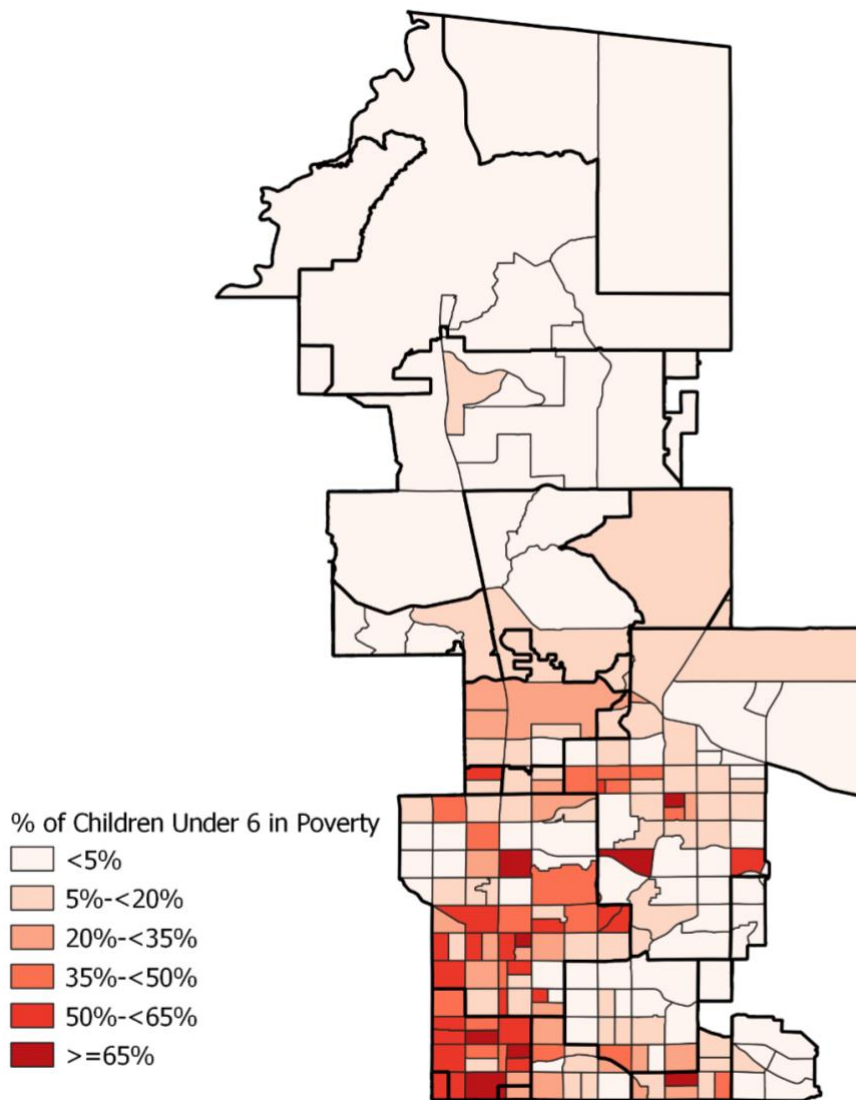
Figure 4-4: Comparison of Poverty Rates Among All Residents and Young Children (2018 RNA – 2022 RNA) in Phoenix North

	2018 RNA	2022 RNA	Percentage Point Change
Arizona – All Residents	18.20%	15.10%	(3.1%)
Arizona – Children Under 6	28.70%	23.30%	(5.4%)
Phoenix North – All Residents	19.20%	15.80%	(3.4%)
Phoenix North – Children Under 6	30.30%	24.40%	(5.9%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B17001 – Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Despite the decline in the poverty rate, nearly one-in-four young children in the Phoenix North region live in poverty. Figure 4-5 presents the distribution of children under six years-old living in poverty by census tract, demonstrating that the highest poverty rates are in the southern portions of the region. Across the region, seven percent of all residents live in deep poverty, defined as having an income less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level, ranging from 1.1 percent in the 85310-zip code area of the Deer Valley Unified School District to 17.1 percent in the Isaac School District.

Figure 4-5: Distribution of Children Under 6 in Poverty by Census Tract in Phoenix North



Source: Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B17001 – Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

The percentage of young children living in poverty varies significantly across the region. Poverty rates for young children exceed 35 percent in the Isaac (54.2 percent), Alhambra (48.2 percent), and Creighton (36.9 percent) districts. Figure 4-6 illustrates poverty rates among children under six years of age by subregion.

Figure 4-6: Poverty Rates Among Children Under 6 by Subregion

Subregion	Poverty Rate for Children Under 6 Years-Old	Subregion	Poverty Rate for Children Under 6 Years-Old
Alhambra	48.2%	DVUSD-85023	26.0%
Creighton	36.9%	DVUSD-85024	7.0%
Isaac	54.2%	DVUSD-85027	15.8%
Madison	12.7%	DVUSD-85053	30.9%
Osborn	26.3%	DVUSD-85083	2.2%
Paradise Valley	16.9%	DVUSD-85085	4.0%
Phoenix Elementary	36.9%	DVUSD-85086	2.6%
Scottsdale	1.5%	DVUSD-85087	0.0%
Washington	30.3%	DVUSD-85310	0.0%
		DVUSD-85331	9.1%
		DVUSD-85383	0.0%
		DVUSD-Non-Zip Area	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B17001 – Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

The federal poverty level does not fully reflect the needs of families. Some observers believe the federal poverty level is antiquated since it was originally established based on food costs when low-income families spent a much larger proportion of their wages on food and because it does not account for differences in regional costs or household composition (for example, the guideline is the same for two adults with one child and for one adult with two children). In response, others have constructed living wage estimates to determine the level of income various family types would need to support themselves. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has produced one such calculator, which incorporates estimates for food, child care, medical costs, housing, transportation, and other expenses. Figure 4-7 presents MIT’s living wage in comparison to the federal poverty level for three types of families in the Phoenix area.

Figure 4-7: MIT 2021 Living Wage Estimates for Select Family Types in the Phoenix Area

	1 Adult, 1 Child	2 Adults (1 Works), 1 Child	2 Adults (Both Work), 1 Child
Food	\$5,574	\$8,639	\$8,639
Child Care	\$5,386	\$0	\$5,386
Medical	\$7,627	\$7,315	\$7,315
Housing	\$14,076	\$14,076	\$14,076
Transportation	\$8,987	\$11,186	\$11,186
Civic	\$3,889	\$3,554	\$3,554
Other	\$4,553	\$4,996	\$4,996
Taxes	\$11,138	\$11,065	\$12,263
Required Income	\$50,092	\$49,767	\$55,153
2021 Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	\$17,420	\$21,960	\$21,960
FPL % of Required Income for Living Wage	34.8%	44.1%	39.8%

Source: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Calculator for the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area. Retrieved from <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/38060>.

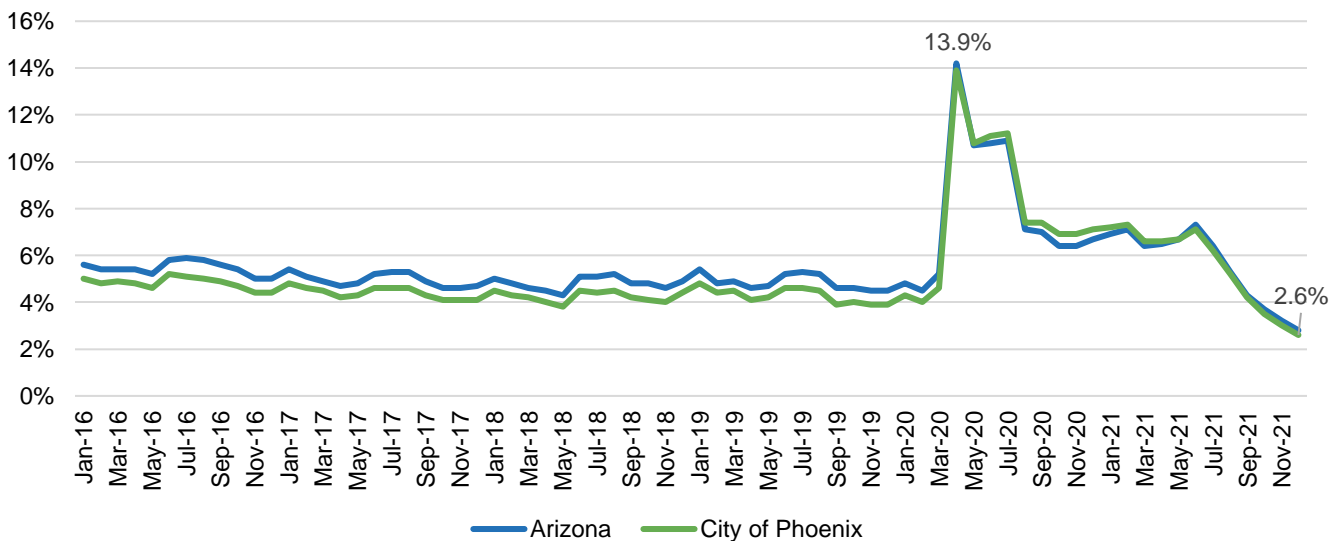
For each of the three family types shown in the table, families would need to earn at least twice the minimum wage to cover the identified costs, demonstrating that a broader range of families may require assistance with housing, transportation, medical, and child care costs.

Employment

Families in Phoenix benefit from a large and strong employment market. However, even many working families may require assistances as many jobs do not pay wages sufficient to cover all of their costs.

Despite a substantial increase in unemployment during the first year-and-a-half of the pandemic, unemployment remains at historically low levels. As illustrated in Figure 4-8, unemployment rates in Phoenix increased substantially at the beginning of the pandemic – from 4.6 percent in March 2020 to 13.9 percent in April – but has steadily declined since then. By the end of 2021, unemployment had fallen below pre-pandemic levels to a record low of 2.6 percent.

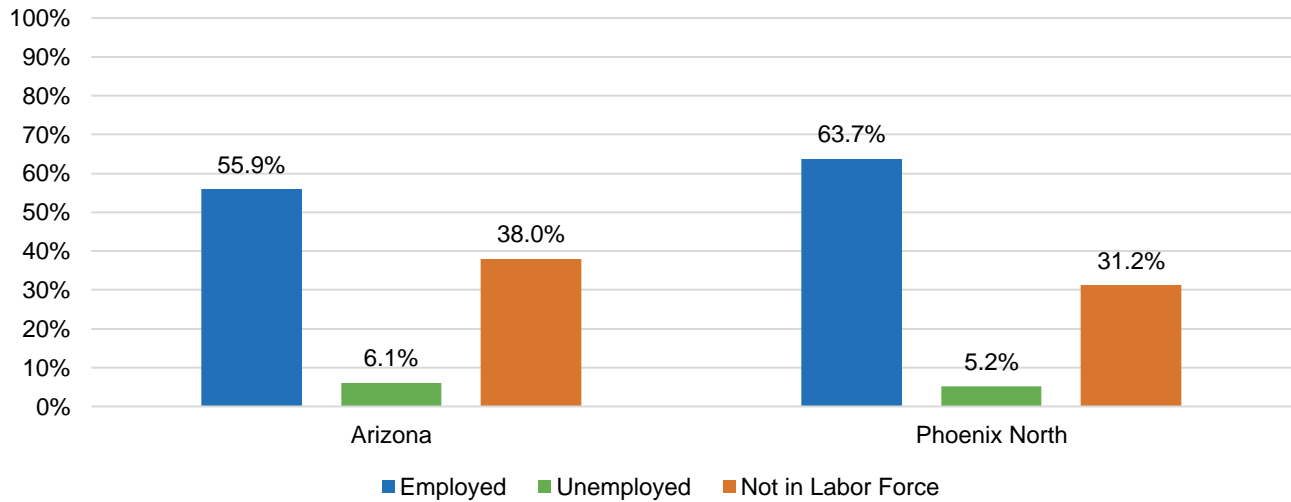
Figure 4-8: Unemployment Rates in Arizona and the City of Phoenix (January 2016 - January 2021)



Source: Arizona Commerce Authority. Labor Force Statistics – Unemployment Rates in Arizona and the City of Phoenix (January 2016 – December 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.azcommerce.com/oeo/labor-market/unemployment/>.

Adults in Phoenix North are employed at higher levels than the statewide average. Considering pre-pandemic data, the employment rate among adults 16 years and older was nearly eight percentage points higher in Phoenix North than in the state overall. Labor force participation rates in the region and the state are presented in Figure 4-9.

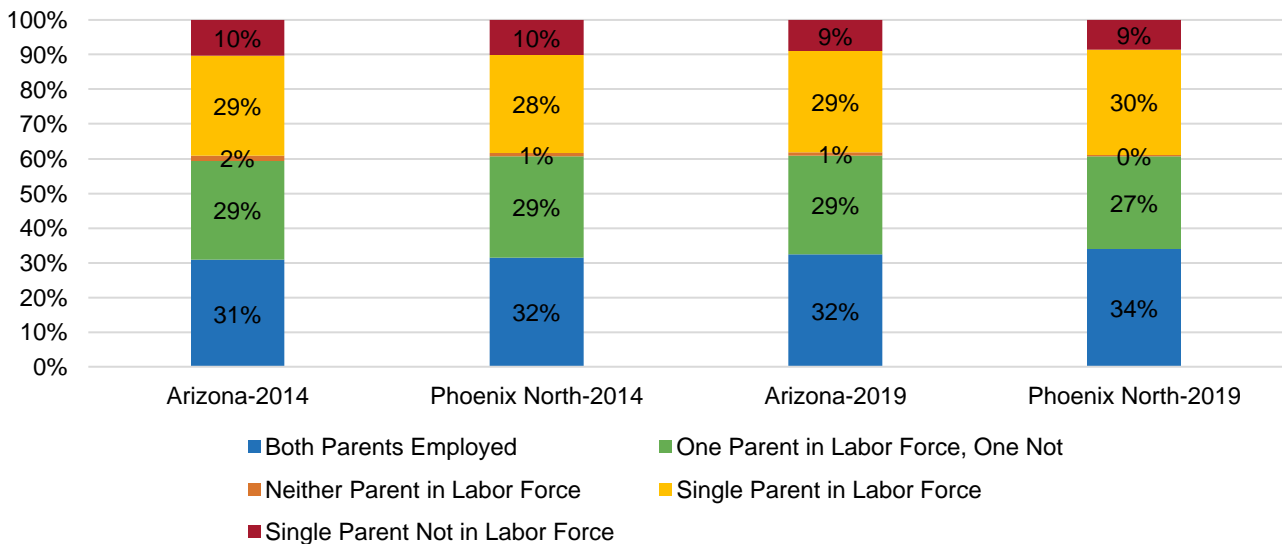
Figure 4-9: Adult Population 16 and Older by Employment Status in Phoenix North



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table S2301 – Employment Status. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Among families with children under six years of age, the percentage of families with at least one employed parent increased from 88.7 percent in 2014 to 91.2 percent in 2019, tracking closely with statewide trends as illustrated in Figure 4-10.

Figure 4-10: Employment Status of Parents of Children Under 6 in Phoenix North



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B23008 – Age of Own Children Under 18 in Families and Subfamilies by Living Arrangements by Employment Status of Parents. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Phoenix is projected to experience continued strong job growth, but many of these jobs will be relatively low paying. Between 2020 and 2030, the Arizona Commerce Authority projects that Phoenix will add 169,672 jobs.¹⁵ Figure 4-11 presents the five occupations projected to add the most jobs and the current median wage for each. None of the top three occupations pay wages sufficient to meet the needs of any of the family types presented earlier in Figure 4-7, indicating that even many working families will need support to help with housing, health, and child care costs.

Figure 4-11: Fastest Growing Jobs in the City of Phoenix through 2030

Occupation	Est. Jobs Added through 2030	Median Hourly Wage (May 2020)
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	23,503	\$15.99
Healthcare Support Occupations	17,816	\$14.25
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	14,063	\$13.01
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	13,537	\$36.20
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	13,023	\$31.10

Sources: Arizona Commerce Authority. *Employment Projections in the City of Phoenix (2020 - 2030)*. Retrieved from <https://www.azcommerce.com/oeo/labor-market/employment-projections/>. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. *May 2020 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Wage Estimates for the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ MSA*. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oesrcma.htm>.

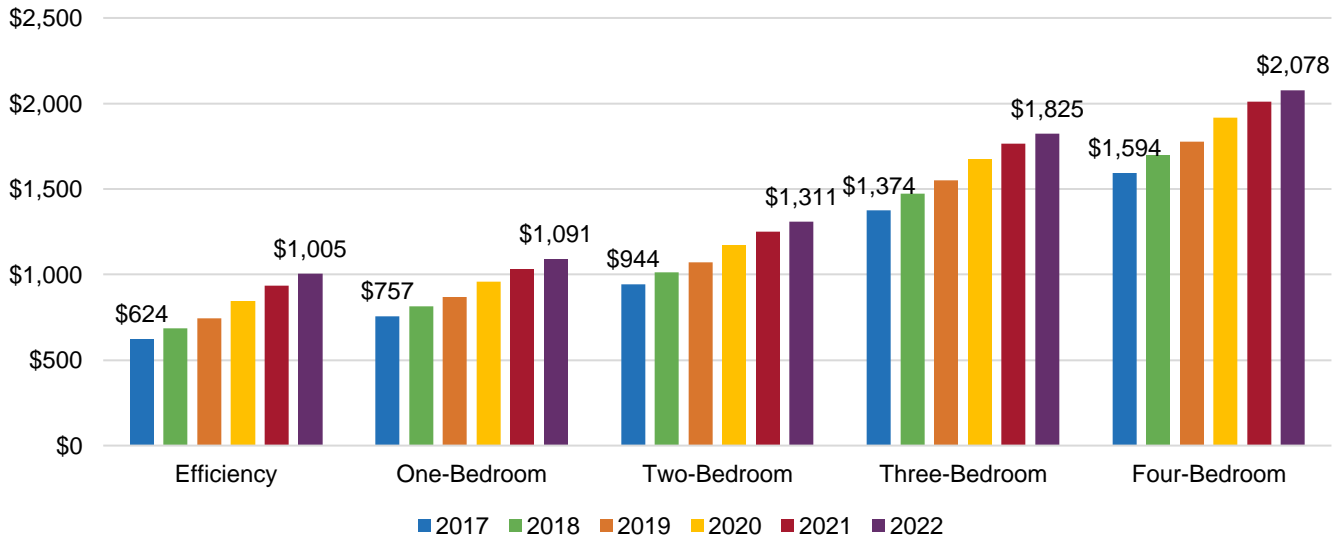
Housing

Housing represents the single largest expense in most families’ budgets. As home prices and rents in the region increase, families’ budgets become increasingly strained, leaving them with fewer resources to meet their other needs.

Only about half of the available housing in Phoenix is considered affordable for families earning the median income. The Housing Opportunity Index – a measure of the share of homes in an area that would cost 28 percent or less of the local median income – decreased by 30.2 percentage points between 2012 and 2021.¹⁶ In 2021, only slightly more than half of the available housing (51.2 percent) was affordable to families earning the city’s median income compared to 81.4 percent in 2012.

Like home prices, rental costs have increased significantly in recent years. Figure 4-12 details the change in fair market rent at the 40th percentile (meaning 40 percent of the rental inventory in any given year costs less while 60 percent costs more). As the figure reveals, fair market rents for all unit sizes have increased significantly between 2017 and 2022, by an average of 41 percent in the six-year period.

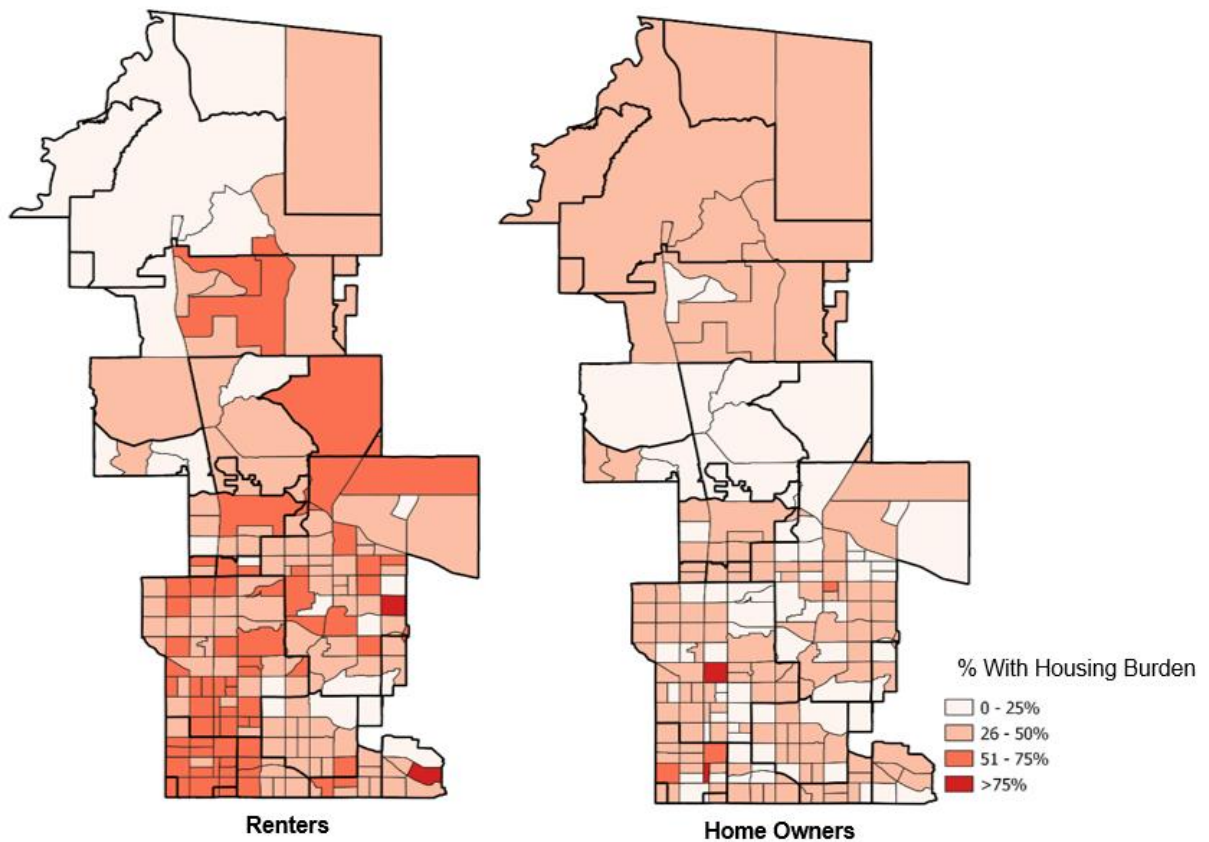
Figure 4-12: Fair Market Rents (40th Percentile) 2017-2022 in the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Fair Market Rents (40th Percentile Rents) 2017 - 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html>.

More than one-in-three households in the region are considered housing cost burdened, with renters significantly more likely to spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development considers families to be housing cost burdened when they spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing.¹⁷ In Phoenix North in 2019, 37.9 percent of households exceeded this burden. This figure varies significantly for owners and renters and across the region. Among renters, 47.2 percent of households in Phoenix North spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent, compared to 27.5 percent of homeowners. This difference is due, in part, to greater housing stability amongst homeowners, which insulates them from annual cost increases. In 2019, 90.7 percent of homeowners were in the same house as the year prior, compared to only 73.3 percent of renters. More than 50 percent of renters in the Alhambra, Isaac, Phoenix Elementary, and Washington districts and the 85023 and 85024 zip code areas of the Deer Valley Unified School District face housing costs in excess of 50 percent of their monthly income, which HUD considers a ‘severe housing burden.’¹⁸ Figure 4-13 illustrates the differences in the percentage of renters and homeowners with a housing cost burden across the region.

Figure 4-13: Percent of Renters and Homeowners with Housing Burden by Census Tract

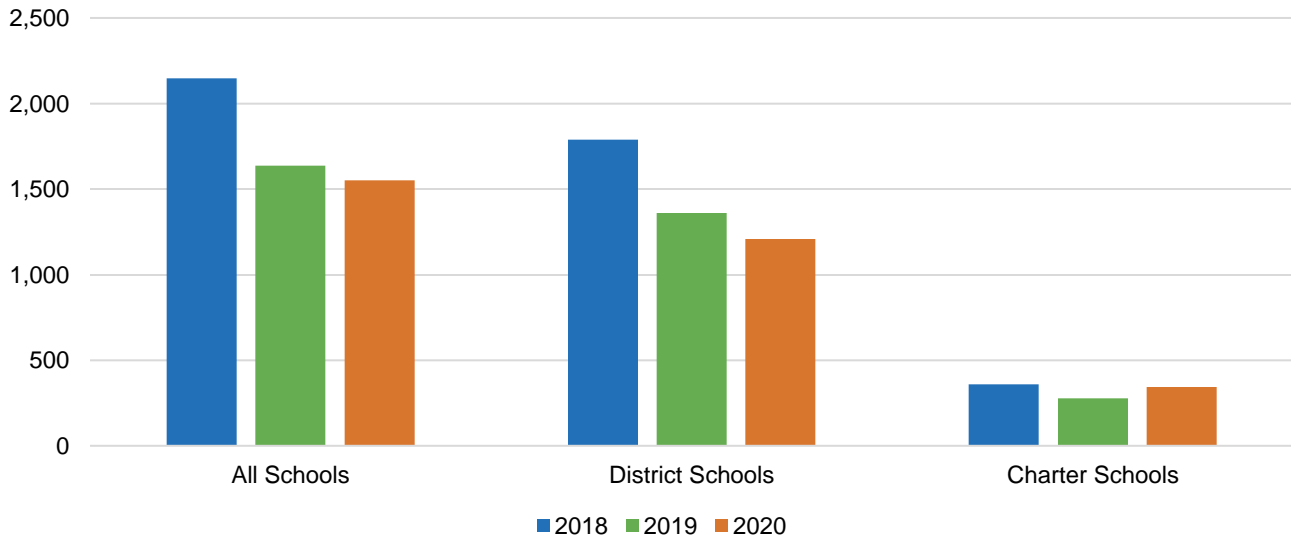


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table DP04 – Selected Housing Characteristics. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the City of Phoenix has tripled since 2014.

The Maricopa Association of Governments conducts an annual point-in-time count of individuals experiencing homelessness across the county. Between 2014 and 2022, the number of unsheltered individuals in the City of Phoenix increased four-fold, from 771 to 3,096.¹⁹ Across Maricopa County, 13.7 percent of the overall count of homeless individuals were comprised of children under 18, though the number of families experiencing homelessness decreased by 12 percent between 2016 and 2022.²⁰ The number of children in kindergarten through 12th grade experiencing homelessness served by public schools in Phoenix North decreased from 2,147 in 2018 to 1,550 in 2020 as illustrated in Figure 4-14.

Figure 4-14: Number of Children Experiencing Homelessness Served by District and Charter Schools in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education, 2018 – 2020 School Years.

Transportation

A key need among low-income families to access employment, educational opportunities for themselves and their children, child care, and other services is access to reliable transportation.

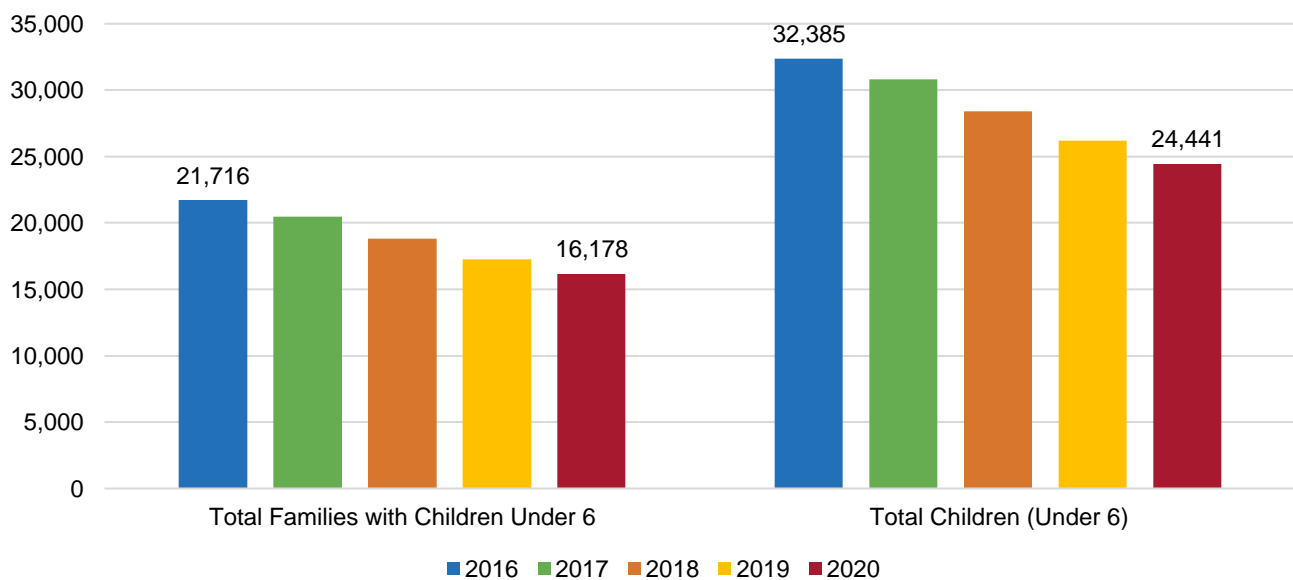
Most residents rely on private transportation to commute to work; those who use public transportation face more limited employment opportunities and must spend more of their time commuting. Across Phoenix North, 7.7 percent of households do not have access to a vehicle.²¹ Renters are more likely to lack access to a vehicle (14.2 percent) than homeowners (2.3 percent). The large majority of Phoenix North’s employed residents – 92.3 percent – use a private vehicle to get to work. Only 3.3 percent rely on public transportation; 2.5 percent use a taxi, motorcycle, or bicycle; and 1.9 percent walk. Commute times are substantially longer for residents who rely on public transportation compared to residents who use a private vehicle. For example, only 5.6 percent of Phoenix commuters who use a private vehicle had an average commute of 60 minutes or more, compared to 37.7 percent of commuters utilizing public transportation.²² Research has shown that, although there is a higher cost to owning a vehicle compared to using public transportation, those using public transportation have fewer options for better-paying jobs where public transportation may not be available and longer commute times reduce opportunities to attend school and other activities that may improve household income.²³

Economic Supports

There are a number of publicly-funded benefit programs available to lower-income Phoenix residents.

With rising employment and incomes, the number of families accessing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – the primary food assistance program in the United States – has decreased in recent years. SNAP provides funds that low-income families can use to purchase food. To be eligible for SNAP, families generally must have gross incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. The average monthly benefit per household in December 2021 was \$486.88.²⁴ The number of families and children receiving SNAP benefits in Phoenix North declined by 25 percent between 2016 and 2020, as shown in Figure 4-15.

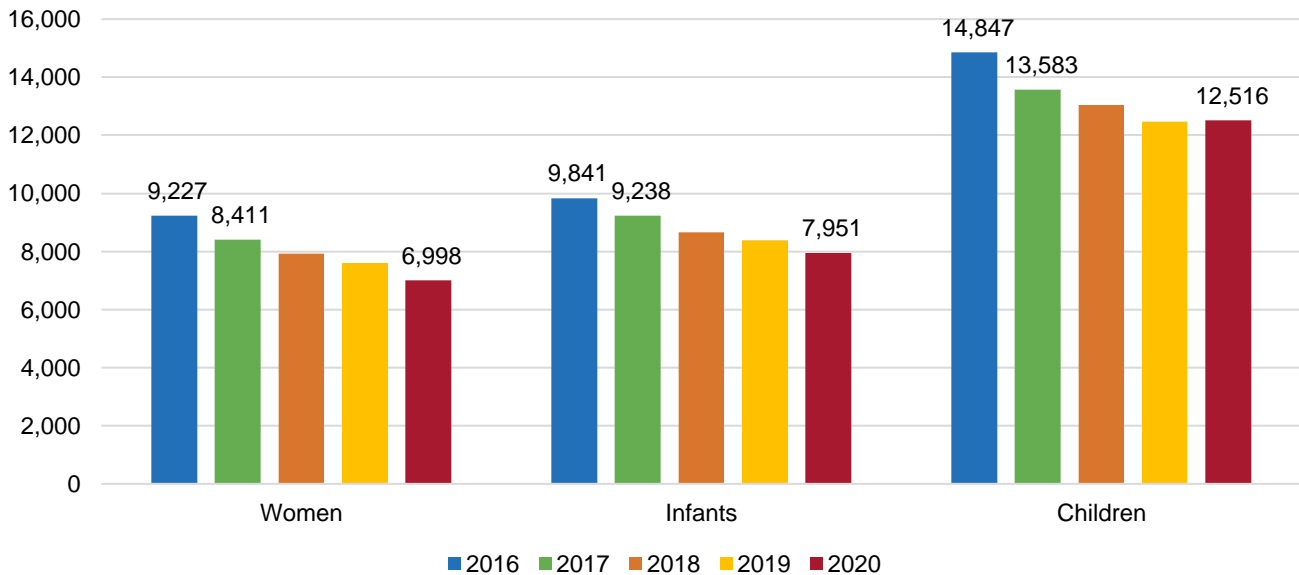
Figure 4-15: Families and Children Using SNAP in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (2016 – 2020).

Participation in the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) program – which provides assistance to parents of newborns and young children to access nutritious food – has declined in recent years due to fewer births and the improved economic circumstances of many families. WIC provides vouchers to pregnant women and mothers of children under five years of age to allow them to purchase certain nutritional foods. The program also provides nutrition education and referrals to health and social services programs. To access WIC benefits, families must have incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. As with SNAP, enrollment in WIC has declined markedly in recent years, as seen in Figure 4-16.

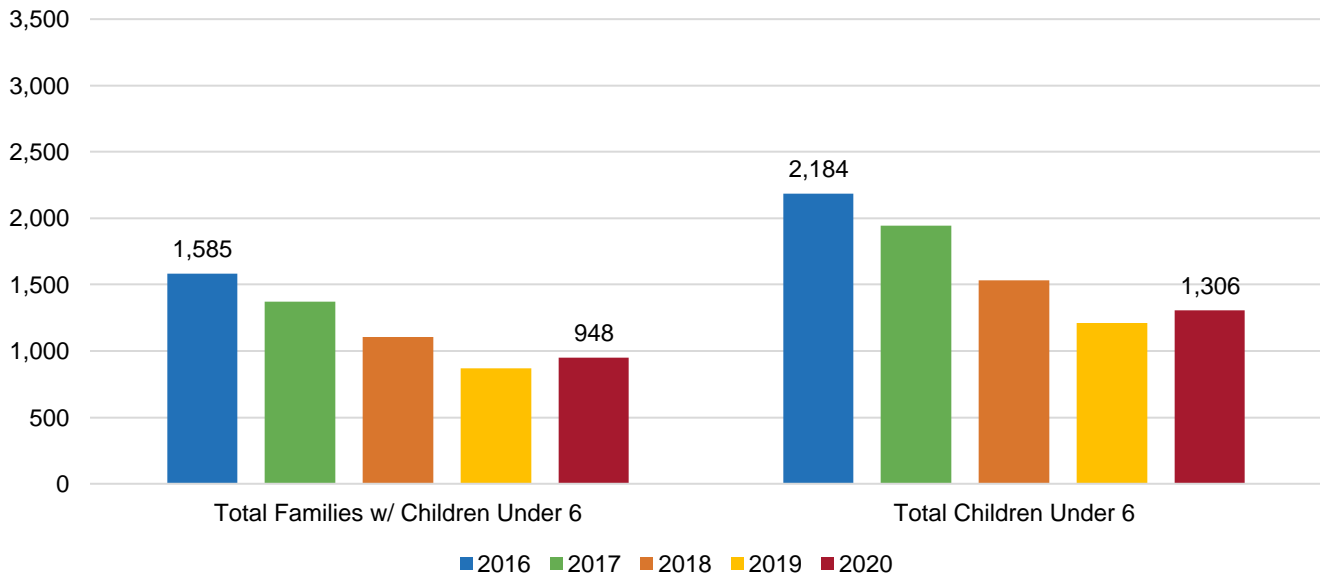
Figure 4-16: WIC Participants in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services (2016 – 2020).

Due to the program’s restrictive eligibility requirements, Arizona’s cash assistance program (known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) reaches only a fraction of families living in poverty. The cash assistance program provides cash benefits to low-income families in order to help them meet their living expenses. To qualify, families must have dependent children, have adjusted household incomes below 36 percent of the 1992 FPL, and cooperate with the Jobs employment program and child support enforcement. The average monthly payment per participating household in December 2021 was \$210.53.²⁵ As illustrated in Figure 4-17, 1,306 children under six years in Phoenix North received cash assistance in 2020 (only 8.3 percent of all young children living in poverty), a decline of 40.2 percent since 2016.

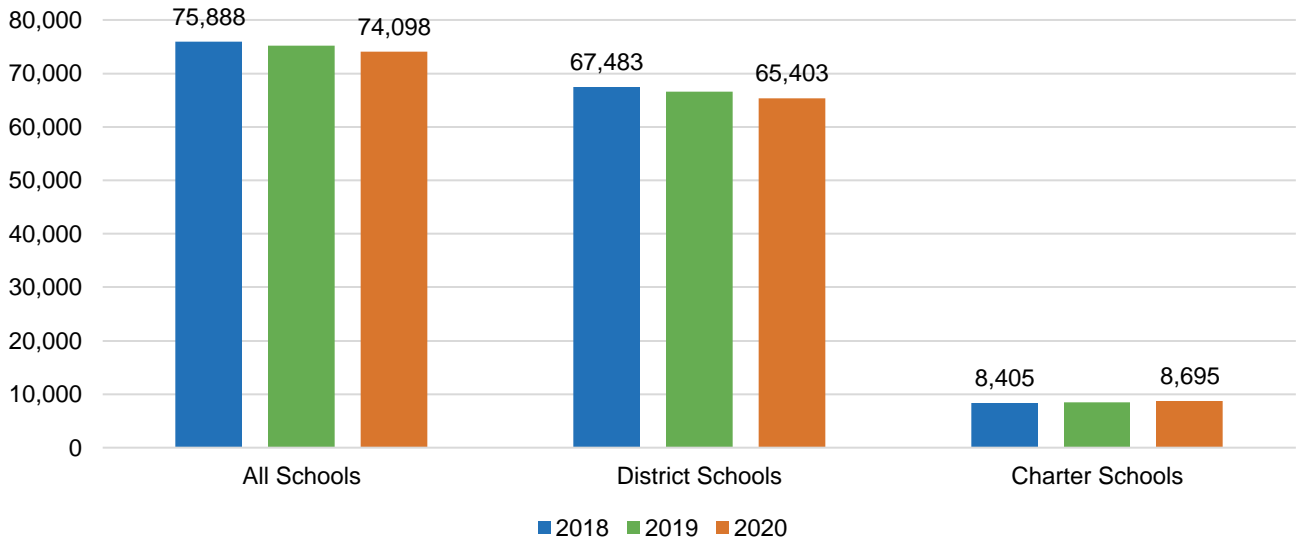
Figure 4-17: Families and Children Using TANF in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (2016 – 2020).

Approximately 60 percent of children in public schools in Phoenix North are eligible for federally-funded free or reduced price lunches. Students from families with incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals, while students from families with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Figure 4-18 illustrates the number of children eligible for free and reduced price meals for public schools in Phoenix North. As the figure demonstrates, there was a small decrease in the number of children receiving free or reduced priced meals in district schools over the past three years and a small increase in charter schools.

Figure 4-18: Children in K-12 Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education (2018 – 2020).

Although there were only small changes in the number of children eligible for free or reduced price lunches over the past three years, the number of meals served fell substantially in 2020. Figure 4-19 reports the total number of free and reduced priced meals distributed by public schools in the Phoenix North region from 2018 to 2020. As the figure reveals, there was nearly a 25 percent decrease in the number of meals served, due primarily to remote or virtual attendance during the pandemic in 2020. For many children, their school lunch is their primary meal so the loss of these meals resulted in increased hunger for some number of children.

Figure 4-19: National School Lunch Program - Sites and Meals Served in Phoenix North

	2018	2019	2020	% Chg in Meals Served
All Schools				
Sites	170	171	170	
Meals Served	20,166,347	20,852,586	15,429,831	(23.5%)
District Schools				
Sites	128	129	128	
Meals Served	18,097,943	18,734,596	13,879,483	(23.3%)
Charter Schools				
Sites	42	42	42	
Meals Served	2,068,404	2,117,990	1,550,348	(25.0%)

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education (2018 – 2020).

Key Takeaways

The City of Phoenix has experienced steady gains in employment and wages since the 2018 RNA. Immediately following the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the unemployment rate increased from 4.6 percent to 13.9 percent, but has since reached an all-time low of 2.6 percent. There was a six-percentage point decrease in the number of children under six years of age living in poverty since the 2018 RNA. Still, nearly a quarter of all young children in the region – 24.4 percent (15,659 children) live below the federal poverty level.

Various public assistance programs are available to lower-income families, but participation in these programs has fallen as family incomes have increased. Although this represents an increase in self-sufficiency, many families are coping with rising costs. For example, the cost of rental housing in the Phoenix area has increased by an average of 41 percent since 2017. These costs increases have generally outpaced wage growth, meaning that many families continue to struggle to make ends meet.



The Early Childhood System

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Why it Matters

Beginning at infancy, children’s physical, social-emotional, and cognitive growth are stimulated by high-quality interactions between the child and their caregiver.²⁶ Higher-quality child care promotes brain development at all ages while better preparing children to enter kindergarten and reconciling the achievement gap between children from lower-income families and children from middle- and higher-income families that have greater access to quality-child care and similar educational opportunities.

“If we want to invest in the prosperity of our nation, we must invest in the education of our children so that their talents may be fully employed.”

-Bill Clinton

Lack of access to child care also negatively impacts parents and society as a whole. Parents who cannot access child care due to the many recognized barriers – cost, transportation, available slots, and similar reasons – experience higher rates of workplace absences and turnover, reduced working hours, inability to attend higher education opportunities, and related issues that reduce family income.²⁷ In Arizona, the lack of child care results in an estimated economic loss of \$1.8 billion per year, with \$1.4 billion in losses due to employee absences and turnover and \$348 million in lost tax revenues.²⁸

Intersection with Poverty

Lack of access to child care is among the numerous interrelated systems and structures that make it difficult for families to break free from poverty.²⁹ Where poverty increases a child’s risk for experiencing behavioral, social, emotional, and health-related challenges, quality child care can ameliorate these risks through language stimulation, improved cognitive function, and better relationships with peers.³⁰ Quality based child care programs further promote “children’s readiness to enter kindergarten by supporting cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral development,” which is particularly important for children from lower-income families.³¹

Among the many barriers to accessing child care, especially among low-income families, is the cost. Families with incomes below the federal poverty level rate that pay for child care spend an average of 30 percent of their income on child care, compared to 18 percent among families with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty level.³²

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

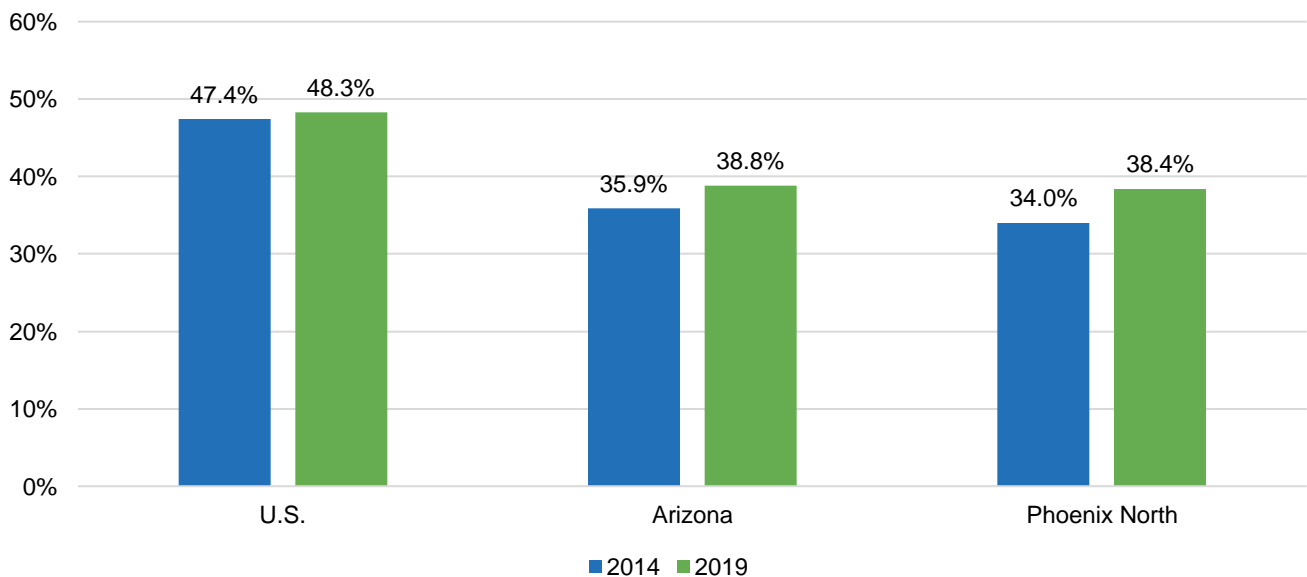
- Early care and education
- Families with children with special needs

Early Care and Education

High-quality early care and education lays the foundation for children beginning kindergarten ready to learn.

The percentage of three and four year-olds in Phoenix North who attend preschool has increased in recent years, but continues to trail national attendance rates. Since 2014, the preschool enrollment rate in the Phoenix North Region has increased, but still lags the national average by approximately 10 percentage points. Specifically, nearly half of all three and four year-olds were enrolled in preschool in 2019, compared to less than 38.4 percent in the region and 38.8 percent in the state. Changes over the past five years are illustrated in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Preschool Enrollment Rates in Phoenix North



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table S1401 – School Enrollment. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

Preschool enrollment rates vary across the region. In the Alhambra, Creighton, Isaac, and Phoenix Elementary districts, as well as the 85053 zip code area of DVUSD, preschool enrollment rates are less than 30 percent as detailed in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2: Preschool Enrollment Rates by Sub-Region in Phoenix North

Subregion	Preschool Enrollment Rate	Subregion	Preschool Enrollment Rate
Alhambra	25.8%	DVUSD-85023	46.1%
Creighton	24.8%	DVUSD-85024	63.3%
Isaac	9.6%	DVUSD-85027	58.2%
Madison	58.6%	DVUSD-85053	25.1%
Osborn	35.2%	DVUSD-85083	42.7%
Paradise Valley	44.2%	DVUSD-85085	63.4%
Phoenix Elementary	17.8%	DVUSD-85086	43.2%
Scottsdale	66.8%	DVUSD-85087	62.1%
Washington	30.5%	DVUSD-85310	100.0%
		DVUSD-85331	62.5%
		DVUSD-85383	52.6%
		DVUSD-Non-Zip Area	52.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table S1401 – School Enrollment (compared to 2018 RNA). Retrieved from data.census.gov.

More than 300 licensed and certified child care providers operate in Phoenix North with total capacity to serve more than 38,000 children under 13 years of age. Licensed child care centers represent the largest share of the provider network with 188 sites with total capacity of more than 23,000 slots. There are 88 licensed child care programs at public schools in the region. The number of children enrolled in preschool programs run by public schools increased 61.7 percent between 2018 and 2020, to 1,486. Licensed and certified home-based providers account for a much smaller share of the market with a total of 34 locations with the ability to serve 180 children.

The number of child care providers participating in Quality First in the region continues to increase and more than one-in-three providers in have at least a 3-Star rating. The number of providers participating in Quality First increased since the 2018 RNA from 137 to 149. Nearly two-thirds of licensed centers participate in Quality First compared to 27 percent of school-based programs, 50 percent of small group homes (although this translates to only five providers), and no certified family homes. In Phoenix North, 78.4 percent of providers participating in Quality First have a rating of 3-Stars or better, nearly identical to the statewide figure of 78.9 percent of participating providers.³³ Figure 5-3 reports the distribution of providers in Phoenix North by Star-rating and provider type.

Figure 5-3: Number and Capacity of Child Care Providers in Phoenix North by Star Rating

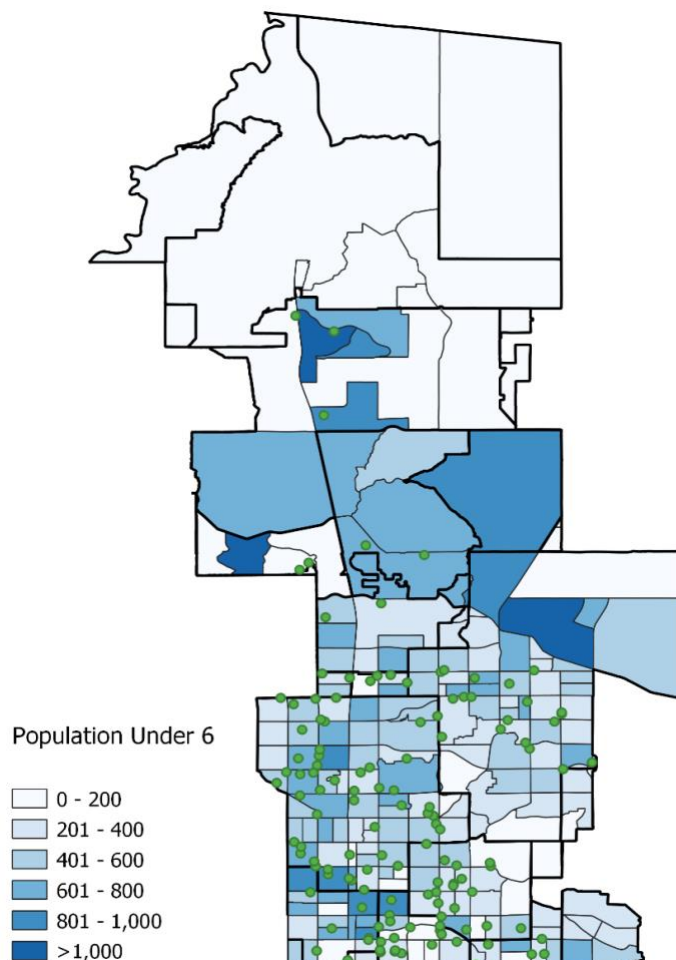
Provider Type	Measure	All Providers*		Quality First Providers				
		All Providers*	Not Rated	1-Star	2-Stars	3-Stars	4-Stars	5-Stars
Child Care Centers	# of Providers	188	17	-	25	38	31	9
	Capacity	23,340	687	-	3,776	5,420	3,621	1,307
Child Care Public Schools	# of Providers	88	4	-	1	15	3	1
	Capacity	14,552	963	-	265	3,178	834	45
Child Care Small Group Homes	# of Providers	10	-	-	2	1	1	1
	Capacity	90	-	-	20	10	10	5
Certified Family Homes	# of Providers	24	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Capacity	90	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	# of Providers	310	21	-	28	54	35	11
	Capacity	38,072	1,650	-	4,061	8,608	4,465	1,357

Sources: ADHS Child Care Licensing Database; DES Certified Family Homes Roster; FTF Quality First Data (retrieved from First Things First Data Center).

*The 'All Providers' count includes providers that do not participate in Quality First.

Figure 5-4 plots the location of Quality First-rated centers and homes, illustrating that most are located in the southern portion of the region with few in the northern-most areas with relatively few children under six years old.

Figure 5-4: Location of Quality First Providers in Phoenix

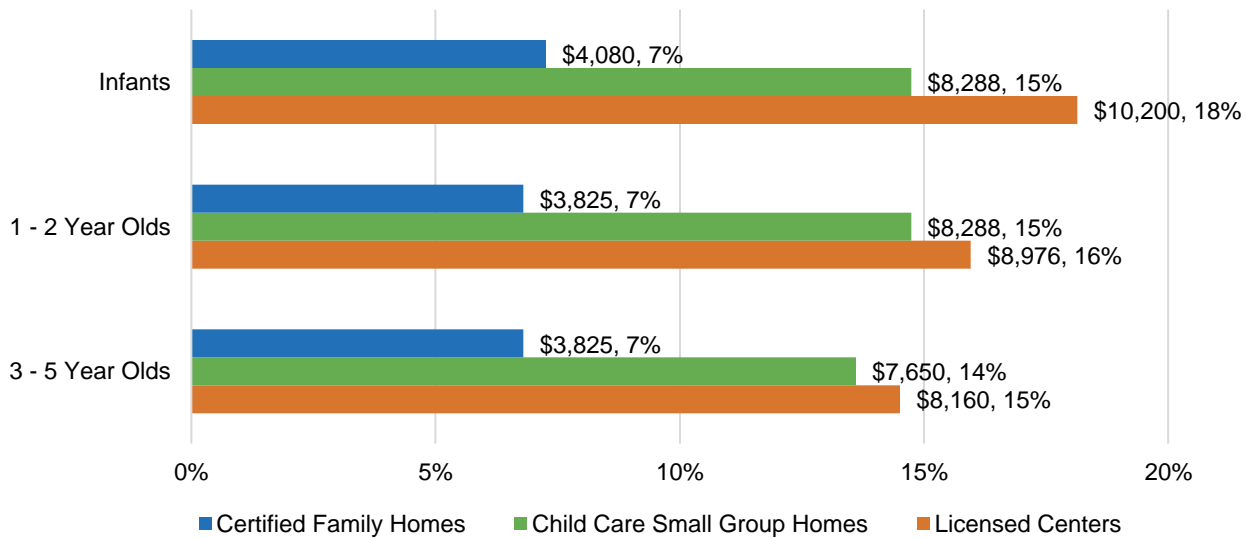


Source: FTF Quality First Data (retrieved from First Things First Data Center).

The cost of formal child care presents a significant barrier for many lower- and middle-income families. The cost of center-based care can rival the cost of in-state tuition at Arizona’s universities. This is particularly true for infants and toddlers for whom annual center-based costs exceed \$9,000 based on the 2018 Child Care Market Rate Survey. A nationally established benchmark suggests that families should

not spend more than seven percent of their income on child care.³⁴ However, as demonstrated in Figure 5-5, for a family earning the median income in Phoenix, the median cost of center-based care in Phoenix North equates to 15 to 18 percent of that family's income and even much less costly care in a certified family home would consume seven percent.

Figure 5-5: Median Annual Cost of Child Care by Provider Type and Setting in Phoenix North and Percent of the City's Median Income Needed for Child Care

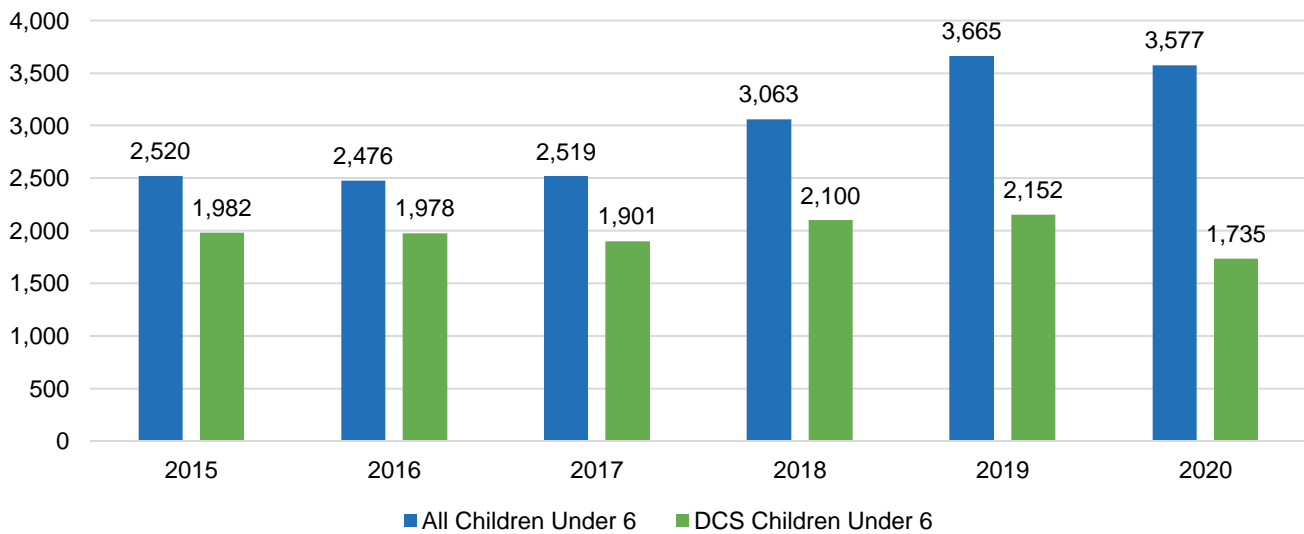


Sources: Unpublished 2018 Child Care Market Rate Survey data provided by the Arizona Department of Economic Security; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table S1903 – Median Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation – Adjusted Dollars). Retrieved from data.census.gov.

The Department of Economic Security's child care subsidy program helped more than 3,500 children under 13 years of age in Phoenix to access child care. The child care subsidy program provides assistance to lower-income families with incomes at or below 165 percent of the federal poverty level who need child care to work or participate in training, as well as families in the child welfare system.³⁵ Most families are required to contribute to the cost of their care on a sliding scale based on their income. The program's largest source of funding is the federal Child Care and Development Fund. In fiscal year 2021, Arizona received more than \$196 million from its regular CCDF allocation, approximately double fiscal year 2018 funding levels. This increase has allowed DES to eliminate the program's waiting list and increase provider payment rates. The number of children under 13 years in Phoenix North determined eligible for a child care subsidy increased 42 percent – from 2,520 to 3,577 – between 2015 and 2020 as illustrated in Figure 5-6. Of these, the number of children actually receiving the child care subsidy increased from 2,363 children in 2015 to 2,798 children in 2020, an 18.4 percent increase.

Arizona has additionally received more than \$630 million in one-time CCDF funding authorized as part of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic that DES is using to support the provider network and otherwise enhance the program.³⁶

Figure 5-6: Children Under 13 Determined Eligible for the DES Child Care Subsidy in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Department of Economic Security.

DES has increased provider payment rates in the subsidy program several times in recent years. At the time of the 2018 child care market rate survey (MRS), it had been nearly two decades since providers had received a permanent increase in payment rates. With the increase in federal funding, DES was able to increase payment levels. This includes increased premiums for high-quality providers. As of October 2021, providers with a Quality First rating of 3-Stars or above or a national accreditation receive a 35 percent premium while home-based providers with a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential receive a 20 percent premium. Figure 5-7 compares the full-time median rate identified through the 2018 MRS for center-based care in Maricopa County to the rates in effect as of this report. As the table shows, all rates are at or above the 2018 median rate.

Figure 5-7: Comparison of Full-Time Median Rates in Maricopa County from 2018 MRS to Current Subsidy Rates

Age Group	Full-Time Median Daily Rate from the 2018 MRS	Current Full-Time Daily Rate
Infants	\$45.00	\$50.20
Toddlers	\$40.00	\$46.15
Preschoolers	\$34.00	\$34.00
School-Aged	\$30.00	\$30.00

Source: Arizona Department of Economic Security (2018). 2018 Child Care Market Rate Survey. Retrieved from <https://des.az.gov/sites/default/files/dl/2018-Child-Care-Market-Rate-Survey.pdf?time=1645480474222>.

The Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council directs significant funding to quality child care and preschool strategies, including Quality First scholarships. All licensed and certified providers in Arizona may choose to participate in First Things First’s Quality First program. Participating providers receive an independent assessment of the overall quality of their program, including teacher and administrator qualifications, the quality of interactions between teaching staff and children, the use of a formal curriculum to deliver child care, and other factors. Following the assessment, providers are assigned a rating of one-to-five stars. Quality First also offers coaching, technical assistance, and financial incentives to improve quality. Additionally, Regional Partnership Councils may allocate funding for scholarships to providers.³⁷ Providers award scholarships to families with children under six years old and with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.³⁸ In 2020, the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council invested more than \$10 million in quality child care and preschool strategies, including funding for a total of 1,184 scholarships across 148 providers.^{39,40}

Families with Children with Special Needs

Early care and education as well as special education services can substantially benefit children with special needs, helping them to reach their full potential.

DES’ Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) provide a variety of services to children with or at risk of developmental delay and disabilities.

Figure 5-8: Number of Children Served by AzEIP and DDD in Phoenix North

	AzEIP – Children Served (point-in-time count)	DDD – Children Served (0 – 2.9 years)	DDD - Children Served (3 – 5.9 year)
2016	705	543	108
2017	1,383	577	128
2018	1,442	596	142
2019		138	405
2020		116	425

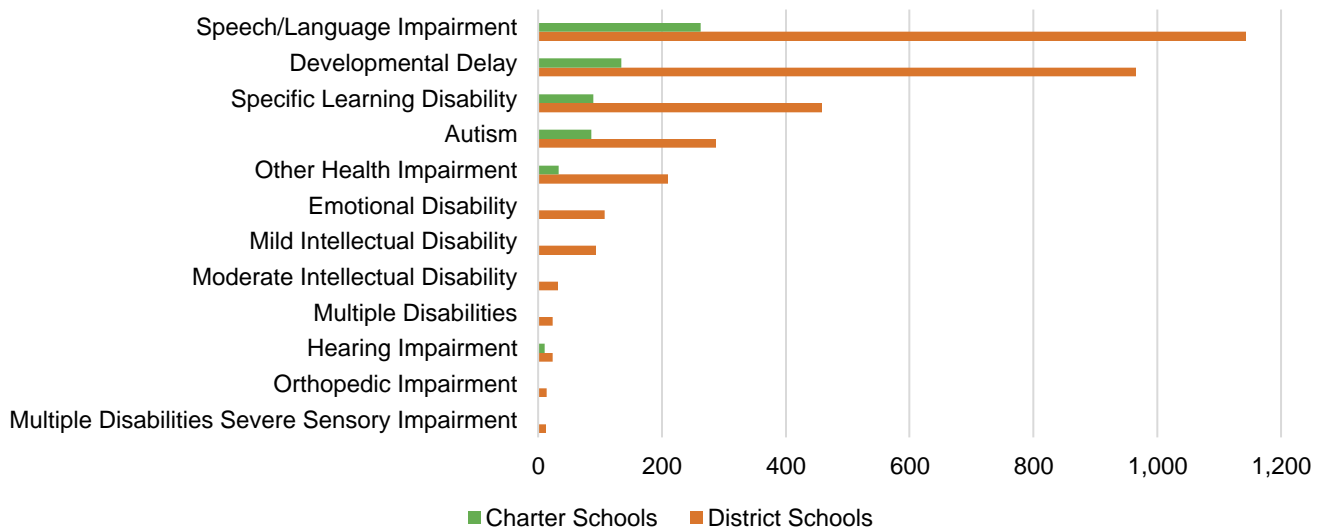
Source: Unpublished data provided by DES.

In addition to services for children, the programs provide families with important tools and training to help raise their children.

Thousands of children in the region receive special education services through district and charter schools. The Exceptional Student Services (ESS) program at the Arizona Department of Education provides professional learning opportunities, provides technical assistance to schools, supports the needs of families of students with disabilities, monitors schools for compliance with the regulations that implement the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and administers the IDEA Part B grant for school-aged children.⁴¹ ESS also assists students with disabilities by providing accessible education materials and assistive technology in the classroom depending on the

individualized needs of children. As illustrated in Figure 5-9, the most common disabilities among children in kindergarten through third grade relate to speech and language development, developmental delays, and autism.

Figure 5-9: Prevalance of Special Needs in District and Charter Schools for Kindergarten - 3rd Graders in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education (2020 school year).

Key Takeaways

The Phoenix North region benefits from a large child care provider community with substantial participation in Quality First. The region’s 310 licensed and certified providers have the capacity to serve more than 38,000 children birth through age 12. Of the available slots, 14,430 (37.9 percent) are associated with providers that participate in Quality First and have a rating of 3-Stars or higher.

The region’s preschool enrollment rate increased by more than four-percentage points since the 2018 RNA to 38.4 percent, which is nearly identical to the statewide rate. Even with this increase, the region’s preschool enrollment rate remains significantly lower than the nationwide rate of 48.3 percent.

Cost continues to be a key barrier for many families to access child care, including higher-quality care. The median cost of child care in Phoenix North ranges from 7 percent to as much as 18 percent of the median income of a family living in Phoenix which exceeds the federal standard that child care is considered affordable when it does not exceed seven percent of a family’s income. Publicly-funded child care assistance programs, such as the DES child care subsidy and First Things First Quality First

scholarship program, are important assets that help thousands of lower-income families in the region to afford formal child care. However, there are still many more families in need of assistance to access child care. In 2020, these programs served more than 4,700 children in Phoenix North, just a fraction of the 15,659 children under six years of age living in poverty within the region.

Early intervention and disability services are important assets for the families of children with or at risk of developmental delays or disabilities. In the Phoenix North Region, 1,439 infants and toddlers receive services from the Arizona Early Intervention Program, 631 children from birth to six years of age are served by the DES Division of Developmental Disabilities, and 1,400 children from three to five years of age receive special education services. In the Phoenix North Region, 4.3 percent of the birth-to-three years-old population receives early intervention services, substantially higher than the statewide rate of 1.94 percent and the 2.70 percent median across all states.



Educational Indicators

EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS

Why it Matters

Educational attainment among children and adults is highly correlated with higher income and lower unemployment rates. According to the Federal Reserve, families headed by an individual with a high school diploma earn a median income nearly double the income of families headed by an individual without a diploma, while families headed by an individual with an advanced degree earn a median income more than five times the income of a household headed by an individual without a high school diploma.⁴² Additionally, individuals 25 years and older with less than a high school diploma experience unemployment rates 2.5 times higher than individuals of the same age with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴³

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

-Nelson Mandela

Intersection with Poverty

Poverty can reduce a child's capacity to learn while negatively impacting academic outcomes and influencing lower levels of educational attainment, thus compromising the potential for higher income later in life.⁴⁴ Further, the neurological effects of deep poverty on young children's development...is tied to structural differences in several areas of the brain associated with school readiness skills. Children from higher socio-economic backgrounds score higher on standardized tests and fare better on other measures of social and emotional outcomes compared to children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, gaps that widen throughout the K-12 educational years.⁴⁵ As much as 20 percent of the gap in test scores could be explained by maturational lags in the frontal and temporal lobes.⁴⁶ This lag in brain development begins in infancy and manifests quickly by the time children of different socioeconomic backgrounds start kindergarten. For example, by the time a child who lives in poverty starts kindergarten, they may already be three years behind peers from more affluent homes.⁴⁷

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

- K-12 enrollment
- Third grade test scores
- Educational attainment

K-12 Enrollment

Nearly 132,000 children from preschool through high school are enrolled in public schools located within the region. Across the region, 138 public schools serve children through 5th grade, including 93 district schools and 45 charter schools. Figure 6-1 reports enrollment by district school and charter school, demonstrating that about four-in-five children are enrolled in district schools. As the figure shows, the proportion of children enrolled in charter schools declines from 22.7 percent of kindergarten through third grade students to 17.6 percent of high school students.

Figure 6-1: Enrollment in District and Charter Schools in Phoenix North in 2020

Grade Cohort	All District and Charter Schools	District Schools		Charter Schools	
		Enrollment	% of Total	Enrollment	% of Total
All Grades	131,592	106,140	80.7%	25,452	19.3%
Preschool	1,486	1,486	100.0%	-	0.0%
K – 3rd Grade	38,329	29,644	77.3%	8,685	22.7%
4th – 5th Grade	19,551	15,583	79.7%	3,968	20.3%
6th – 8th Grade	30,470	25,029	82.1%	5,441	17.9%
9th – 12th Grade	41,699	34,341	82.4%	7,358	17.6%

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education for the 2020 school year. Note: the 'All Grades' total is slightly higher than the individual grade cohorts due to masking of sub-regional totals when there are fewer than 10 students.

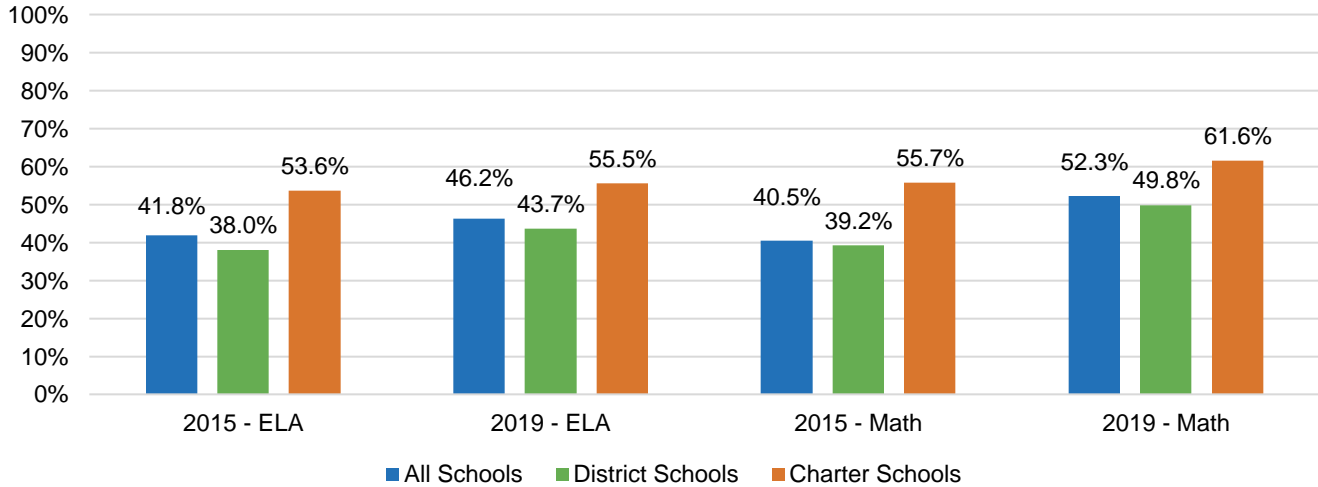
Third Grade Test Scores

Third grade test scores are strongly correlated with future educational performance, including success in and graduation from high school.

Standardized test scores among third graders in Phoenix North have improved in recent years and are similar to statewide figures. Between 2015 and 2019, the region-wide English language arts (ELA) proficiency rate increased from 40.5 percent to 46.2 percent (compared to 46.1 percent statewide) and the mathematics proficiency rate increased from 41.8 percent to 52.3 percent (compared to 50.9 percent statewide). Figure 6-2 compares proficiency rates between district schools and charter schools in 2015

and 2019. As the figure shows, the largest improvements during this period occurred in district schools, but charter schools continue to outperform district schools in both areas.

Figure 6-2: AzMERIT Proficiency Among 3rd Graders in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education for the 2015 and 2019 school years.

Proficiency rates vary substantially across the region. In 2019, less than 40 percent of third graders attending schools in the Alhambra, Creighton, Osborn, Washington, and 85053 zip code area of the Deer Valley Unified School District achieved ELA proficiency, while less than 40 percent of third graders in the Alhambra and Creighton school districts achieved math proficiency. Figure 6-3 reports proficiency rates by district.

Figure 6-3: AzMERIT Proficiency Among 3rd Graders in 2019 by Sub-Region

Sub-Region	All Schools		District Schools		Charter Schools	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Phoenix North	46.2%	52.3%	43.7%	49.8%	55.5%	61.6%
Alhambra	28.6%	39.3%	29.5%	38.6%	25.4%	41.9%
Creighton	33.7%	35.7%	35.0%	36.8%	15.0%	20.0%
Madison	58.6%	64.5%	58.4%	66.1%	60.3%	49.3%
Osborn	38.0%	47.0%	29.6%	39.6%	47.4%	55.5%
Paradise Valley	53.0%	57.0%	49.8%	54.1%	66.2%	68.9%
Scottsdale	63.8%	70.4%	64.1%	70.6%	63.4%	70.2%
Washington	36.3%	41.1%	34.6%	39.4%	50.2%	54.3%
DVUSD-85023	43.9%	60.5%	34.5%	50.7%	61.8%	78.9%
DVUSD-85027	65.6%	63.6%	48.0%	47.2%	84.0%	81.0%
DVUSD-85053	35.4%	50.0%	29.7%	41.5%	45.7%	65.7%
DVUSD-85083	83.3%	74.1%	83.3%	74.1%	NAN	NAN
DVUSD-85085	73.2%	78.2%	73.0%	83.3%	73.8%	65.4%
DVUSD-85086	66.8%	76.6%	68.1%	76.9%	63.6%	75.9%
DVUSD-85087	66.4%	77.6%	66.4%	77.6%	NAN	NAN

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education for the 2019 school year. 'NAN' means no observations available.

Educational Attainment

Graduating high school and attaining further education can translate to hundreds of thousands of dollars of additional lifelong earnings.

Graduation rates in high schools in Phoenix North have increased in recent years and are similar to statewide figures. The four-year high school graduation rate among students attending district and charter schools in Phoenix North improved from 75.1 percent for the 2014 graduation cohort to 79.7 percent for the 2019 cohort (compared to 79.2 percent statewide), while the five-year graduation rate improved from 79.6 percent to 84.0 percent (compared to 82.6 percent statewide). Graduation rates by subregion are presented in Figure 6-4. As the figure indicates, graduation rates among charter schools are lower than in district schools. This is attributed to a higher proportion of charter school students attending alternative schools, online schools, and other educational models that differ from district school models.⁴⁸

Figure 6-4: Four and Five-Year Graduation Rates for the 2019 Graduation Cohort by Sub-Region

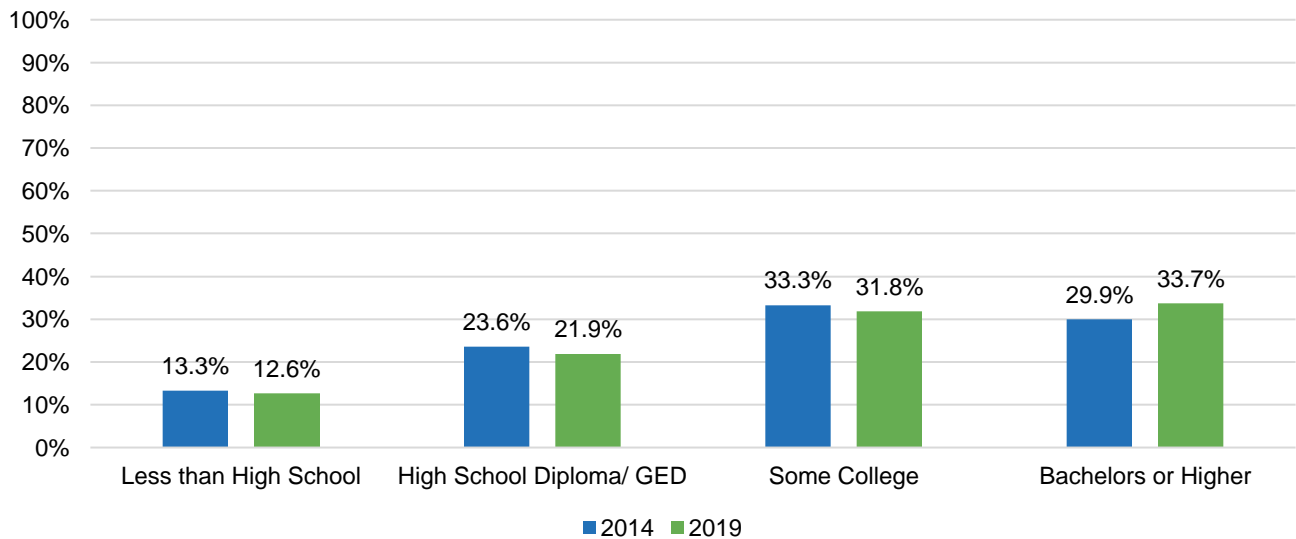
Sub-Region	All Schools		District Schools		Charter Schools	
	4-Year	5-Year	4-Year	5-Year	4-Year	5-Year
Phoenix North	79.7%	84.0%	87.3%	90.7%	51.9%	60.1%
Alhambra	62.2%	68.1%	71.0%	76.2%	39.8%	47.7%
Madison	73.1%	80.3%	85.7%	90.8%	60.4%	70.3%
Osborn	79.1%	84.2%	77.1%	82.2%	93.9%	>98%
Paradise Valley	84.1%	87.1%	89.2%	91.9%	54.9%	60.6%
Phoenix Elementary	31.1%	67.5%	31.1%	67.5%	DS	DS
Scottsdale	92.1%	94.4%	90.5%	92.7%	95.7%	>98%
Washington	75.7%	80.1%	91.9%	94.3%	34.5%	44.5%
DVUSD-85027	87.8%	90.2%	87.8%	90.2%	DS	DS
DVUSD-85083	98.0%	>98%	98.0%	>98%	DS	DS
DVUSD-85086	94.7%	95.2%	94.3%	94.9%	>98%	>98%

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Education for the 2019 school year. DS means data is suppressed due to fewer than 11 observations.

While four- and five-year high school graduation have improved, fewer students who graduate high school are subsequently enrolling in a two or four-year college. Nationally, the immediate college enrollment rate for students completing high school was 66 percent in 2019.⁴⁹ In comparison, only 46.3 percent of Arizona’s graduating class enrolled in college in 2020 compared to 52.9 percent in 2019, with the pandemic seen as the reason for the large decrease in enrollment following high school.⁵⁰ The Arizona Board of Regents predicts that if current trends prevail, only 16.8 percent of ninth graders in 2021 will graduate from a four-year college by 2029.⁵¹

Since 2014, educational attainment among adults 25 and older has increased. As Figure 6-5 details, the percentage of adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased by almost four percentage points. Across the State, attainment of a bachelor’s degree or higher increased at a slower pace, from 27.1 percent in 2014 to 29.5 percent in 2019.

Figure 6-5: Educational Attainment of Adults (25 and Older), 2014 - 2019 in Phoenix North



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table S1501 – Educational Attainment (compared to 2018 RNA). Retrieved from data.census.gov.

The percentage of mothers giving birth in Phoenix North with higher levels of educational attainment increased in recent years. Between 2014 and 2016, 26.7 percent of mothers giving birth had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 29.1 percent between 2017 and 2019. There was a commensurate decrease in the percentage of mothers with a less than a high school diploma or GED. Between 2014 and 2016, 21.7 percent of mothers giving birth had less than a high school diploma or GED compared to only 18.5 percent of mothers giving birth between 2017 and 2019.

Key Takeaways

Across Phoenix North, there are 138 public schools (93 district schools and 45 charter schools) educating nearly 132,000 children from preschool through high school. Between 2014 and 2019, third grade proficiency levels in within Phoenix North’s district and charter schools improved markedly: proficiency in ELA increased from 41.8 percent in 2014 to 46.2 percent in 2019, while math proficiency among third graders increased from 40.5 percent in 2014 to 52.3 percent in 2019. High school

graduation rates in the schools within the region have also improved over the past five years. For the 2019 class, 84.0 percent of students graduated within the five years. Both third grade test scores and high school graduation rates within the region are very similar to statewide figures.

Another positive trend among adults 25 years and older in Phoenix North is the percentage obtaining higher levels of education. Between 2014 and 2019, the percentage of adults 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 29.9 percent to 33.7 percent, while the percentage of adults with a high school diploma or less decreased from 36.9 percent to 34.5 percent. Similarly, the percentage of mothers giving birth in Phoenix North with a bachelor's degree or higher increased to 29.1 percent in the period between 2017 and 2019 from 26.7 percent between 2014 and 2016.



Health

HEALTH

Why it Matters

Health in early childhood lays a foundation for growth and development throughout a child's life and can have long-lasting impacts well into adulthood. There is a strong connection between early childhood health and school readiness. For example, children who have access to healthcare have improved school attendance, which promotes learning continuity; children with healthy teeth are at lesser risk for speech impairments and are more engaged in learning; and children who have healthful diets have more energy for school and learning.⁵²

"He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything."

-Arab Proverb

A healthy childhood begins with a healthy pregnancy. Children born to mothers who receive adequate prenatal care are three times less likely to have low birth weight and are five times less likely to die in infancy.⁵³ Healthy habits during pregnancy for the mother, such as a proper nutritional diet, is crucial to the baby's development. Conversely, use of harmful substances, such as tobacco, alcohol, or drugs are associated with higher rates of birth defects and developmental disabilities.⁵⁴

Following birth, infants and young children need access to health care, which is best assured when children have adequate health insurance coverage. Children with health insurance coverage are more likely to receive physical and behavioral health services, which lowers the risk for hospitalization and improves screening for other issues, such as developmental delays, which are best addressed early.⁵⁵

Children who have health insurance have lower rates of obesity, improved oral health, decreased reports of mental health disorders, and better educational outcomes.⁵⁶

Intersection with Poverty

Early childhood stressors stemming from poverty, lack of safe housing, and lack of access to routine medical services impact a child's lifelong health.⁵⁷ Children who live in poverty are at increased risk of chronic illness, physiologic stress, poor nutrition, and injury.⁵⁸ Further, children who grow up in poverty may experience "neuroendocrine dysregulation that may alter brain function and may contribute to the development of chronic cardiovascular, immune, and psychiatric disorders."⁵⁹ Early research has shown

more acute issues related to mental health and well-being among children during COVID-19 due to the effects of virtual learning and access to school health services.⁶⁰

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

- Mothers giving birth
- Infant and child health
- Behavioral health

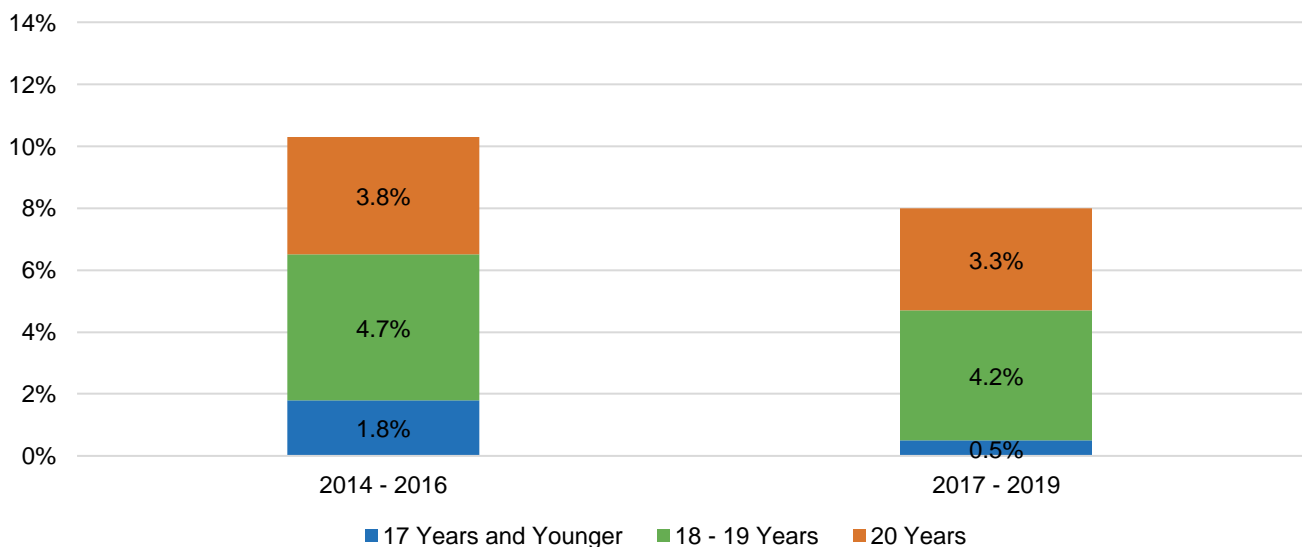
Mothers Giving Birth

Good health in early childhood begins with good health prior to birth.

Following broader national trends, the number of births rates in the region have declined in recent years. There were 735 fewer births between 2017 and 2019 than between 2014 and 2016, a reduction of 7.4 percent. Statewide, the birth rate declined 6.1 percent during these time periods.

The percentage of births to teen mothers has declined substantially in recent years. In the three year period between 2014 and 2016, the percentage of births to mothers under 20 years old was 18.6 percent. In the subsequent three-year period, the percentage of births to teenage mothers decreased to 13.2 percent, as illustrated in Figure 7-1. The multi-decade decline in the teen birth rates is a positive

Figure 7-1: Percent of Births to Mothers Under 21 Years in Phoenix North

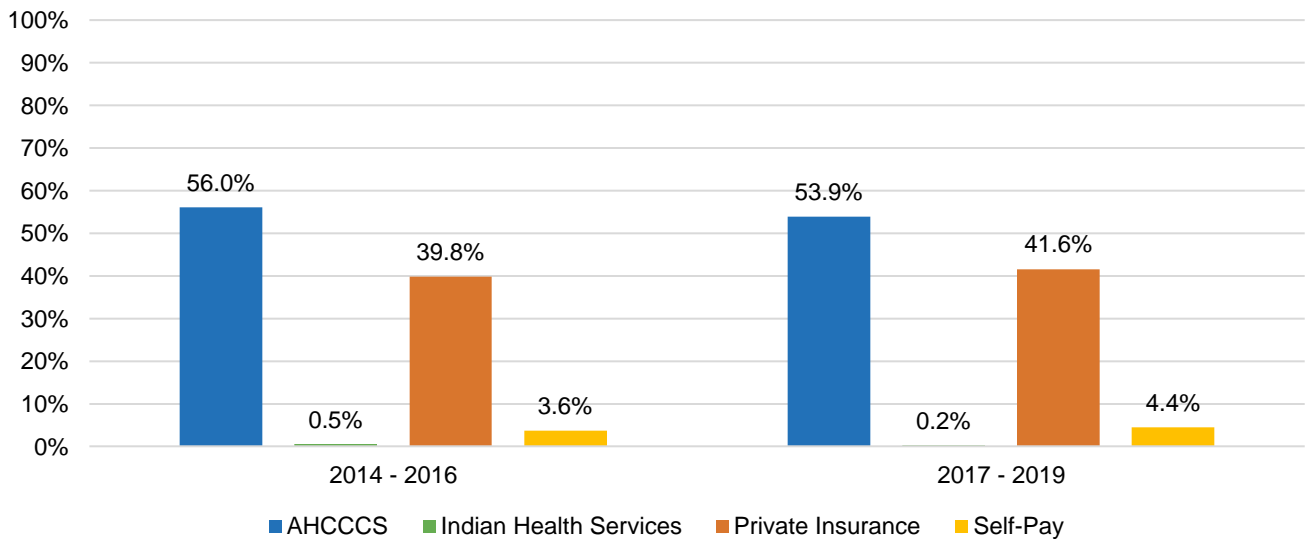


Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

development as teenage pregnancy is a significant contributor to high school dropout rates and children of teenage mothers are more likely to have lower school achievement, have more health problems, and ultimately experience higher rates of unemployment as young adults. ⁶¹

The majority of births are to mothers who rely on AHCCCS for their health insurance. While AHCCCS continues to pay for the majority of births in the region, there was a small reduction in recent years. As shown in Figure 7-2, in the three-year period between 2014 and 2016 the total percentage of births paid by public insurance (including AHCCCS and Indian Health Services) was 56.5 percent compared to 54.1 percent during the three-year period between 2017 and 2019.

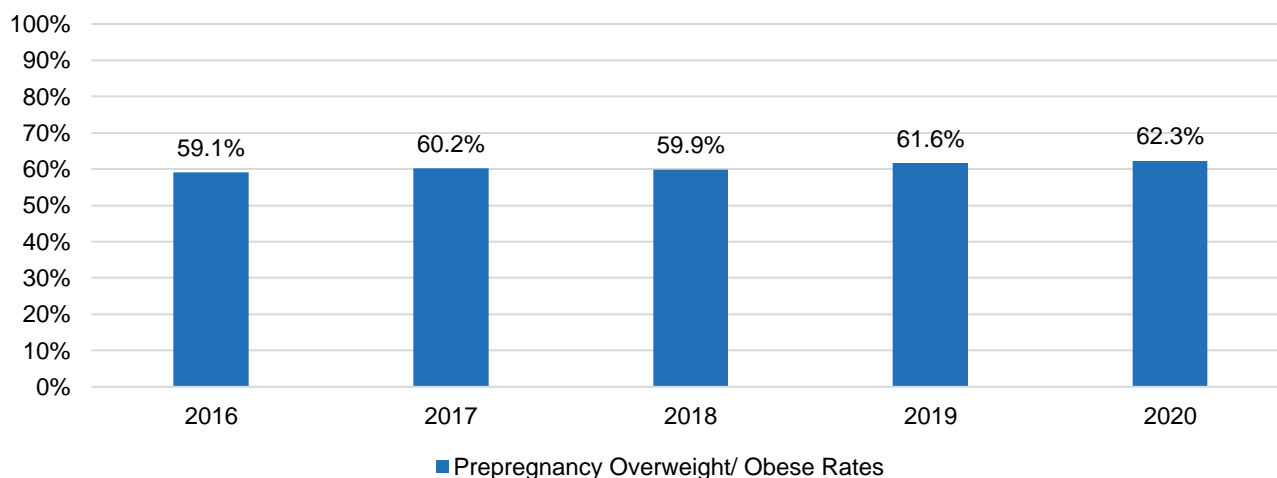
Figure 7-2: Percent of Births by Payer in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

More than three-in-five births are to women who are overweight or obese. Between 2016 and 2020, the percentage of births to mothers who were overweight or obese increased by from 59.1 percent to 62.3 percent as shown in Figure 7-3. Overweightness and obesity during pregnancy are associated with a variety of risks including increased risk of miscarriage, gestational diabetes, cardiac dysfunction, birth defects, childhood asthma, and childhood obesity. ⁶²

Figure 7-3: Percent of Births to Mothers who are Overweight or Obese in Phoenix North



Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Prenatal care for mothers in Phoenix North declined in recent years. Prenatal care is linked to reduced risks for pregnancy complications, improved fetal health and development, and improved pregnancy health as mothers receive clinical advice about diet and medication intake that can ensure a healthy pregnancy.⁶³ Between 2017 and 2019, 62.6 percent of mothers began prenatal care within the first trimester (compared to 64.5 percent statewide during the same period), which is a reduction from 65.6 percent of mothers between 2014 and 2016 (compared to 68.2 percent statewide during the same period).⁶⁴

Infant and Child Health

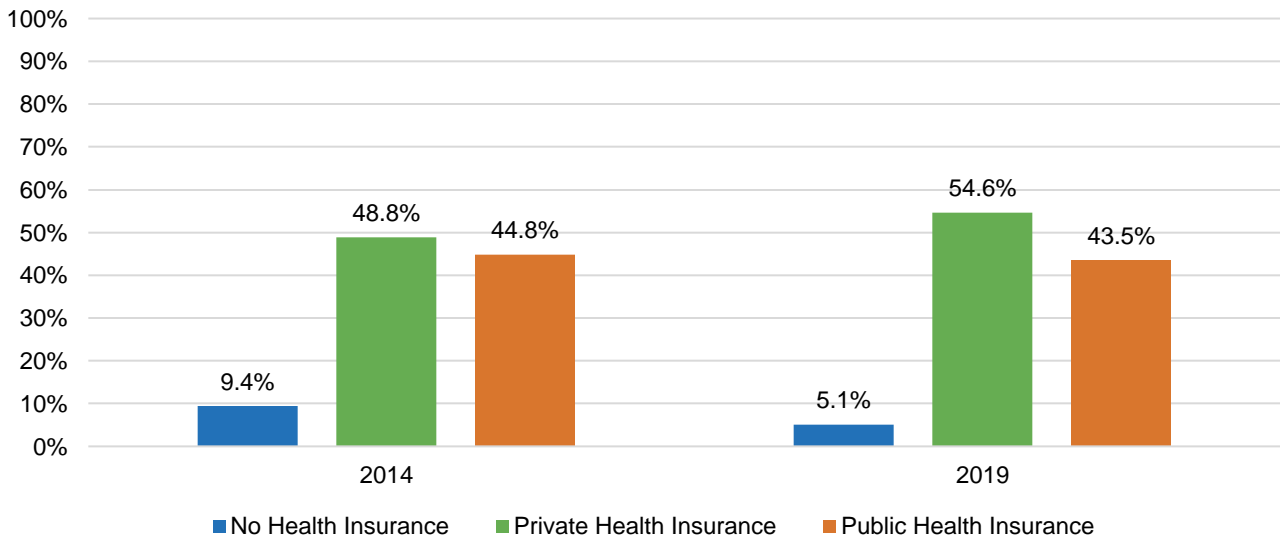
A child's health in the initial months and years of life can have impacts – positive and negative – that persist throughout their entire life.

The percent of mothers breastfeeding their infants has remained constant in recent years. Infants who are breastfed have reduced risks of asthma, obesity, diabetes, sudden infant death syndrome, and similar health risks, while mothers who breastfeed lower their risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, and certain types of cancer.⁶⁵ Approximately 80 percent of mothers in Phoenix North reported breastfeeding their infants each year between 2017 and 2020, slightly higher than the statewide average of 77 percent.

The number of young children without health insurance has fallen substantially in recent years. Between 2014 and 2019, the rate of uninsured children under six years of age decreased from 9.4 percent to 5.1 percent as illustrated in Figure 7-4. Additionally, a larger proportion of children had

private insurance due to higher rate of employer-sponsored health insurance. Children with health insurance coverage are more likely to receive healthcare and are at lower risk for hospitalization, while experiencing improved outcomes in physical health and other areas of life.⁶⁶

Figure 7-4: Rates of Insurance by Type for Children Under 6 Compared to 2018 RNA in Phoenix North



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), Table B27001 – Health Insurance Coverage Stats by Sex by Age; B27002 – Private Health Insurance Status by Sex by Age; B27003 – Public Health Insurance Status by Sex by Age. Retrieved from data.census.gov.

There were small but notable declines in immunization rates in 2020. Vaccinations provide important immunities to life threatening illnesses such as measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, varicella, and other life-threatening diseases.⁶⁷ However, between 2018 and 2020, vaccination rates decreased for children attending child care facilities and kindergarten in Phoenix North as shown in Figure 7-5. The pandemic was a likely factor in the overall decrease in 2020, though it is noted that the rates of vaccination largely decreased from 2018 to 2019 as well.

Figure 7-5: Vaccination Rates of Children in Child Care and Kindergarten in Phoenix North

Vaccine	Child Care Facilities				Kindergarten			
	2018	2019	2020	Change 2018-2020	2018	2019	2020	Change 2018-2020
4+ Doses DtAP	91.3%	91.4%	88.7%	(2.6%)	93.7%	92.1%	92.9%	(0.8%)
3+ Doses Polio	93.3%	92.9%	91.1%	(2.2%)	94.3%	92.9%	93.2%	(1.1%)
1+ Dose MMR (2+ for KG)	93.9%	93.7%	91.2%	(2.7%)	94.2%	92.8%	93.0%	(1.2%)
3+ Doses HIB	93.2%	92.9%	91.6%	(1.6%)				
2 Doses Hepatitis A	87.4%	85.4%	85.1%	(2.3%)				
3 Doses Hepatitis B	92.0%	91.3%	89.4%	(2.6%)	95.1%	94.1%	93.6%	(1.5%)
1 Dose Varicella (2+ for KG)	93.2%	93.4%	91.2%	(2.0%)	96.4%	74.3%	80.0%	(16.4%)

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Nearly one-in-three children in the region are overweight or obese. Children who are overweight or obese are at increased risk for high blood pressure and cholesterol, impaired glucose tolerance, type 2 diabetes, respiratory issues such as asthma and sleep apnea, anxiety and depression, lower self-esteem, and lower quality of life.⁶⁸ In 2020, 32.0 percent of children in Phoenix North and Arizona overall were considered overweight or obese compared to 29.0 percent in 2016.

Over the past five years, there was an annual average of about 5,000 emergency room visits and 64 inpatient hospital admissions among young children in Phoenix North. Across Phoenix North, there were 321 inpatient hospitalizations for children under five years between 2016 and 2020, an average of 64 per year, compared to 104 hospitalizations in 2014. The most common reason for inpatient hospitalizations is due to falls, followed by poisoning. Additionally, there were a total of 24,844 emergency room visits among children under five years between 2016 and 2020, an average of 4,969 visits per year, compared to 6,725 visits in 2014. Falls account for almost half of these visits. Figure 7-6 lists the reasons for emergency room visits and inpatient admissions over the past five years.

Figure 7-6: Counts of Hospitalizations and Emergency Room Visits Among Children Under 5 in Phoenix North (2016 – 2020)

Cause	Hospitalizations	ER Visits	Cause	Hospitalizations	ER Visits
Fall	125	11,671	Overexertion	0	454
Other	34	3,988	Pedal cyclist, Other	0	126
Struck by, Against	12	3,409	Unspecified	DS	110
Natural/Environmental	18	2,077	Drowning/Submersion	6	55
Poisoning	70	1,290	Other Transport	DS	55
Cut/Pierce	DS	808	Pedestrian, Other	DS	19
MV Traffic	26	748	Machinery	0	9
Fire/Hot Objects or Substance	26	706			

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services. DS means data is suppressed due to fewer than 11 observations.

Additionally, 187 children under five years who were hospitalized for asthma-related conditions between 2016 and 2020, an average of 37 asthma-related hospitalizations per year. Over the same period, there were 18 hospitalizations of children under five years-old in Phoenix North related to type 2 diabetes.

The mortality rate for young children in the region improved in recent years. Between 2017 and 2019, there were 38 deaths among children under five years of age in Phoenix North, including 31 infant deaths. In comparison, there were 53 child deaths among children under five years of age, including 47 infant deaths, between 2014 and 2016.

Behavioral Health

Young children are less likely to experience behavioral health issues than adolescents or adults, but for children with such issues, the effects can be significant.

Although detailed information is not available at the regional level, state-by-state rankings demonstrate that Arizona needs to improve mental health care for children. Behavioral health treatment is covered by insurance, including the AHCCCS program. However, mental health among children in Arizona requires greater attention. Mental Health America rates states on specific indicators, including mental health access, instances of substance use, and the extent to which private health insurance covers mental or emotional problems among children under 18 years. Figure 7-7 below compares Arizona’s standing between 2018 and 2022, where Arizona ranked 49th overall.

Figure 7-7: Arizona’s Rankings for Children’s Behavioral Health

Factor	2018	2022
Overall Youth Ranking	43rd	49th
Youth with At Least One Major Depressive Episode (major depressive episode) in the Past Year	39th	43rd
Youth with Substance Use Disorder in the Past Year	42nd	40th
Youth with Severe major depressive episode	10th	28th
Youth with major depressive episode who Did Not Receive Mental Health Services	36th	48th
Youth with Severe major depressive episode who Received Some Consistent Treatment	36th	47th
Children with Private Insurance that Did Not Cover Mental or Emotional Problems	43rd	42nd
Students Identified with Emotional Disturbance for an Individualized Education Program	27th	27th

Source: Mental Health America. (2022). Youth Ranking 2022. Retrieved from <https://mhanational.org/issues/2022/mental-health-america-youth-data>. And Youth Ranking 2018, retrieved from <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/2019%20MH%20in%20America%20Final.pdf>.

Similarly, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2022 Kids Count Data Book ranked Arizona 44th out of 50 states for overall child well-being, considering economic well-being, education, family and community, and health – all factors influential to a child’s mental well-being.⁶⁹ According to the report, the pandemic took a particular toll on children, who were more likely to “deal with anxiety or depression during the first year of the pandemic” while nearly three quarter of parents believed their children would benefit from mental health counseling. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that “1 in 14 children has a caregiver with poor mental health, which may impair their ability to properly care for their children in the absence of resources and support.”⁷⁰

Use of opioids and other substances is an issue across the region and state. Between 2017 and 2020, there were a total of 559 opioid overdose deaths in Phoenix North. Additionally, there were 1,466 newborns hospitalized in Phoenix North during the same time period due to maternal drug use during pregnancy.

Key Takeaways

The number of births in Phoenix North declined 7.4 percent between 2017 and 2019 compared to births in 2014 and 2016. Maternal and infant health indicators were mixed. Positively, births to teen mothers declined and NICU admissions decreased. Of concern, the percentage of mothers giving birth who are overweight or obese has increased and prenatal care declined.

Child health indicators similarly demonstrate both negative and positive trends. Health insurance rates have increased and both emergency department visits and inpatient hospital admissions declined, while child obesity rates increased and standard vaccination rates fell.



Family Support

FAMILY SUPPORT

Why it Matters

Children require a safe, supportive, and stable living environment to learn and grow. Children who experience isolated or routine adversities, such as abuse, neglect, and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) may experience high levels of chronic stress, which can impact or impair brain development, including emotional and social development.⁷¹

The environment in which children are raised, including their local neighborhood, also plays a significant role in their development. Children raised in stable housing and in safe neighborhoods enjoy more physical outdoor activity, develop healthy social relationships, and experience lower levels of stress than children who grow up in neighborhoods where crime may be more prevalent.⁷² Violent and property crimes affect thousands of the City’s residents each year, but have been on the decline in recent years despite an increase in overall population.

Intersection with Poverty

Research has demonstrated that children from low-income families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system.⁷³ As is the case in Arizona, neglect is the most frequent form of maltreatment reported to child welfare agencies⁷⁴ However, neglect is often a function of a family’s inability to acquire the basic needs for their children, such as healthcare or transportation to school.⁷⁵ Economic relief provided to low-income families both alleviates the financial pressures families face and has been shown to reduce reports of child neglect. For example, research has shown that a 10 percent increase in the federal Earned Income Tax Credit led to a nine percent decrease in cases of reported child neglect.⁷⁶ Accordingly, a reduction in poverty “could lead to lower rates of child removal, higher rates of reunification, and higher rates of parental right retention.”⁷⁷

What the Data Tell Us

This domain covers the following topics:

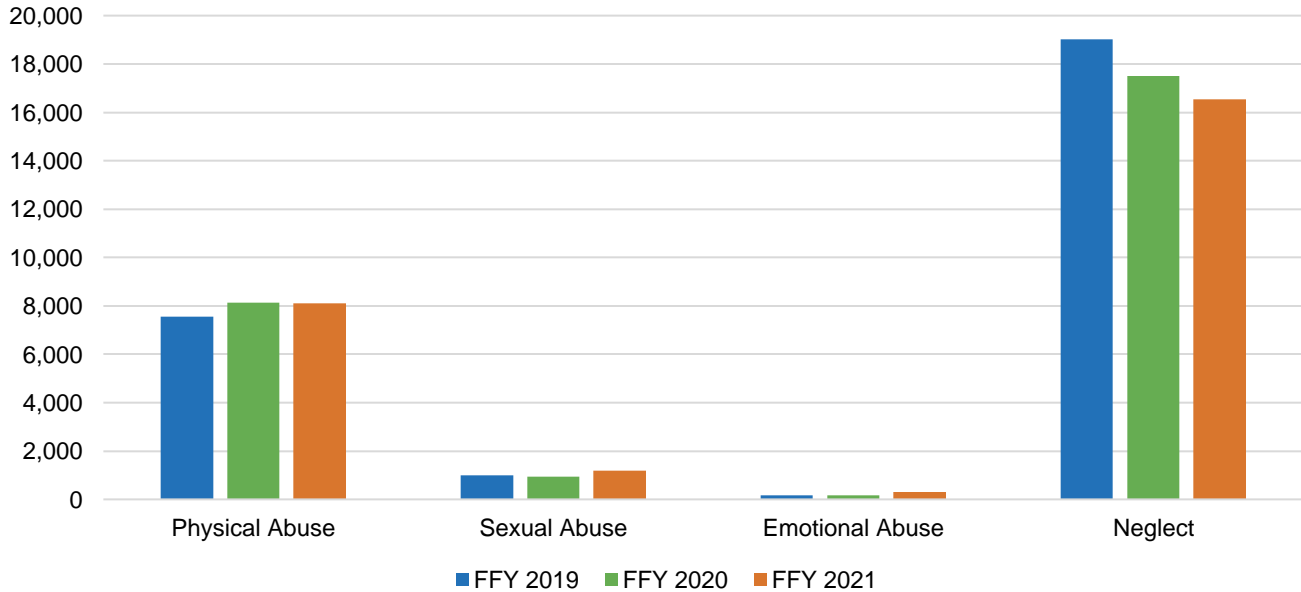
- Child welfare
- In-home support programs
- Community risk

Child Welfare

The state’s child welfare system provides a critical safety for endangered children.

Reports of child abuse and neglect have fallen significantly during the pandemic due to reduced connections to schools, physicians, and other mandatory reporters. According to the CDC, official reports to child protection agencies have declined across the United States by 20 to 70 percent during the pandemic due to decreased in-person contact between children and mandated reporters.⁷⁸ However, the CDC also reports the risk for child abuse and neglect increased during the pandemic, indicating that many cases are going unreported. Following this trend, the number of reports for physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect in Maricopa County to the Department of Child Safety (DCS) declined 5.7 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021 from 27,736 reports to 26,140 reports.⁷⁹ However, the decrease is attributable to reports of neglect, as reports of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse increased by a combined 885 cases (a 10.1 percent increase) between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021 as illustrated in Figure 8-1.

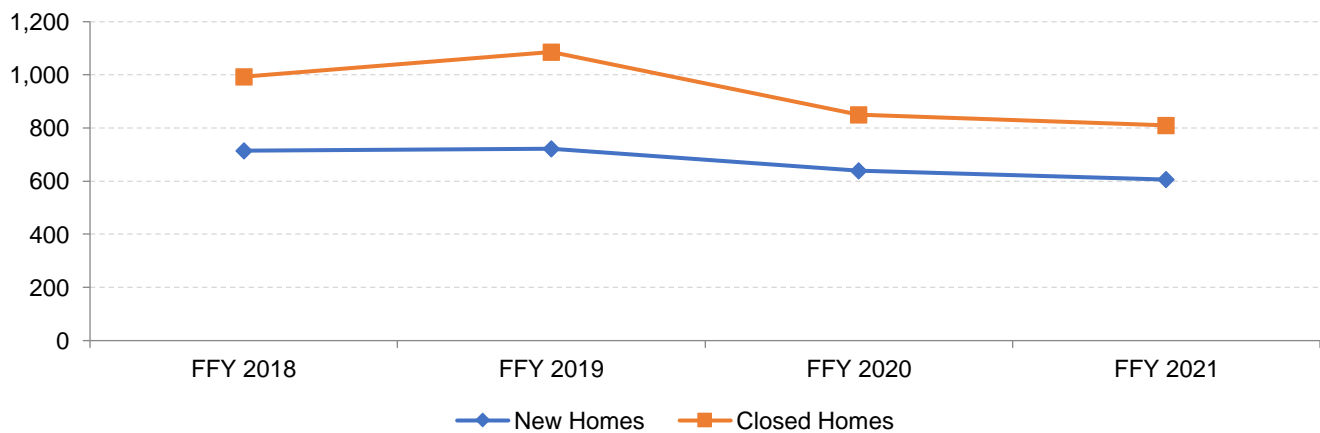
Figure 8-1: Reports Received by DCS in Maricopa County by Maltreatment Category, Federal Fiscal Years 2019 -2021



Source: Arizona Department of Child Safety. (2021). *Semi Annual Child Welfare Reports*. Retrieved from <https://dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures>.

The number of available licensed foster homes has been in decline for several years. The number of children in an out-of-home placement in Maricopa County decreased 17.3 percent between federal fiscal years 2017 to 2021, from 9,702 to 8,027. Across Arizona, the number of licensed foster homes declined 13.7 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021, from 4,115 to 3,552 as more foster homes have closed than opened in each of the past four years as seen in Figure 8-2. As a result, the number available foster home slots decreased from an average of 9,834 in 2019 to 7,833 in 2021, which can make it more challenging to appropriately match children to homes in terms of neighborhood and race/ ethnicity and to find placements for certain children such as teenagers.

Figure 8-2: New and Closed Foster Homes, FFY 2018 - 2021



Source: Arizona Department of Child Safety. (2021). *Semi Annual Child Welfare Reports*. Retrieved from <https://dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures>.

Family Support Programs

Families living in Phoenix North have access to a variety of family support programs that provide valuable resources designed to enhance parenting skills, support the health and education of young children and their families, assist at-risk parents to prevent child abuse or neglect, and similar family support programs.

For example, Family Resource Centers offer training and educational opportunities, resources, and links to other services for healthy child development. In addition, the centers strengthen families of young children by providing locally-based information and instruction on health and child development issues. There are eight family resource centers located in the Phoenix North Region. Since 2015, the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council’s investment in Family Resource Centers nearly doubled from \$746,000 to \$1,400,000 in fiscal year 2021.⁸⁰

In addition, there are a variety of programs that assist families in their homes to learn important parenting skills, promote health and wellness among children, and better prepare children for school.

Programs available in Phoenix North include:

- Early Head Start works with pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers to enhance parenting skills as well as children’s physical, social, emotional, and mental development. Services are provided through home visits and center-based settings. Across the City of Phoenix, the program has funding for only for 832 slots.
- Healthy Families administered by DCS works with at-risk parents to prevent child abuse or neglect and to promote child development and wellness. Services must begin before a child is three months old and may continue through five years of age. In fiscal year 2020, 2,057 families in Maricopa County received services.⁸¹
- The High Risk Perinatal/ Newborn Intensive Care Program administered by ADHS provides services dedicated to reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity (abnormalities that may impact a child’s growth and development) through early identification of high-risk women and children; education for health professionals, families, and communities; linkage of infants, toddlers, and pregnant women to risk-appropriate services; and establishment of standards of care. In fiscal year 2020, 4,154 infants across Arizona were enrolled in the program, with 7,325 home visits conducted for medically fragile infants.⁸²
- Health Start provides education, support, and advocacy services to pregnant/ postpartum women in targeted communities across the state. Families receive home visits and case management overseen by nurses and social workers, through the enrolled child’s second year of life. The program emphasizes various health-related goals.
- The Nurse-Family Partnership serves low-income first-time mothers less than 28 weeks pregnant. A nurse home visitor works with these mothers to engage in good preventive health practices, to provide responsible and competent care, and to improve economic self-sufficiency. By some estimates, every dollar invested in the Nurse-Family Partnership program saves \$5.70 in future costs for the highest-risk families served.⁸³
- The Parents as Teachers program works with parents-to-be and parents of children younger than five years to increase their knowledge of early childhood development, to develop positive parenting techniques, to provide early detection of developmental delays, and to increase the child’s school readiness.

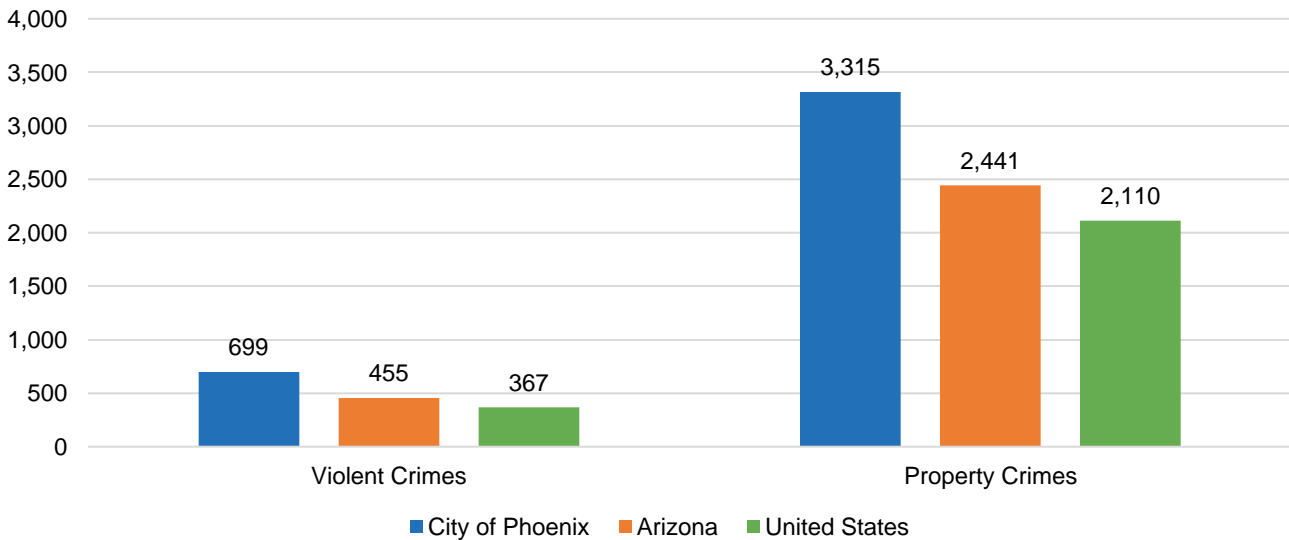
Community Risk

Exposure to crime and violence can have severe negative impacts on children.

Crime rates in Phoenix have continued to decline, but remain higher than less populous areas.

Violent crimes, such as murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, robbery, and sexual or aggravated assaults as well as property crimes, such as burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft decreased between 2017 and 2019. In 2019, there were a total of 11,803 violent crimes in the city compared to 12,511 in 2017. Property crimes declined from 60,353 to 55,974 during the same period. However, crime in Phoenix per 100,000 residents exceeds both the statewide and national averages as depicted in Figure 8-3.

Figure 8-3: Violent and Property Crime Rates per 100,000 residents in the City of Phoenix, Arizona, and the United States in 2019



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1>.

To better contextualize these figures, crime is generally more prevalent in large metropolitan areas such as Phoenix. Figure 8-4 compares the violent and property crime rates per 100,000 residents in 2019 to the 10 largest cities in the United States by population. As the figure shows, Phoenix ranks seventh in both violent and property crimes.

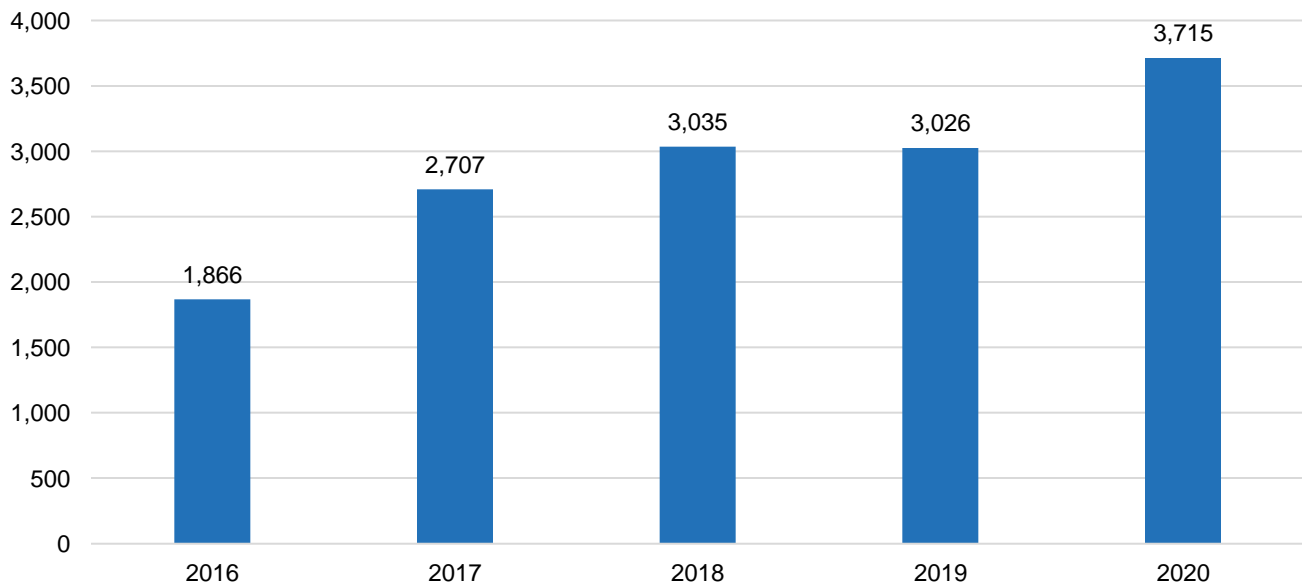
Figure 8-4: Violent and Property Crime Rates per 100,000 in Phoenix Compared to Other Large Cities in the United States (2019)

Violent Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents		Property Crimes per 100,000 Residents	
City	Rate	City	Rate
Houston	1,072	New York City	1,460
Chicago	943	San Diego	1,883
Philadelphia	909	Los Angeles	2,383
Dallas	863	San Jose	2,420
Los Angeles	732	Chicago	2,983
San Antonio	708	Philadelphia	3,097
Phoenix	699	Phoenix	3,315
New York City	571	Dallas	3,321
San Jose	438	Houston	4,319
San Diego	362	San Antonio	4,324

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1>.

Reports of domestic violence in Phoenix have nearly doubled in the past five years. Reports to the Phoenix Police Department related to domestic violence increased substantially between 2016 and 2020, from 1,866 to 3,715, a 99.0 percent increase. Figure 8-5 reports these figures over the past five years. In 2021, there were 35 deaths due to domestic violence, including three children under the age of six years. Across Maricopa County, there are seven domestic violence shelters with a total of 390 beds, and of these, three are located within the City of Phoenix with a total of 187 beds.⁸⁴

Figure 8-5: Phoenix Police Calls for Domestic Violence



Source: City of Phoenix Open Data – Calls for Service (2016 – 2020). Retrieved March 2021 from <https://www.phoenixopendata.com/dataset/64a60154-3b2d-4583-8fb5-6d5e1b469c28/resource/1d536ee6-7ffb-49c3-bffe-5cdd98a3c97e/download/callsforservice.csv>.

Key Takeaways

Several troubling trends regarding child and family safety have emerged in Phoenix in recent years. Consistent with national trends, the number of reports of child abuse and neglect in Maricopa County has declined during the pandemic. In particular, reports to DCS from Maricopa County decreased 5.7 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021. However, this reduction is attributed to reduced contacts with mandatory reporters rather than a decline in need; in fact, the CDC reports that risk has increased during the pandemic. Further, reports of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse actually increased by 10.1 percent between federal fiscal years 2019 and 2021. Between 2018 and 2021, there was a 13.7 percent decrease in the number of licensed foster care homes, with more homes closing than opening in each year, which may make it more challenging to place children in family-like setting when out-of-home placement is appropriate.

Violent and property crimes in the City of Phoenix decreased between 2017 and 2019, but calls to the Phoenix Police Department for domestic violence doubled between 2016 and 2020.

There are a number of programs that offer services and resources to families in Phoenix to strengthen their families, access parental training, and provide other supports. In general, however, these programs are only able to reach relatively modest numbers of families.



Summary and Conclusions

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With more than 65,000 children under six years of age, Phoenix North is the most populous First Things First region. Unsurprisingly for such a large community, this group is diverse. For example:

- Nearly one-in-four children across the region live in poverty, but median family incomes in some school districts in the region approach or exceed \$100,000
- Almost three quarters of children live with married or cohabiting couples while approximately 20 percent live with a single female
- About 40 percent of young children in the region are of Hispanic descent while about 40 percent are White/ Caucasian
- Nearly 30 percent of individuals five years and older in the region primarily speak a language other than English at home

Since the 2018 Regional Needs and Assets reports, Phoenix North has experienced improvements across a variety of measures; key findings include:

- Family incomes increased and the percentage of children living in poverty fell from 30.3 percent in 2014 to 24.4 percent in 2019
- The preschool enrollment rate for three and four year-olds increased from 34.0 percent to 38.4 percent, although this remains substantially below the national average of 48.3 percent
- Participation in Quality First has increased and 40 percent of licensed and certified slots are associated with providers with at least a 3-Star rating, signifying high quality
- An influx of federal funds allowed DES to eliminate the waiting list for its child care subsidy program; coupled with Quality First scholarships, more than 4,700 lower-income children received child care assistance
- Third grade proficiency scores improved, although about half of children do not meet proficiency standards on both the math and English exams
- High school graduation rates improved and the percentage of adults with college degrees increased
- The percentage of young children with health insurance increased to nearly 96 percent

Despite this progress, several concerning trends were noted, including:

- Rapid increases in home pricing and rental costs means that one-in-three households are now considered housing cost burdened
- Child care costs remain high, further stretching budgets for lower-income families without access to financial assistance
- The percentage of families who began prenatal care in the first trimester declined
- Immunization rates for standard childhood vaccines (which does not include the COVID-19 vaccines) fell
- Reports of child abuse increased (although overall reports declined due to sharper declines in reports of neglect) as did domestic violence related calls to the Phoenix police department

These findings illustrate opportunities for stakeholders in early childhood health and development systems to build on existing strengths and respond to emerging needs. Given the interrelatedness of many of these issues, many strategies have the potential to impact multiple outcomes. For example:

- Efforts to strengthen children and families living in poverty have the potential to improve a variety of outcomes that are negatively affected by the condition of poverty
- Continued support of Quality First and supports for families to access high-quality child care can both reduce cost-based barriers to care and ensure children are better prepared for kindergarten
- Public health initiatives such as encouraging prenatal care and vaccines can positively impact lifelong health

With the leadership of the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council and the many assets and committed stakeholders in the community, the region is positioned to continue to build on positive trends and ensure all children are ready to succeed in school and in life.



Appendices

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- ⁸ Although the 2010 count is based on the 2010 decennial census, most population figures cited throughout this report are taken from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, covering the 5-year period between 2015 and 2019. Figures from the two sources may not be comparable due to differences in surveying methods and sampling error.
- ⁹ Arizona Department of Education. (2015). *AzMERIT Testing Conditions, Tools, and Accommodations Guidance*. Retrieved from https://www.husd.org/cms/lib/AZ01001450/Centricity/Domain/754/azmerit-testing-accommodations_august-2015.pdf.
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