

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Southwest Maricopa Region



2022

NEEDS AND ASSETS
REPORT

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ninety percent of a child's brain growth occurs before kindergarten, and the quality of a child's early experiences impacts whether their brain will develop in positive ways that promote learning. First Things First (FTF) was created by Arizonans to help ensure that Arizona children have the opportunity to start kindergarten prepared to be successful. Understanding the critical role the early years play in a child's future success is crucial to our ability to foster each child's optimal development and, in turn, impact all aspects of wellbeing in our communities and our state.

This Needs and Assets Report for the Southwest Maricopa Region helps us in understanding the needs of young children, the resources available to meet those needs and gaps that may exist in those resources. An overview of this information is provided in the Executive Summary and documented in further detail in the full report.

The report is organized by topic areas pertinent to young children in the region, such as population characteristics or educational indicators. Within each topic area are sections that set the context for why the data found in the topic areas are important (Why it Matters), followed by a section that includes available data on the topic (What the Data Tell Us).

The First Things First Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council recognizes the importance of investing in young children and ensuring that families and caregivers have options when it comes to supporting the healthy development and education of young children in their care. It is our sincere hope that this information will help guide community conversations about how we can best support school readiness for all children in the Southwest Maricopa Region. To that end, this information may be useful to local stakeholders as they work to enhance the resources available to young children and their families and as they make decisions about how best to support children birth to 5 years old in communities throughout the region.

Acknowledgements

The Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council wishes to thank all of the federal, state and local partners whose contributions of data, ongoing support and partnership with First Things First made this report possible. These partners included the Arizona Departments of Administration (Education, Employment and Population Statistics), Child Safety, Economic Security and Health Services; the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System; Child Care Resource and Referral; and the U.S. Census Bureau. We are especially grateful for the spirit of collaboration exhibited by all our partners during an unprecedented time of crisis for our state and our nation.

We also want to thank parents and caregivers, local service providers and members of the public who attended regional council meetings and voiced their opinions, as well as all the organizations working to transform the vision of the regional council into concrete programs and services for children and families in the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Lastly, we want to acknowledge the current and past members of the Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council whose vision, dedication, and passion have been instrumental in improving outcomes for young children and families within the region. As we build upon those successes, we move ever closer to our ultimate goal of creating a comprehensive early childhood system that ensures children throughout Arizona are ready for school and set for life.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First Things First (FTF) is the only state agency in Arizona dedicated exclusively to investing in and enhancing the early childhood system. FTF works through regional partnership councils that partner with local communities to create a family-centered, comprehensive, collaborative, and high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, health, and early education of all Arizona children, from birth to age five.

Every two years, each regional partnership council develops a report detailing the needs and assets of the region's youngest children and their families. The intent of the report is to inform the council and the local community about the overall status of children zero to five years of age in the region, in order to support data-driven decision making around future funding and programming. Data for this report were gathered from federal and local data sources, as well as provided directly to FTF by state agencies.

Overview of the Southwest Maricopa Region

The Southwest Maricopa Region is located entirely inside Maricopa County, in the southern part of the West Valley. Maricopa County is the most populous county in Arizona with a population of about 4.4 million people.¹ As part of a county that is very diverse in terms of topography, population density, and economic status, amongst other factors, the Southwest Maricopa Region both shares characteristics with and differs from Maricopa County. The major cities in the region include Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, and Tolleson.

The Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council (Council) makes strategic investments to support the healthy development and learning of the young children in the region. The Council's priorities include:

- Poverty among families with young children;
- Unemployment or job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Third grade reading performance.

The following section provides a summary of the key findings for each of the six domains of the 2022 Regional Needs and Assets report, highlighting the major data findings, the needs and assets they uncover for the Southwest Maricopa region, potential considerations and opportunities for further exploration. The considerations provided below do not represent comprehensive approaches and methods for tackling the needs and assets in the region. Instead, the considerations represent possible approaches that early childhood system partners, including FTF, could take to address needs and assets

¹ Maricopa County. *Maricopa County Quick Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.maricopa.gov/3598/County-Quick-Facts>

in the region, as conceptualized by the authors of this report.

Key Findings

Population Characteristics

The demographic profile of residents in a particular community helps policy and decision makers make effective decisions that will positively impact the community's well-being. The Southwest Maricopa Region has a total population of 273,194 residents and 28,512 children under the age of six, which make up ten percent of the population. Just over half (52%) of these preschool-age children identify as Hispanic or Latino and most of the rest (34%) are non-Hispanic white. Seven percent are African American, three percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and two percent are American Indian. There is a higher percentage of Hispanic and Latino children that reside in the Southwest Maricopa Region than in Maricopa County as a whole (46%). Across the region, there is considerable variation in the racial and ethnic composition of young children within communities. For example, high concentrations of children under the age of six that identify as Hispanic or Latino reside in Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (79%), Arlington (61%), or Avondale (60%).

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 67% of residents (age 5 and older) speak English at home with Spanish (28%) being the second most common home language. The highest proportion of Spanish speakers reside in Tolleson (58%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (47%). In these two sub-regions, about 20% of the population do not speak English "very well" (Tolleson 16% and 21% Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel). Only four percent of households in the region are classified as limited-English-speaking, which means that there is no adult who speaks English "very well."

Three-quarters of households with children under six are married-couple households, with about 15% of households led by single females and ten percent led by single males, which is slightly less than the state. Additionally, 13% of children under six live in the same household as a grandparent, which is similar to the state and county. Of the children under 18 that live in the same household as a grandparent, 45% are primarily cared for by a grandparent. The high percentage of children growing up in dual-parent households is an asset for the region, as is the experience of children living in a multigenerational household, since this means the children likely have more permanent connections with adult role models. Though living with grandparents can be an asset, it can also indicate that the child's parents may be emotionally or financially unable to care for their child on their own. Thus, these families may need additional resources and parenting education as they have grandparents who are taking on the task of raising a second generation. Additionally, 32% of children are living in single-family households. This may indicate a more stressful home environment and less time spent with their parents as they are likely be the sole breadwinners for their family.

Economic Circumstances

As children are growing and developing, outcomes such as school achievement, physical health, and emotional well-being are all impacted by a child's economic situation.² The average unemployment rates for both the state and county increased in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but started to decrease in 2021, indicating the county is starting to return to unemployment rates equivalent to pre-pandemic. Almost all households with children under six in the region (93%) have at least one parent who is employed. The median annual income for families with children under eighteen in the county is consistently higher than the statewide median for all household types. Married-couple families in the county have a median income of about \$94,782 while single females have a median income of \$32,479. This suggests that single females may experience financial hardships and need support.

Fourteen percent of young children under six years old in the Southwest Maricopa Region live under the poverty level, compared to 23% in the state. However, almost half of children under age six in Arlington (49%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (45%) live in poverty, while poverty for children under six years old is less common in Litchfield Park (6%). Thirty-six percent of families in the region with children aged four and under live below 185% of the FPL (that is, they earned less than \$36,500 per year for a family of four), which is less than the 43% in the county and 46% across the state. Across the sub-regions, a majority of families with children ages 0 to 4 earn less than 185% of the FPL reside in Arlington (80%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (71%). This data may help identify geographic areas and populations to target for further intervention or support around increasing financial resources.

Technology serves many purposes in people's lives, providing access to information and communication resources. As technology becomes increasingly prevalent in daily lives, it is imperative that households have access to a reliable computer and internet. A majority (81%) of households in the region have both a smartphone and computer, a larger proportion than the county (77%) and state (73%). Similarly, the majority (90%) of Southwest Maricopa region residents live in households with a computer and internet, which is also a larger proportion than the county (88%) and state (87%). For children specifically, household access to a computer and internet in the region is slightly higher (91%). However, less children in Arlington (41%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (63%) have access to a computer and internet. Of people living in households with a computer and internet in the region, 76% have fixed broadband with a cellular data plan. Though many of the households in the Southwest Maricopa Region have access to technology and internet, some sub-regions (i.e., Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel) are less likely to have these resources in their household. This may further the digital divide within the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Educational Indicators

Children's participation in early learning experiences is likely to result in higher academic performance

² Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). *The effects of poverty on children. The future of children*, 55-71.

in future years.³ About two in five children between ages three and four (39%) are enrolled in school in the Southwest Maricopa Region. This is lower than the county (55%) and state (65%) proportion of children between ages three and four enrolled in school. In addition, about half of the third-grade students in the region, scored proficient or highly proficient on the AZ Merit English Language Arts and Math assessments.

The percentage of first, second, and third graders missing ten or more days of school slightly decreased between 2019 to 2020 across the Southwest Maricopa Region, county, and state. The region's high school graduation rate has remained fairly steady since 2019 at around 90% and the high school dropout rate has remained steady at around one percent since 2020. Many adults in the region have completed at least high school or received a GED (85%), which is similar to the state and county. However, adults in the region are less likely to have a bachelor's degree or more (22%) compared to the county (33%) and state (29%). Sub-regions with higher rates of bachelor's degree or more can be found in Litchfield Park (34%) and Goodyear (31%), while Arlington (9%) and Tonopah-Wintersburg (9%) have the lowest proportions.

Early Learning

Participation in early care and education programs plays an important role in preparing children for kindergarten and beyond.⁴ About 64% of households are assumed to need child care based on the employment status of the adults in the household, yet only 39% of preschool-aged children in the region are enrolled in early care and education programs. One factor that may influence this finding is the high cost of child care in the region. Though the number of children receiving child care subsidies decreased between 2019 to 2020, child care subsidies are helpful to children in the region.

According to the most recent data, there are currently 243 early childhood centers and homes with a capacity 27,649 children in the region. Many of these centers are located in Avondale, Buckeye and Goodyear; there are three or fewer in Tonopah-Wintersburg (3) and Arlington (1). Additionally, about 1,500 children in the region are enrolled in Quality First centers rated between three to five stars. Increasing access to quality early care and education programs is essential for the regions' children.

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, slightly more children were served by the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AZEIP) in FY2020 (164) than in FY2018 (143). However, the numbers served by the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) have decreased over time. In the region, 377 children (ages birth to 5) were served by DDD in 2017 but only 310 were served in 2020.

³ Bakken, L., Brown, N., Downing, B. (2017) *Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits*. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*. Volume 31. Issue 2. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1273285>

⁴ University of Massachusetts Global (2021) *What is the purpose of early childhood education? Why it's so important*. Retrieved from: <https://www.umassglobal.edu/news-and-events/blog/what-is-purpose-of-early-childhood-education>

Child Health

Ensuring healthy development through early identification and treatment of children's health issues helps families understand healthy developmental pathways and how health issues affect children and their school readiness.⁵ According to American Community Survey data averaged over the five years from 2015 to 2019, seven percent of young children in the Southwest Maricopa Region are estimated to be without health insurance, along with ten percent of the all-ages population in the region. Young children without health insurance are most likely to reside in Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (15%) or Tolleson (13%).

In the calendar year 2019, Southwest Maricopa Region residents gave birth to 4,689 babies, which was six percent of all births in the state. Of the people who gave birth in the region in 2019, 55% were Hispanic or Latina, 34% were White non-Hispanic, eight percent were Black or African American, three percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and one percent were American Indian or Alaska Native. Those who gave birth in the region had a lower level of educational attainment (20%) with a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the county (29%) and the state (25%). People who gave birth under the age of 20 accounted for five percent of the total in the region, and fewer people in the region reported smoking while pregnant (2%) as compared to the state (4%). Sixty-four percent of those who gave birth who participated in WIC were overweight or obese before becoming pregnant, which is the same percentage statewide. In addition, the rate of pre-pregnancy obesity in the region and the state has gradually increased each year since 2017. Nearly all people who gave birth received at least some form of prenatal care, and five percent of babies in the region were born to those who had had fewer than five prenatal care visits (which is less than the statewide rate of 8%).

In the region in 2019, six percent of babies were low birth weight, compared to seven percent across the state. The percent of premature births was the same within the region (9%) as the state. The percentage of infants participating in WIC in the region being breastfed and has gradually increased from 71% in 2017 to 74% in 2020.

Although immunization rates vary by vaccine, over 90% of children in child care and kindergarten in the Southwest Maricopa Region had completed each of the three major (DTAP, polio, and MMR) vaccine series. Rates of personal exemptions for vaccinations among children in child care (5% for religion exemption and 0.1% for medical exemption) was consistent with the exemption rates at the county (5% for religion exemption and 0.5% for medical exemption) and state level (5% for religion exemption and 0.4% for medical exemption).

Among children participating in WIC in the Southwest Maricopa Region in 2020, 13% were obese and an additional 18% were overweight. However, the region's proportion of children that are obese or overweight has increased in recent years, from 28% in 2017 to 31% in 2020.

⁵ *Schools & Health (2016). Impact of Health on Education. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/pages/Anthropometricstatusgrowth.aspx>*

Family Support

Support for young families is an essential piece of the holistic efforts around kindergarten readiness and long-term success for children.⁶ The number of families and children receiving assistance from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has decreased over the years. While the number of young children participating in SNAP and TANF has declined since 2017, SNAP still supports nearly 10,700 children while TANF supports nearly 780 children annually in the Southwest Maricopa Region. WIC enrollment has also slightly declined from 2017 (49% of children under five) to 2020 (46% of children under five). Almost 60% of all public- and charter-school students in the region have been eligible for free or reduced-price lunch since 2018.

The total number of fatal opioid deaths in the Southwest Maricopa Region was 167 from 2017 to 2020, which consisted of three percent of the total deaths in Arizona. In Maricopa County, the number of the number of non-fatal overdoses from opiates or opioids increased from 963 in 2017 to 2,772 in 2020.

Opportunities for Further Exploration

Most of the findings provided in this report are based on secondary data sources. As the Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council continues to make increasingly difficult decisions with diminishing funds, the following suggestions for further data collection and analysis may help inform those decisions in a data-driven way. The following opportunities were identified based on the priorities identified by the Council that data were not available to fully explore. Methods could include gathering existing data from local sources or conducting local focused surveys. Listed in order of the domains in this report, the Council may want to consider collecting additional information regarding:

- Available resources for **non-English speaking guardians or parents**, especially for parents of young children.
- Impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic** on young children's mental health and socioemotional well-being.
- School districts with **high third grade proficiency** scores versus those with lower scores and the factors that contribute to those results that can inform policy and practice changes within the lower-performing districts. In addition, looking at scores in relation to socioeconomic status and racial and ethnic identity of students to identify best practices.
- Where families are turning for **child care** if licensed care is too expensive or not available in their communities.

⁶ Center for the Study of Social Policy (2013). *Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development*. Retrieved from http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/SF_Knowledge-of-Parenting-and-Child-Development.pdf

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Family well-being is an important indicator of child success.^{7, 8} Healthy families and healthy communities create a context in which young children can thrive, developing the cognitive, emotional, motor, and social skills they will need to succeed in school and life.⁹ Early childhood interventions promote well-being and impact outcomes for children and adults later in life, including school readiness, parent involvement, K-12 achievement, educational attainment, crime prevention and remedial education.¹⁰

First Things First (FTF) is one of the critical partners in the family-centered, comprehensive, collaborative, and high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, health, and early education of all Arizona children from birth to age five. FTF is intent on bolstering current child-focused systems within Arizona as a strategic way to maximize current and future resources. The Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council (Council) makes strategic investments to support the healthy development and learning of the young children in the region. The Council's priorities include:

- Poverty among families with young children;
- Unemployment or job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Third grade reading performance.

Methodology

This is the eighth Needs and Assets report conducted on behalf of the Southwest Maricopa Regional Council. It fulfills the requirement of ARS Title 8, Chapter 13, Section 1161, to submit a biennial report to the Arizona Early Childhood Health and Development Board detailing the assets, coordination opportunities, and unmet needs of children from birth to age five and their families in the region. This report is designed to provide updated information to the Southwest Maricopa Council about the needs and assets in their region to help them make important programmatic and funding decisions. This report describes the current circumstances of young children and their families as it relates to unmet needs and assets for the region.

⁷ Bøe, T., Serlachius, A., Sivertsen, B., Petrie, K., Hysing, M. (2017) *Cumulative effects of negative life events and family stress in children's mental health: the Bergen child study*. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00127-017-1451-4>

⁸ Sosu, E., Schmidt, P. (2017) *Economic deprivation and its effects on childhood conduct problems: the mediating role of family stress and investment factors*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01580>

⁹ Knitzer, J. (2000). *Early childhood mental services: a policy and systems development perspective*. In J. Shonkoff & S. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 416-438). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ Reynolds, A., Ou, S., Mondri, C., Hayakawa, M. (2017) *Processes of early childhood interventions to adult well-being*. *Child Development*. Volume 88 Issue 2. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12733>

This report is organized by topic area followed by subtopics and indicators. When available, data are presented for the state, county, region, and subregional breakdowns as appropriate. Key data indicators are represented in this report in six unique domains:

- Population characteristics;
- Economic circumstances;
- Educational indicators;
- Early learning;
- Child health; and
- Family support.

A systematic review designed to reveal the needs and assets of the Southwest Maricopa Region was used to collect and summarize data for this report. Quantitative data components included a review and analysis of current and relevant secondary data describing the FTF Region, Maricopa County, and State of Arizona. Wherever possible, data throughout the report are provided specifically for the Southwest Maricopa region and are often presented alongside data for the County and the State of Arizona for comparative purposes. Subregional data from the American Community Survey and 2010 Census were calculated by aggregating the ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTA) in each subregion. ZCTAs were assigned to a subregion by FTF, and Harder+Company then used those assignments to determine which ZCTAs belonged to each subregion. For ZCTAs that are in more than one subregion, a percentage of the tabulation area was assigned to each subregion based upon the population living in ZCTA within the subregions' portion of the ZCTA.

Secondary data was gathered to better understand demographic trends for the Southwest Maricopa Region. The assessment was conducted using data from state and local agencies and organizations who provided public data or who have an existing data sharing agreement with FTF. A special request for data was made to the following state agencies by First Things First on behalf of Harder+Company Community Research: Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), Department of Child Safety (DCS) and First Things First itself.

Further secondary data were gathered directly from public databases. For example, demographic data included in this report were primarily gathered from the US Census and the American Community Survey. Understanding the true needs and assets of the region required extracting data from multiple data sets that often do not have similar reporting standards, definitions, or means for aggregating data. This suggests that, for some indicators, data were only available at the county level, for small towns, or certain zip codes, whereas for other indicators, data were available at all levels. Whenever possible this report presents all data available. In some cases, not enough data is available to make meaningful conclusions about a particular indicator within a region, city, or county.

Furthermore, many agencies are collecting data independent of other public entities which results in

duplication of data efforts, gaps in the collection of critical indicators, or differences in method of collection, unit of analysis, or geographic level. Many indicators that are of critical importance to understanding the well-being of children under age six and their families were not available for the Southwest Maricopa Region, such as more detailed data on housing or homelessness, home visiting, oral health, hearing loss screenings, and child welfare. The analysis presented in this report aims to integrate relevant data indicators from a variety of credible sources, including regional and subregional, and/or community-level analyses for a subset of data indicators. This report represents the most up-to-date representation of the needs and assets of young children and their families in the region and interpretation of the identified strengths of the community (i.e., the assets available in the region).

In addition to systematically reviewing secondary data, key findings and data trends were synthesized and presented to the FTF Regional Council and community members, FTF Research and Evaluation Unit, and FTF Regional Directors which allowed for a deeper discussion on the interpretation of the findings. Whenever possible, the rich context provided by these stakeholders is incorporated throughout the report to help contextualize the findings. To further expand the meaningfulness of data trends, a brief literature review was conducted to ensure the inclusion of other relevant research studies that help explain the needs and assets of the region.

Per FTF guidelines, education data from the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), with counts of or percentages related to fewer than eleven, excluding counts of zero (i.e., all counts of one through ten) are suppressed. Percentages greater than 98% or less than 2% were presented as >98% and <2% respectively. For data related to health or developmental delay, all counts and rates/ratios/percentages are based on non-zero counts less than six, excluding counts of zero (i.e., all counts of one through six, depending on the indicator) are suppressed.

Limitations

In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020 and continues through the writing of this report. Thus, it is important to contextualize how the pandemic impacted data availability and the process to develop this report. First, public agencies had limited capacity to support data requests while they focused on their pandemic response, therefore some data sets could not be provided. For this reason, the timeline for the 2022 RNA report was modified to adapt to the barriers in collecting data and moving forward with the report process.

This report relied primarily on secondary data. Most of the data were extracted by teams other than the evaluation team conducting the asset and needs assessment, except for the data of the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) which the evaluation team accessed through the ADE data system.

Some of the most recent data was not available for this report. The demographic and economic profile of the region relied mostly on Census and ACS data. For some of the Census indicators, only 2010 Census data were available as 2020 Census data were delayed due to COVID-19. For some of the indicators reported, the most recent data for the region was released in 2018, thus trends may have changed within the past four years, especially due to the pandemic. For example, the most recent data for the Child Care

Market Rate Survey is from 2018. This survey provides the median cost for licensed centers, approved family homes and certified group homes.

Another limitation impacting the findings and interpretation of findings is the targeted population included in each of the different data sources. For many domains reported, data were often available only at the county level rather than the region, and data for children often includes children under 18 rather than children under six. Additionally, ACS estimates are less reliable for small geographic areas or areas with smaller populations. Similarly, rural areas tend to be undercounted, along with non-white populations. Federal data also have similar limitations. For example, WIC data only includes a sample of the young children and families' served. In regards to education data, ADE provided AZMerit only for 2018-2019 school year (prior to COVID-19) since this assessment was not administered during the 2019-2020 school year. The report uses public data for the 2020-2021 school year at the state and county level.

Another major limitation is the discrepancy in the definitions and criteria used by each agency that is collecting the data. Because various different data sources are used for each domain and they each have different definitions, it is difficult to make confident comparisons on indicators between data sources. Given these limitations, interpretation of key findings requires a deep understanding of the region. Contextualizing the findings is equally important as what the data tell us.



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Why It Matters

The demographic profile of residents in a particular community helps inform the types of services needed in that community. Policy and decision makers need to understand the demographic profile of the communities they serve in order to make effective decisions that will positively impact the community's well-being. Timely information about the demographics of a region, such as the number of children and families, number and composition of households, racial and ethnic composition, languages spoken, and living arrangements help policy makers identify the needs of the region they serve and the services and resources that would benefit the community. For example, knowing where non-English speakers live and what their primary languages are can inform translation and interpretation services to help these families access health care and other social services. Knowing where children and families are located will help identify the needs for early childhood services to support their development and well-being.

This first domain of the report provides an overview of the geographic region's population dynamics, projected growth, ethnic and racial composition, languages spoken, immigration trends, and household characteristics (e.g., living arrangements for children). Indicators about children living with grandparents are included as well. Although only limited research has been conducted on the influence of grandparents on child development and health, this data provides an overview of their participation in the region's households and shows trends in grandparental care over time.¹¹ Understanding how the population is changing and where it is growing allows decision makers to strategically and proactively allocate resources.

What the Data Tell Us

The First Things First (FTF) Southwest Maricopa Region is located entirely inside Maricopa County, in the southern part of the West Valley, as shown in Exhibit 1.1. For this report, the region has been divided into eight sub-regions:

The **Arlington** sub-region is the 85322 zip code area. This sub-region includes the unincorporated place of Arlington, in the central part of the region. It is the least populated of the eight sub-regions.

¹¹ Sadruddin, A., Ponguta, L., Zonderman, A., Wiley, K., Grimshaw, A., Panter-Brick, C. (2019) How do grandparents influence child health and development? A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*. Volume 239. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112476>

The **Avondale** sub-region includes the 85323 and 85392 zip code areas. This sub-region contains almost all of the city of Avondale plus some nearby unincorporated areas.

The **Buckeye** sub-region is primarily defined as zip code areas 85326 and 85343, along with a small part of zip code 85361 and the majority of 85396. The entire city of Buckeye is in this sub-region. (The larger part of 85361 and a small part of 85396 are assigned to the Southwest Maricopa Region.)

Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel includes the majority of zip code 85337 and the part of 85333 which lies in Maricopa County. (The Yuma County portion of 85333 is assigned to the Yuma Region.) The town of Gila Bend lies in this sub-region. The Tohono O’odham Reservation includes some lands in zip code 85337 near the town of Gila Bend; these lands are assigned to the Tohono O’odham First Things First Region.

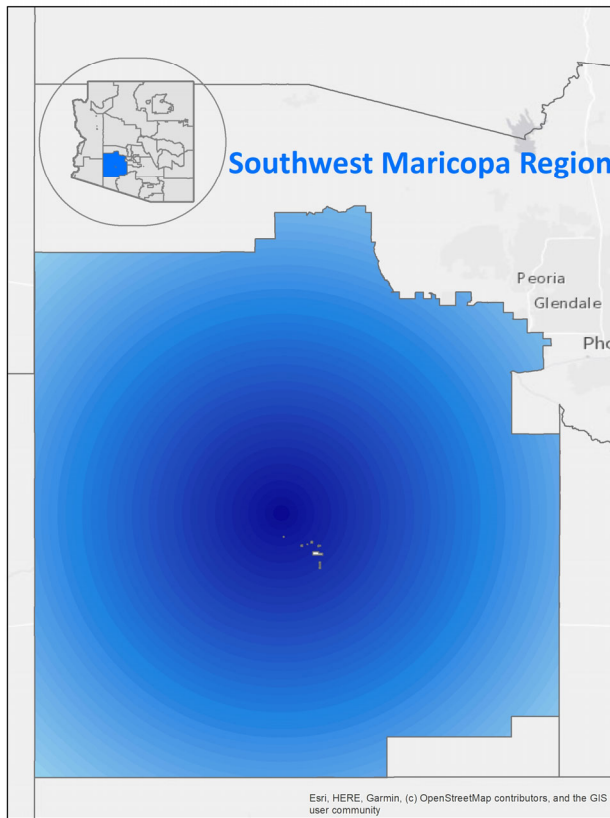
Most of the city of Goodyear lies in the **Goodyear** sub-region, which includes zip code areas 85338 and 85395. The Maricopa County part of zip code 85319, which is primarily the community of Mobile, is also included in this sub-region.

The **Litchfield Park** sub-region is primarily the 85340 zip code area, plus a small part of the 85355 zip code area. This sub-region includes almost all of the city of Litchfield Park, and small portions of the cities of Avondale, Glendale, and Goodyear. (The larger part of the 85355 is assigned to the Southwest Maricopa Region.)

The **Tolleson** sub-region is the 85353 zip code area, plus a small part of the 85339 area. This sub-region includes the city of Tolleson plus a neighboring part of the city of Phoenix (south of Buckeye Road, between 75th and 107th Avenues) and a small part of the city of Avondale.

Finally, the **Tonopah-Wintersburg** sub-region is the 85354 zip code area. It includes those two unincorporated places, Harquahala Valley, and the surrounding countryside.

Exhibit 1.1. Map of Maricopa County and Southwest Maricopa Region boundaries



Population Counts and Projections

According to the 2010 Census, the Southwest Maricopa Region has a total population of 273,194 residents. There are about 28,500 children under six years old in the region, accounting for ten percent of the total population in the region (Exhibit 1.2). This ranged from seven percent of young children living in the Arlington sub-region to a high of 13% living in the Tolleson sub-region.

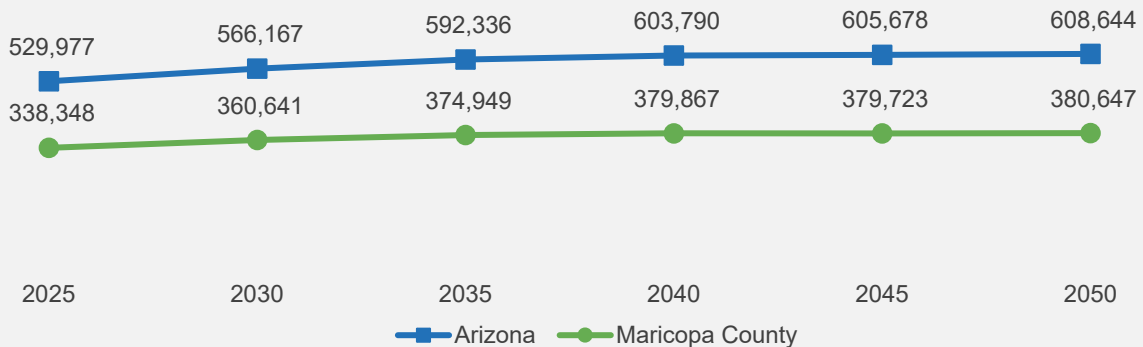
Exhibit 1.2. Population (all ages) in the 2010 Census

	All ages	Ages 0-5	Children (0-5) as a percentage of the total population
Southwest Maricopa Region	273,194	28,512	10%
Arlington	752	54	7%
Avondale	74,817	8,317	11%
Buckeye	64,084	6,716	10%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	2,482	270	11%
Goodyear	67,161	5,922	9%
Litchfield Park	26,214	2,468	9%
Tolleson	31,039	4,188	13%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	6,645	577	9%
Maricopa County	3,817,117	339,217	9%
ARIZONA	6,392,017	546,609	9%

U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 Census Summary File 1; Tables P11 & P14

The number of children under six in Maricopa County is expected to increase over the next ten years, rising to about 380,000 by 2050 (Exhibit 1.3). About 60% of Arizona’s young population of children under six years old reside in Maricopa County. Over the same time period the number of children under six is expected to increase for the state as a whole.

Exhibit 1.3. Projected population of children 0-5 in Arizona and Maricopa County



Arizona Department of Administration, Office of Employment & Population Statistics (2017). Arizona Population Projections: 2020 to 2050, Medium Series

Demographics and Language

In the Southwest Maricopa Region more than 50% of adults 18 and over identify as white and 37% identify as Hispanic or Latino (Exhibit 1.4). This compares to 63% and 25%, respectively, for Arizona. A small proportion of adults 18 and over (11%) identify as African American (7%), Asian or Pacific Islander (3%), or American Indian (1%).

Exhibit 1.4. Race and ethnicity of the adult population (Ages 18 and Older) in the 2010 Census

	Number of persons (ages 18 and older)	Hispanic or Latino	White alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	American Indian alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	African-American alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	Asian or Pacific Islander (not Hispanic or Latino)
Southwest Maricopa Region	188,494	37%	51%	1%	7%	3%
Arlington	530	28%	68%	0%	2%	0%
Avondale	50,498	46%	39%	1%	8%	4%
Buckeye	44,558	34%	56%	1%	6%	2%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	1,721	63%	31%	3%	2%	1%
Goodyear	49,008	24%	63%	1%	6%	4%
Litchfield Park	18,048	21%	65%	1%	6%	5%
Tolleson	19,525	64%	22%	1%	8%	3%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	4,606	29%	67%	1%	1%	0%
Maricopa County	2,809,256	25%	64%	1%	4%	4%
ARIZONA	4,763,003	25%	63%	4%	4%	3%

U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 Census Summary File 1; Tables P11 & P14

In the region, children under five are more likely to identify as Hispanic or Latino (52%) and less likely to identify as non-Hispanic white (34%) than the overall population (Exhibit 1.5 and Exhibit 1.6). In addition, slightly more children in the Southwest Maricopa Region identify as Hispanic or Latino compared to young children in Arizona (45%) and Maricopa County (46%). In some sub-regions (i.e., Arlington, Tonopah-Wintersburg), more than half of young children are likely to identify as Hispanic or Latino compared to about a quarter of adults. In these sub-regions, most of the adults identify as non-Hispanic white.

Across the region, there is considerable variation in the racial and ethnic composition of young children within communities. For example, the vast majority of children in the Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-region (79%), Tolleson sub-region (71%), Arlington sub-region (61%) and Avondale sub-region (60%)

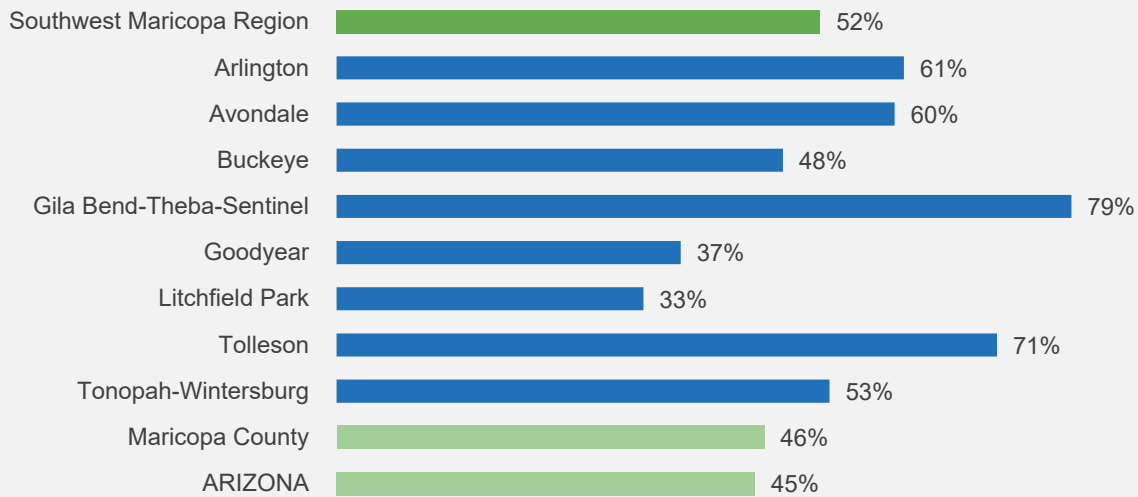
identify as Hispanic or Latino, while about one-third in the Goodyear sub-region (37%) and Litchfield Park sub-region (33%) identify as Hispanic or Latino (Exhibit 1.6). A small proportion of young children (12%) across the Southwest Maricopa Region identify as either African American (7%), Asian or Pacific Islander (3%), or American Indian (2%) (Exhibit 1.5).

Exhibit 1.5. Race and ethnicity of children (ages 0-4) in the 2010 Census

	Number of persons (ages 0-4)	Hispanic or Latino	White alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	American Indian alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	African-American alone (not Hispanic or Latino)	Asian or Pacific Islander (not Hispanic or Latino)
Southwest Maricopa Region	23,741	52%	34%	2%	7%	3%
Arlington	44	61%	30%	0%	5%	0%
Avondale	6,948	60%	24%	2%	9%	3%
Buckeye	5,583	48%	42%	1%	5%	1%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	238	79%	16%	7%	0%	0%
Goodyear	4,910	37%	47%	1%	6%	5%
Litchfield Park	2,027	33%	49%	1%	7%	5%
Tolleson	3,503	71%	14%	2%	11%	3%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	488	53%	43%	2%	0%	1%
Maricopa County	282,770	46%	40%	3%	6%	4%
ARIZONA	455,715	45%	40%	6%	5%	3%

U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 Census Summary File 1; SF 1, Tables P12B, P12C, P12D, P12E, P12H, and P12I

Exhibit 1.6. Percent of children (0-4) reported to be Hispanic in the 2010 Census



U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 Census Summary File 1; SF 1, Table P12H

Approximately two out of three (67%) people in the region speak English as their primary language, while 28% primarily speak Spanish, and an additional four percent speak a language other than English or Spanish (Exhibit 1.7).

Exhibit 1.7. Primary language spoken at home for population ages 5 and over

	Estimated population (ages 5 and older)	Speak English at home	Speak Spanish at home	Speak another language at home
Southwest Maricopa Region	313,192	67%	28%	4%
Arlington	635	70%	30%	0%
Avondale	76,145	61%	35%	4%
Buckeye	78,910	72%	26%	2%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	2,097	46%	47%	7%
Goodyear	75,650	79%	15%	6%
Litchfield Park	33,265	79%	14%	7%
Tolleson	39,136	39%	58%	3%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	7,354	73%	26%	1%
Maricopa County	4,050,301	73%	20%	7%
ARIZONA	6,616,331	73%	20%	7%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B16001

Compared to Arizona and Maricopa County, less households speak English at home (73% versus 67%) and more families speak Spanish (20% versus 28%) in the Southwest Maricopa Region. In Litchfield Park (79%) and Goodyear (79%) sub-regions households that speak another language besides English is rare. Sub-regions that have about one of two households that speak Spanish are Tolleson (58%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (47%). In these two sub-regions, they have the highest proportion across the region of households that do not speak English “very well” (Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel 21% and Tolleson 16%) (Exhibit 1.8).

Exhibit 1.8. Proficiency in English (ages 5 and older)

	Population (ages 5 and older)	Speak English at home	Speak another language at home, and speak English "very well"	Speak another language at home, and do not speak English "very well"
Southwest Maricopa Region	313,192	67%	23%	9%
Arlington	635	70%	15%	15%
Avondale	76,145	61%	27%	12%
Buckeye	78,910	72%	20%	8%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	2,097	46%	33%	21%
Goodyear	75,650	79%	15%	6%
Litchfield Park	33,265	79%	15%	6%
Tolleson	39,136	39%	44%	16%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	7,354	73%	19%	8%
Maricopa County	4,050,301	73%	18%	9%
ARIZONA	6,616,331	73%	19%	9%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B16001

A household is considered “limited-English-speaking” if there is no adult (14 or older) who speaks English well. Three percent of households in Southwest Maricopa Region are classified as limited English-speaking, which is equal to the proportion of households in Arizona (3%) and Maricopa County (3%). Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (16%) and Arlington (14%) have the highest proportion of limited English-speaking households across the region, and all of these limited English-speaking households speak Spanish (Exhibit 1.9).

Exhibit 1.9. Limited-English-Speaking households

	Number of households	Households which speak a language other than English	Limited-English-speaking households (Total)	Limited-English-speaking households (Spanish)
Southwest Maricopa Region	99,615	35%	4%	3%
Arlington	291	31%	14%	14%
Avondale	25,641	42%	6%	5%
Buckeye	23,134	29%	3%	2%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	745	60%	16%	16%
Goodyear	25,756	25%	2%	1%
Litchfield Park	11,044	27%	3%	1%
Tolleson	10,710	66%	6%	6%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	2,293	26%	5%	5%
Maricopa County	1,552,096	27%	4%	3%
ARIZONA	2,571,268	28%	4%	3%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B16002

There are slightly more children living with parents born outside the U.S. in the region (30%) compared to the county (29%) and state (25%) (Exhibit 1.10). The highest percentages of children living with parent(s) born outside the U.S. reside in the sub-regions: Arlington (100%), Tolleson (45%), and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (40%).

Exhibit 1.10. Children (ages 0 to 5) living with parents born outside the U.S.

	Children (ages 0-5) living with one or two parents	Children (ages 0-5) living with one or two parents born outside the U.S.
Southwest Maricopa Region	27,492	30%
Arlington	31	100%
Avondale	7,815	30%
Buckeye	6,485	24%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	267	40%
Goodyear	5,811	26%
Litchfield Park	2,465	23%
Tolleson	4,224	45%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	394	35%
Maricopa County	319,099	29%
ARIZONA	494,590	25%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019) American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B05009

The number of kindergarten through third students in the region that are migrants has increased from 13 in 2018 to 27 in 2020. This trend was similar in the state (Exhibit 1.11). Arizona defines a migrant child as “child or youth, from birth up to 20 [22 with an IEP], who made a qualifying move in the preceding 36 months as a migratory agricultural worker or migratory fisher; or with, or to join, a parent or spouse who is a migratory agricultural worker or migratory fisher.”¹²

Exhibit 1.11. Children in grades K to 3 that are migrants from 2018 to 2020

	Arizona	Maricopa County	Southwest Maricopa Region
2018	662	52	13
2019	570	43	14
2020	809	33	27

Arizona Department of Education (2021). Migrant Children. Provided by AZ FTF

The percent of kindergarten through third grade students in the region who are English Language Learners (ELL) is ten percent, which is lower than the county and equal to the state (Exhibit 1.12). These percentages remained consistent from 2018 to 2020.

Exhibit 1.12. Percentage of children in grades K to 3 that are English Language Learners from 2018 to 2020

	Arizona	Maricopa County	Southwest Maricopa Region
2018	10%	12%	10%
2019	9%	11%	9%
2020	10%	12%	10%

Arizona Department of Education (2021). English Language Learners. Provided by AZ FTF

¹² Alvarez, L. (2021) *Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Arizona Migrant Education Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2022/01/Arizona%20Comprehensive%20Needs%20Report%202021.pdf>

Household Characteristics

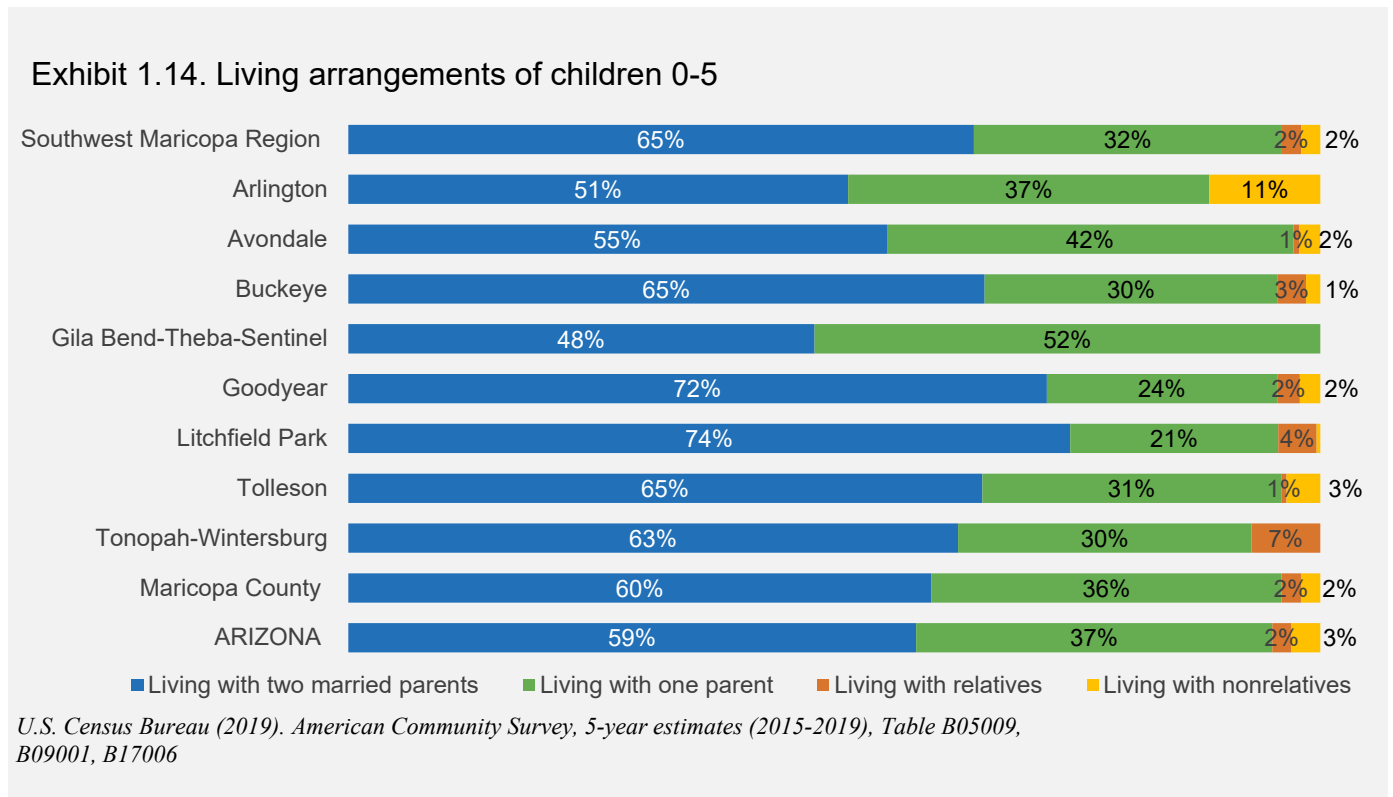
In the Southwest Maricopa Region there are almost 80,000 households and about 16,000 (20%) include children under six years old (Exhibit 1.13). Sub-regions with the highest proportion of households with children under six years include Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (28%) and Tolleson (26%),

Exhibit 1.13. Number of households and household characteristics

	Total number of households	Total number of households with children 0-5	Percent of households with children 0-5	Percent of married-couple households with children 0-5	Percent of single-male households with children 0-5	Percent of single-female households with children 0-5
Southwest Maricopa Region	78,740	15,816	20%	75%	10%	15%
Arlington	174	28	16%	57%	0%	43%
Avondale	19,323	4,501	23%	64%	12%	24%
Buckeye	19,041	3,722	20%	80%	8%	12%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	553	154	28%	57%	15%	28%
Goodyear	19,990	3,280	16%	81%	9%	10%
Litchfield Park	8,746	1,436	16%	82%	9%	10%
Tolleson	9,142	2,420	26%	75%	11%	13%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	1,771	275	16%	79%	4%	17%
Maricopa County	1,018,723	188,572	19%	70%	9%	21%
ARIZONA	1,679,198	291,242	17%	68%	10%	22%

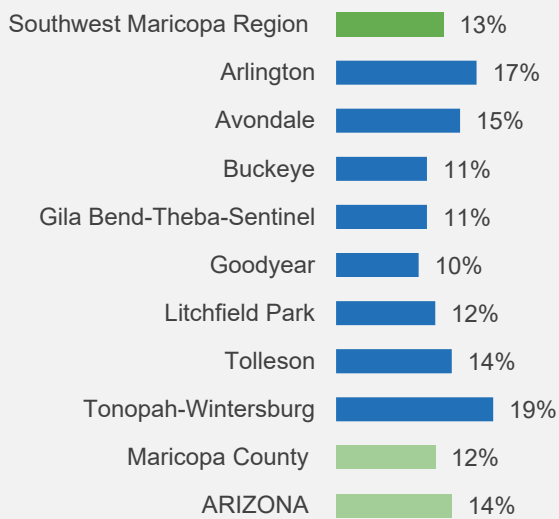
U.S. Census Bureau (2019) American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015–2019), Table B11003

Although almost two in three of children (65%) under six live in married-couple households, about one-quarter (32%) live in single-parent households (Exhibit 1.14). Sub-regions with the highest proportion of single-parent households include Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (52%) and Avondale (42%).



Additionally, 13% live in the same household as a grandparent (Exhibit 1.15). Of children under 18 who live in the same household as a grandparent, 45% are primarily cared for by a grandparent, which is slightly less than 50% for Arizona (Exhibit 1.16). There can be several advantages to living in a multigenerational household, including an increase in emotional well-being and grandparents serving as role models in the socialization of children. However, this also indicates that young families may not have the resources to live on their own and may be living with their elderly parents. Grandparents raising their grandchildren may also require additional support due to the nontraditional family structure, changes in parenting practices since grandparents are raising children, and the fact that many older adults live on fixed incomes and may struggle with caring for dependents. There may also be cultural factors that result in grandparents living in the same household as their grandchildren.

Exhibit 1.15. Percent of children (0-5) living in a grandparent's household in the 2010 Census



U.S. Census Bureau (2010) Census Summary File 1; SF 1, Table P41

Exhibit 1.16. Children (ages 0-17) living in a grandparent's household

	Number of children (ages 0-17) living in a grandparent's household	Percent of children (ages 0-17) living in a grandparent's household, and the grandparent is responsible for the child	Percent of children (ages 0-17) living in a grandparent's household, and the grandparent is responsible for the child (with no parent present)
Southwest Maricopa Region	8,986	45%	13%
Arlington	10	100%	100%
Avondale	2,385	40%	9%
Buckeye	2,599	45%	15%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	140	78%	38%
Goodyear	1,481	50%	20%
Litchfield Park	605	56%	6%
Tolleson	1,625	41%	9%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	141	43%	33%
Maricopa County	84,051	48%	15%
ARIZONA	155,821	50%	16%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B10002

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS HIGHLIGHTS

The Southwest Maricopa Region is located entirely inside Maricopa County, in the southern part of the West Valley, with a growing population of children under the age of six. The ethnic profile of the region is slightly different from the profile of the State of Arizona with a higher percentage of the adult and children population identifying as Hispanic or Latino (37% for adults and 52% for young children). The majority of households speak English as their primary language and less than 30% primarily speak Spanish. The majority of households with children under six are led by married couples, though this varies widely between the different sub-regions. Only four percent of children under six in the region live with relatives or non-relatives. Thirteen percent of young children live in the same household as their grandparents and a little less than half of children are primarily cared for by a grandparent.

Below are key findings that highlight the demographic assets, needs and data-driven considerations for the region. The considerations provided below do not represent comprehensive approaches and methods for tackling the needs and assets in the region. Instead, the considerations represent possible approaches that early childhood system partners, including FTF, could take to address needs and assets in the region, as conceptualized by the authors of this report.

Assets	Considerations
<p>The data from 2018 shows that by 2050 the population of children under the age of six is projected to grow at a steady rate. The region may foresee and need to prepare for the growing demands of their youngest residents.</p>	<p>Discuss tactics for planning ahead for the projected slow, but steady, growth of the under six population and the needs that accompany that growth, such as healthcare and childcare needs for young children.</p>
<p>Thirty-two percent of Southwest Maricopa residents speak a language other than English, and twenty-eight percent of residents speak Spanish. Over 20% of Southwest Maricopa residents speak another language at home and speak English "very well."</p>	<p>Provide materials and information in multiple languages, especially in Spanish, to account for residents that speak languages other than English.</p>

Needs	Considerations
<p>In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 13% of children under 18 years are living in a grandparent's household and the grandparent is responsible for the child (with no parent present). Higher percentages of children living with grandparents with no parent present occur in the Arlington (100%), Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (38%), and Tonopah-Wintersburg (33%) sub-regions.</p>	<p>Enhance support services, such as financial support and access to food, specifically designed for grandparents raising grandchildren and targeted in the Arlington, Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel and Tonopah-Wintersburg sub-regions, to help them support the young children in their homes.</p>



ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

Why it Matters

The economic situation of children and their families has a large impact on their ability to access opportunities and services that can contribute to their well-being and healthy development. As children are growing and developing, outcomes such as school achievement, physical health, and emotional well-being are all impacted by a child's economic situation.¹³ Additionally, being unemployed or living below the federal poverty level indicates that parents and caregivers have fewer resources to be able to meet their families' basic needs, such as adequate, nutritious food and good quality, stable housing.

Economic stability is critical to supporting young children and families to maintain a household where children can thrive. Recent research has shown that physical housing quality, neighborhood environment and housing stability play an important role in children's development and well-being.^{14, 15, 16} Housing instability, which includes frequent moves, difficulty paying rent, being evicted or being homeless, is associated with worse health, academic, and social outcomes.¹⁷ Children without housing stability often experience negative outcomes such as higher grade retention, higher high school dropout rates, and lower educational attainment as adults.^{18,19} Unemployment of parents can also affect the psychological well-being of children in the long-term due to negative experiences and stressful events.²⁰ Lack of access to healthy food and general food insecurity can also lead to numerous issues for children and mothers, including birth complications, delayed development, learning difficulties, and chronic health conditions.^{21,22,23} Thus, housing, families' employment and food security are important components to consider when evaluating the conditions that affect a child's development and well-being during their first five years of life.

¹³ Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). *The effects of poverty on children. The future of children*, 55-71.

¹⁴ Blau, D., Haskell, N., Haurin, D. (2019). *Are housing characteristics experienced by children associated with their outcomes as young adults? Journal of Housing Economics*, 46, 101631.

¹⁵ Roy, J., Maynard, M., Weiss, E. (2008) *Partnership for America's Economic Success. The Hidden Costs of the Housing Crisis*. Retrieved from http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/partnership_for_americas_economic_success/paeshousingreportfinal1pdf.pdf

¹⁶ Clair, A. (2019). *Housing: An under-explored influence on children's well-being and becoming. Child Indicators Research*, 12(2), 609-626.

¹⁷ Sandstrom, H. & Huerta, S. (2013). *The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis*. Urban Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/research/publication/negative-effects-instability-child-development-research-synthesis/view/full_report

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Kushel, M., Gupta, R., Gee, L., Haas, J. (2006) *Housing Instability and Food Insecurity as Barriers to Health Care Among Low-Income Americans*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1525-1497.2005.00278.x/full>

²⁰ Nikolova, M., Nikolaev, B. (2018) *How having unemployed parents affects children's future well-being*. Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/07/13/how-having-unemployed-parents-affects-childrens-future-well-being/>

²¹ *Feeding America*. Retrieved from <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/child-hunger/child-development.html>

²² Ke, J., Lee Ford-Jones, E. (2015) "Food Insecurity and Hunger: A Review of the Effects on Children's Health and Behaviour." *Paediatrics & Child Health* 20.2.89

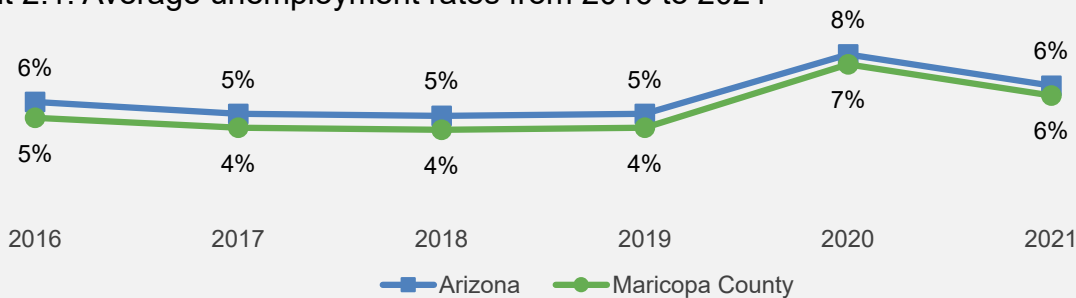
²³ *Data for food security appears in the family support section.*

What the Data Tell Us

Employment Indicators

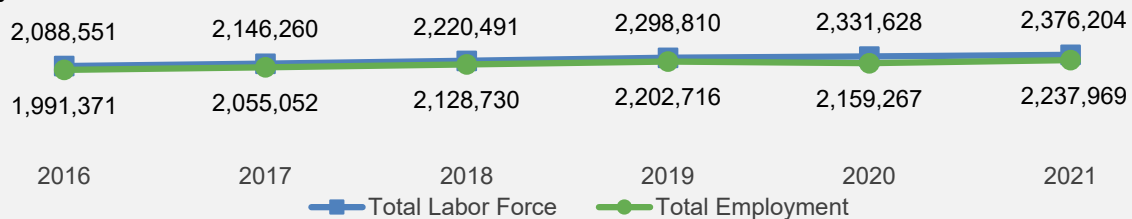
In Maricopa County the unemployment rate increased between 2016 and 2021 but has consistently been lower than the unemployment rate for Arizona as a whole (Exhibit 2.1). Starting in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates for both Maricopa County and Arizona increased. During the COVID-19 pandemic, those who tended to be affected by unemployment included those with jobs in services, restaurants, transportation, and other fields that typically do not offer long-term contracts, decent wages, and health benefits.²⁴ The monthly unemployment rate in Maricopa County reached a peak at 14% in March 2020 and started to decline to seven percent in August 2020 (not shown). The yearly unemployment rate in Maricopa County decreased from seven percent in 2020 to six percent in 2021 (Exhibit 2.1). This decrease indicates that more people started to re-enter the labor force as pandemic-related restrictions eased. The number of people in the labor force has consistently increased in Maricopa County from 2016 through 2019 (Exhibit 2.2).²⁵ In 2020, the number of people employed slightly decreased but increased in 2021.

Exhibit 2.1. Average unemployment rates from 2016 to 2021



U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Arizona Office of Employment. Note: The data for 2021 goes up to September 2021.

Exhibit 2.2. Number of people in the labor force and employed in Maricopa County



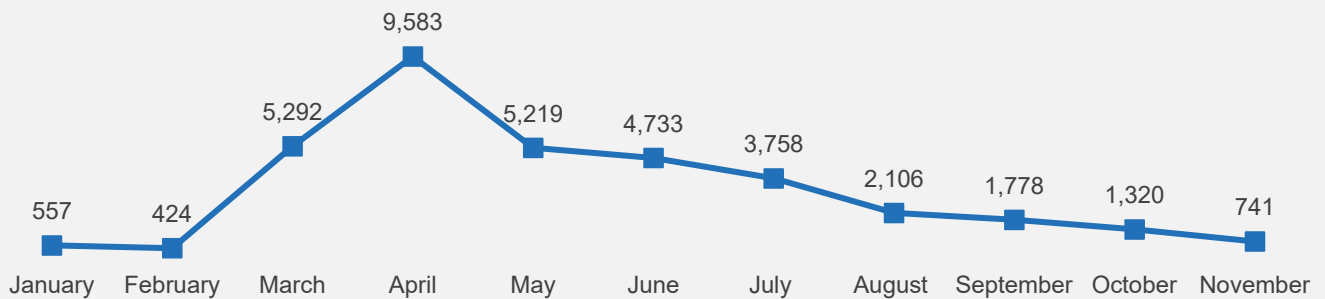
U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Arizona Office of Employment.

²⁴ Blustein, David L., and Paige A. Guarino. "Work and unemployment in the time of COVID-19: the existential experience of loss and fear." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 60.5 (2020): 702-709.

²⁵ "In the labor force" includes persons who are employed and persons who are unemployed but looking for work.

Unemployment claims provide temporary payments to individuals who are unemployed through no fault of their own and meet the other eligibility requirements. In order to receive these benefits, an individual that has lost their job completes an application and if they are eligible, they then receive unemployment benefits. In 2020 for the Southwest Maricopa Region, the total number of unemployment claims started to increase in March 2020 as businesses began to close at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Exhibit 2.3). In April 2020, the number of total claims peaked at 9,583 and gradually started to decrease starting in May 2020 to 5,219 then to 2,106 in August 2020. By the end of 2020, the total claims were 741.

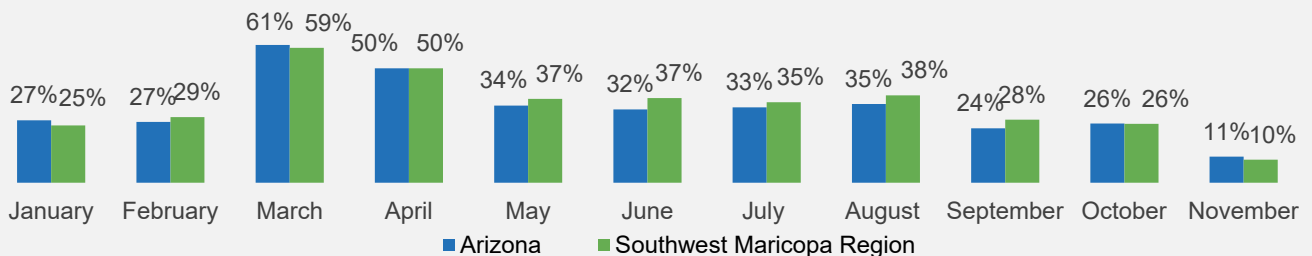
Exhibit 2.3. Number of total unemployment claims 2020 for Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Unemployment claims. Provided by AZ FTF

In addition to the total number of claims increasing in March and April 2020, the percentage of eligible claims also increased in the Southwest Maricopa Region and in Arizona (Exhibit 2.4). Rates for claims that were eligible were similar in 2020 for Arizona and the Southwest Maricopa Region. In the beginning of 2020, about 25 to 29% of claims were deemed eligible in the Southwest Maricopa Region and this increased to over 50% in March and April 2020. As the number of total claims started to decrease in September 2020, the percentage of eligible claims also started to decrease. By November 2020, ten percent of claims were found eligible which was the lowest percentage in 2020.

Exhibit 2.4. Percent of eligible and paid unemployment claims in 2020



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Unemployment claims. Provided by AZ FTF

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 93% of children under age six live in a household where at least one adult is in the labor force (Exhibit 2.5), which is similar to the percentage for Arizona (90%). Though having neither parent in the workforce is rare at seven percent, 42% of parents in the Arlington sub-region have neither parent in the workforce. About 64% of children under age six have either both parents in the labor force or a single parent in the labor force, indicating they have some need for childcare.

Exhibit 2.5. Employment status of parents with children 0-5

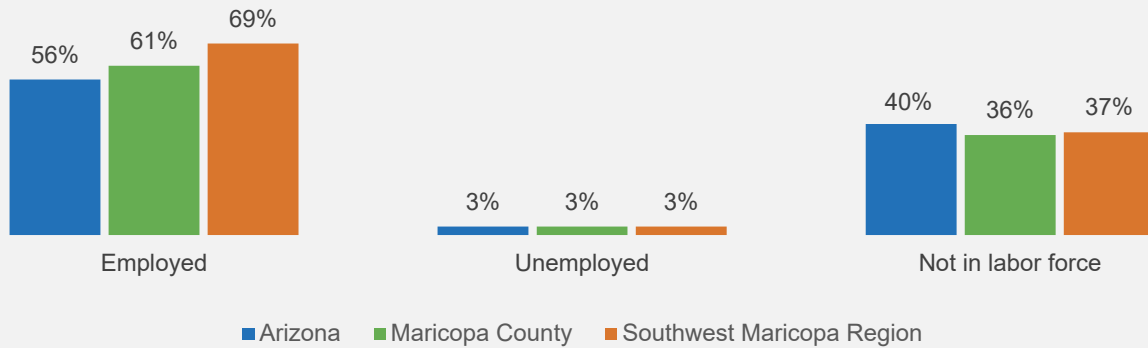
	Estimated number of children (ages 0-5) living with one or two parents	Children (ages 0-5) living with two parents who are both in the labor force	Children (ages 0-5) living with two parents, one in the labor force, and one not	Children (ages 0-5) living with two parents, neither in the labor force	Children (ages 0-5) living with a single parent who is in the labor force	Children (ages 0-5) living with a single parent who is not in the labor force
Southwest Maricopa Region	27,503	38%	29%	0%	26%	7%
Arlington	31	0%	58%	0%	0%	42%
Avondale	7,815	29%	28%	0%	35%	8%
Buckeye	6,483	41%	27%	0%	24%	7%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	277	19%	29%	0%	34%	19%
Goodyear	5,814	42%	32%	1%	20%	5%
Litchfield Park	2,465	45%	31%	1%	14%	8%
Tolleson	4,224	41%	27%	0%	24%	8%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	394	28%	43%	0%	29%	0%
Maricopa County	319,099	34%	28%	1%	29%	8%
ARIZONA	494,590	32%	28%	1%	29%	9%

U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019), Table B23008

Note: "In the labor force" includes persons who are employed and persons who are unemployed but looking for work. Persons who are "not in the labor force" include stay-at-home parents, students, retirees, and others who are not working or looking for work.

The overall percentage of adults who are in the labor force in the Southwest Maricopa Region is 69%, which is higher than the proportion in Arizona (56%) and Maricopa County (61%) (Exhibit 2.6).

Exhibit 2.6. Employment status of adult population (ages 16 and older) who are employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force

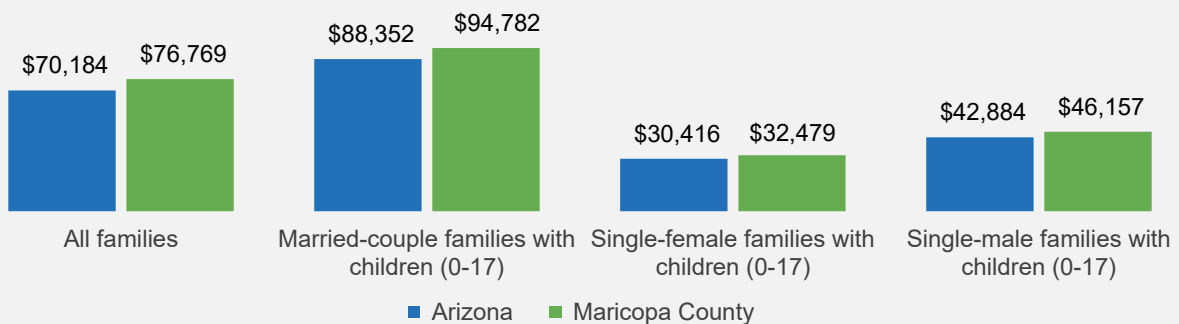


*U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey Table B23025
 Note: "In the labor force" includes persons who are employed and persons who are unemployed but looking for work. Persons who are "not in the labor force" include st*

Median Income and Poverty

The median income of families with children under age eighteen in Maricopa County is \$76,769, which is higher than the median income statewide. The median income for single-parent families, which comprise about 33% of households with children under age six, is significantly less than for married-couple families. For single-parent households, those headed by single females make about \$14,000 less than those headed by males. Exhibit 2.7 shows the difference in median income for married-couple families, single-female families, and single-male families.

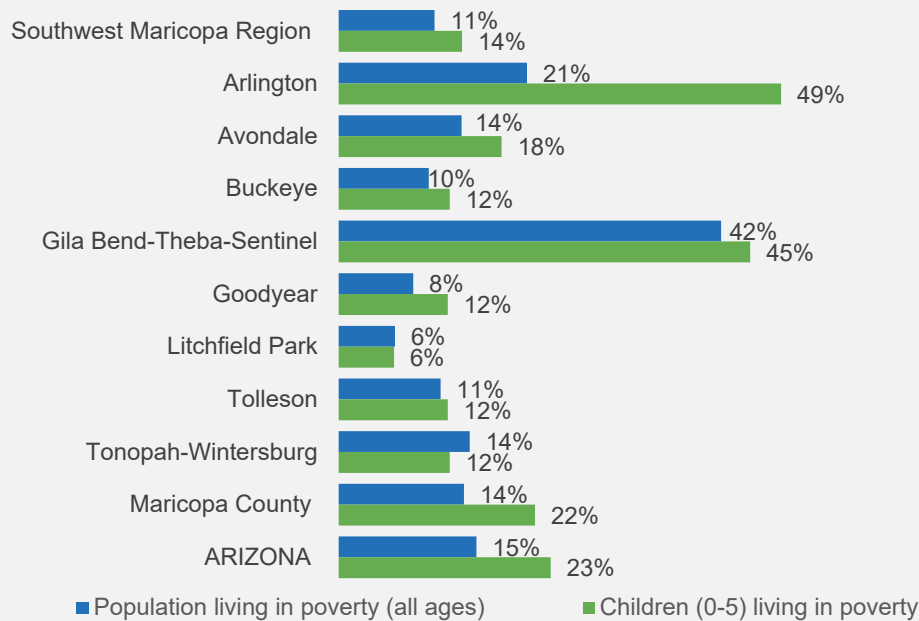
Exhibit 2.7. Median income for families



U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B19126

The large number of single-parent families combined with their low median income contributes to a sizable portion of the population in the Southwest Maricopa Region living in poverty. In the Southwest Maricopa Region 11% of the population and 14% of children under age six are living in poverty (Exhibit 2.8).²⁶ Although these proportions are lower than Maricopa County and Arizona, higher poverty levels can be found in the Arlington (21% for population and 49% for children under six years old) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (42% for population and 45% for children under six years old) sub-regions.

Exhibit 2.8. Percentage of population living in poverty

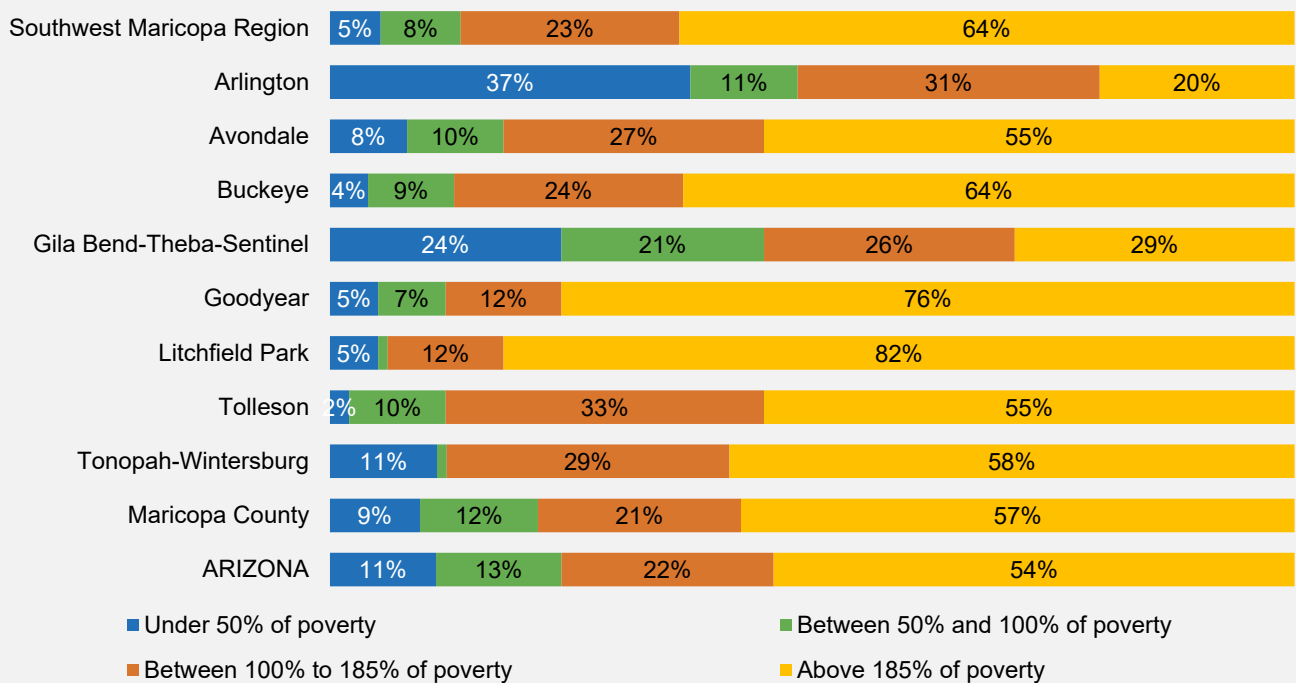


U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B17001

²⁶ To define poverty, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U).

Federal poverty levels (FPL) are used to determine eligibility for certain programs and benefits, including SNAP and Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). The federal poverty level changes every year and is based on family size. For example, in 2021, the FPL was \$26,500 for a family of four. In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 36% of families with children under age 4 live below 185% of the FPL (that is, they earned less than \$26,500 a year), which is less than the 43% in the county and 46% across the state (Exhibit 2.9). Across the sub-regions, a majority of families with children ages 0 to 4 earn less than 185% FPL in Arlington (80%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (71%).

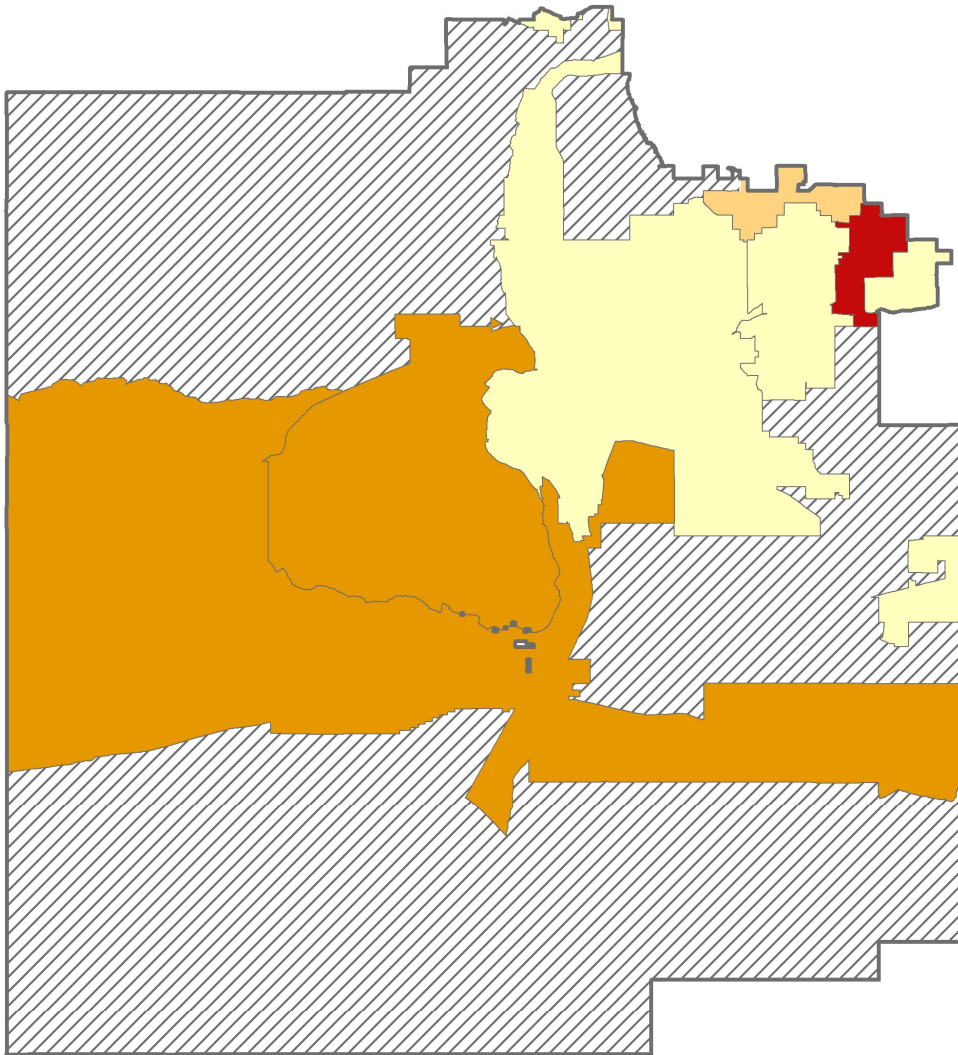
Exhibit 2.9. Families with young children (ages 0-5) living at various poverty thresholds








U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables B17001 & B17022.

The relative population and poverty of areas for young children within the Southwest Maricopa Region are mapped in Exhibit 2.10. The Avondale sub-region has a high rate of poverty and high population, while the Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-regions have high rates of poverty with low population.

Exhibit 2.10. Poverty in the Southwest Maricopa Region



Poverty and Population

-  No Data
-  High Poverty-High Population
-  High Poverty-Low Population
-  Low Poverty-Low Population
-  Low Poverty-High Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010.

In Maricopa County individuals who identify as white or Asian are the least likely to be living in poverty. In contrast, people who identify as Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaskan Native, or some other race experienced poverty rates above 20% in 2019 (Exhibit 2.12). Compared to the general population, higher proportions of children under five years old are living below the federal poverty level (Exhibit 2.13). In Maricopa County, children under five years old who identify as Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latino, or some other race have poverty rates over 30%. This trend is similar to the proportions in Arizona indicating that children of color experience high rates of poverty.

Exhibit 2.11. Percentage of population below the federal poverty level by race/ethnicity*

	Arizona	Maricopa County
Black or African-American	20%	19%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	33%	23%
Asian	12%	11%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	16%	12%
Other Race	23%	24%
Two or More Races	17%	15%
White, not Hispanic	10%	9%
Hispanic or Latino	22%	22%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables B17001B, Table B17001C, Table B17001D, Table B17001E, Table B17001F, Table B17001H, Table B17001I.

**Estimates for city and sub-regional breakdowns are not presented due to the limited sample size for these indicators*

Exhibit 2.12. Percentage of children under 5 years old below the federal poverty level by race/ethnicity*

	Arizona	Maricopa County
Black or African-American	34%	33%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	44%	37%
Asian	11%	11%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	31%	24%
Other Race	53%	52%
Two or More Races	13%	10%
White, not Hispanic	12%	11%
Hispanic or Latino	31%	31%

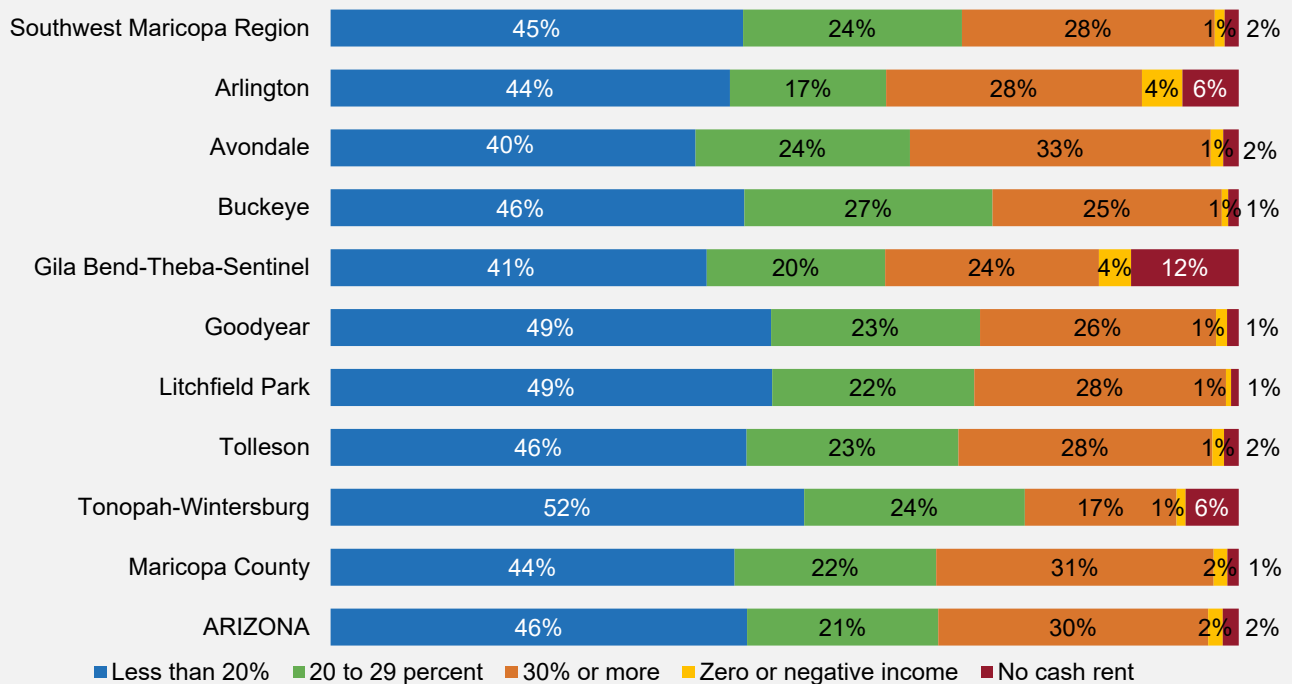
U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables B17001B, Table B17001C, Table B17001D, Table B17001E, Table B17001F, Table B17001H, Table B17001I.

**Estimates for city and sub-regional breakdowns are not presented due to the limited sample size for these indicators*

Housing

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) define "rent burdened" as spending more than 30 percent of income on housing.²⁷ Residents of the Southwest Maricopa Region have a similar housing cost burden to residents of the state as a whole: 28% of the region's housing units require their residents to contribute more than 30% of their household income toward housing (Exhibit 2.13). Housing costs are somewhat more burdensome in the Avondale sub-region (33%) and less burdensome in the Tonopah-Wintersburg sub-region (17%).

Exhibit 2.13. The cost of housing, relative to household income



U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25106

Children that are experiencing homelessness qualify for rights and services under the McKinney-Vento Act. The McKinney-Vento Act defines children that are experiencing homelessness as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”²⁸ The number of children experiencing homelessness in kindergarten through third grade from 2018 to 2020 is displayed in Exhibit 2.14. From 2018 to 2020, each district within the Southwest Maricopa Region had less than eleven students that were experiencing homeless. Across all schools in the Southwest Maricopa Region, the number of

²⁷ PD&R Edge (n.d.) Rental Burdens: Rethinking Affordability Measures. Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_featd_article_092214.html

²⁸ Arizona Department of Education. Welcome to Homeless Education Program. Retrieved from <https://www.azed.gov/homeless>

students experiencing decreased from 2018 to 2020, which is a similar trend compared to Arizona and Maricopa County.

Exhibit 2.14. Number of students experiencing homelessness in kindergarten through third grade, 2018 to 2020

	2018	2019	2020
Southwest Maricopa Region Schools	275	225	136
Archway Classical Academy Trivium East	<11	<11	<11
Archway Classical Academy Trivium West	<11	<11	<11
Arlington Elementary District	<11	<11	<11
BASIS Charter Schools, Inc.	<11	<11	<11
Gila Bend Unified District	<11	<11	<11
Imagine Avondale Elementary, Inc.	<11	<11	<11
Incito Schools	<11	<11	<11
Paloma School District	<11	<11	<11
Sentinel Elementary District	<11	<11	<11
The Odyssey Preparatory Academy, Inc.	<11	<11	<11
Wickenburg Unified District	<11	<11	<11
Maricopa County Schools	2,637	2,051	1,841
All Arizona Schools	4,565	3,676	3,191

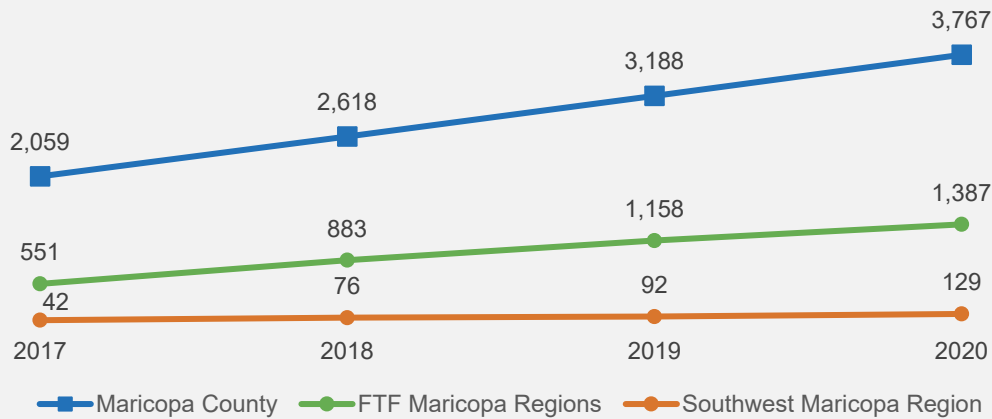
Arizona Department of Education (2020). [homeless students]. Unpublished data.

Note: The school-district data in this table include only the schools that are located within the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Every year the Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care conducts the Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Count, a street and shelter count that determines the number of people experiencing homelessness in Maricopa County during a given point in time.²⁹ This is the primary source of the count of people experiencing homelessness in the county and helps inform the community on the number of people who need services, such as Emergency Shelters or Transitional Housing. The number of those experiencing homeless and who are unsheltered (i.e., on the streets or other place not meant for human habitation) has increased from 2017 to 2020 across Maricopa County, FTF Maricopa Regions and Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 2.15). As the number of unsheltered homeless people increases, the Southwest Maricopa Region and the county need to strategize how to provide support for the homeless population and those who are experiencing financial hardships.

²⁹ *Maricopa Association of Governments (n.d.) 2020 Point-in-Time (PT) Count Report. Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care. Retrieved from <https://www.azmag.gov/Portals/0/Documents/MagContent/PIT-Count-Report-2020.pdf?ver=2020-07-27-155257-657>*

Exhibit 2.15. Unsheltered homeless count for single adults, 2017 to 2020.



Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care Unsheltered Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

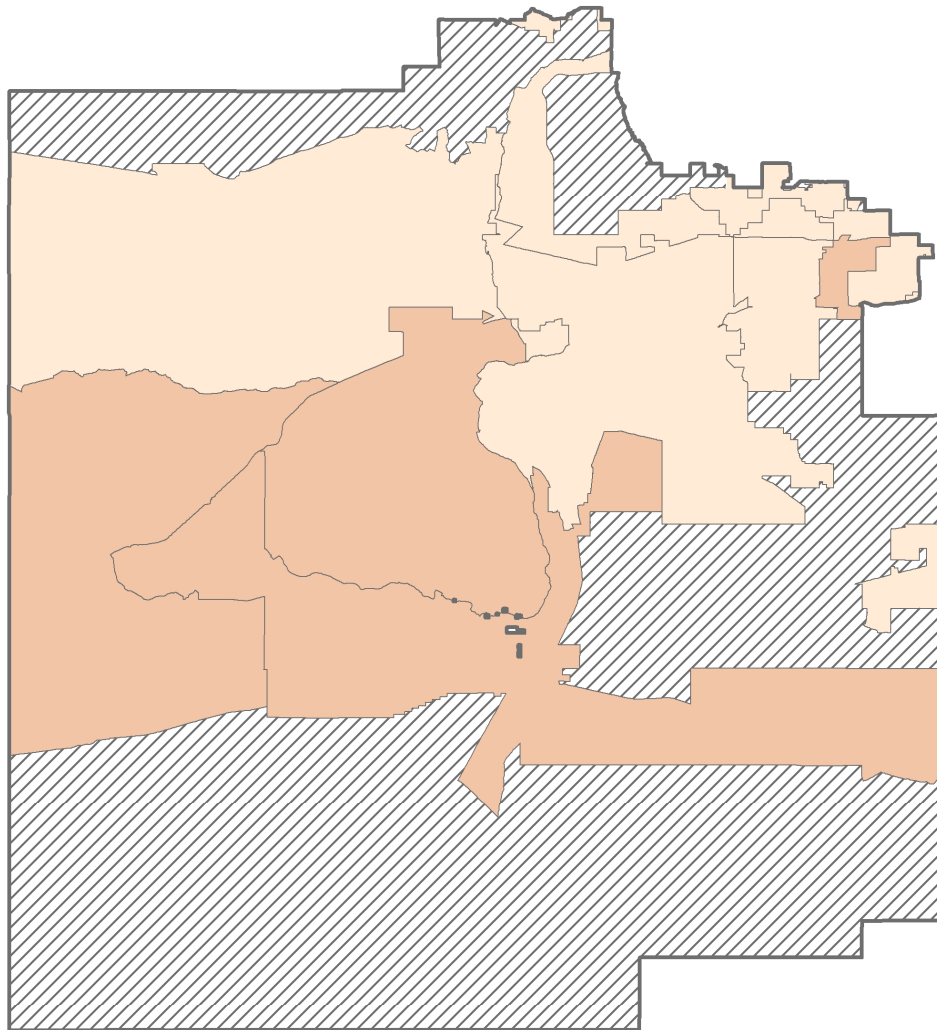
About three percent of the households in the Southwest Maricopa Region have no vehicle available to them, according to the American Community Survey (Exhibit 2.16). This is a smaller percentage than in the county as a whole (6%). Among the sub-regions, the percentage without vehicles is higher in Arlington (7%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (7%), while Tonopah-Wintersburg had no households without vehicles available. The map in Exhibit 2.17 shows that certain parts of the other sub-regions have concentrations of households without vehicles such as Central Avondale.

Exhibit 2.16. Estimated percent of households with no vehicle available

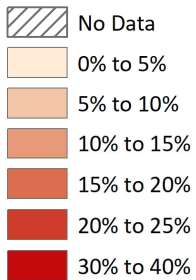
	Estimated number of households	Households with no vehicle available
Southwest Maricopa Region	99,615	3%
Arlington	291	7%
Avondale	25,641	5%
Buckeye	23,134	3%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	745	7%
Goodyear	25,756	2%
Litchfield Park	11,044	2%
Tolleson	10,710	2%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	2,293	0%
Maricopa County	1,552,096	6%
ARIZONA	2,571,268	6%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B08201

Exhibit 2.17. Percent of households without a vehicle



Percent of households without a vehicle



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2015-2019). Table B08201

About 81% of households have both a smartphone and computer, which is higher than the proportion in Maricopa County (77%) and Arizona (73%) (Exhibit 2.18). Households with neither a smartphone or computer are the most likely to reside in the Arlington (18%) or Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (19%) sub-regions.

Exhibit 2.18. Households with and without computers and smartphones

	Total number of households	Percent with computer but no smartphone	Percent with smartphone but no computer	Percent with both smartphone and computer	Percent with neither smartphone nor computer
Southwest Maricopa Region	99,615	5%	10%	81%	4%
Arlington	291	20%	31%	32%	18%
Avondale	25,641	5%	13%	76%	7%
Buckeye	23,134	5%	8%	83%	4%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	745	4%	30%	47%	19%
Goodyear	25,756	6%	5%	86%	2%
Litchfield Park	11,044	6%	5%	85%	3%
Tolleson	10,710	3%	21%	73%	3%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	2,293	9%	11%	72%	9%
Maricopa County	1,552,096	6%	11%	77%	7%
ARIZONA	2,571,268	7%	12%	73%	4%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25106

Note: In this table, "computer" includes both desktops and laptops.

Nine of ten (90%) residents in Southwest Maricopa Region live in households with a computer and internet (Exhibit 2.19).

Exhibit 2.19. Persons (all ages) in households with and without computers and internet connectivity*

	Number of person (all ages) living in households	Percent in households with computer and internet	Percent in households with computer but no internet	Percent in households without computer
Southwest Maricopa Region	326,550	90%	7%	3%
Arlington	663	59%	27%	14%
Avondale	82,846	88%	7%	5%
Buckeye	78,089	93%	5%	2%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	2,379	68%	13%	20%
Goodyear	76,821	93%	6%	1%
Litchfield Park	35,200	95%	3%	2%
Tolleson	42,833	86%	12%	2%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	7,719	82%	11%	8%
Maricopa County	4,274,725	88%	7%	5%
ARIZONA	6,892,175	87%	7%	6%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B28005

Note: In this table, "computer" includes both desktops and laptops.

*Internet includes a dial-up internet subscription or a broadband internet subscription.

For households with children under 18 years old, 91% have a computer and internet in the region. During the nationwide closures of elementary and secondary schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more families had to rely on having multiple computers and reliable internet in their homes which caused the digital divide to become more apparent.³⁰ Households that are the most impacted by the digital divide included those in rural communities, living in poverty and people of color.^{31,32} Even though 91% of households with children under 18 years old have a computer and internet, Arlington (59%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (37%) sub-regions had a high proportion of households without a computer or internet (Exhibit 2.20).

Exhibit 2.20. Children (ages 0-17) in households with and without computers and internet connectivity*

	Number of children (ages 0-17) living in households	Percent in households with computer and internet	Percent in households with computer but no internet	Percent in households without computer
Southwest Maricopa Region	94,067	91%	7%	2%
Arlington	85	41%	51%	8%
Avondale	24,132	88%	8%	5%
Buckeye	23,778	93%	6%	1%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	806	63%	13%	24%
Goodyear	19,692	93%	6%	1%
Litchfield Park	9,616	97%	2%	1%
Tolleson	14,043	87%	12%	1%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	1,914	92%	8%	0%
Maricopa County	1,044,531	89%	8%	4%
ARIZONA	1,632,019	88%	8%	4%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B28005

Note: In this table, "computer" includes both desktops and laptops.

*Internet includes a dial-up internet subscription or a broadband internet subscription.

³⁰ Masonbrink, A., Hurley, E. (2020) "Advocating for children during the COVID-19 school closures." *Pediatrics* 146.3..

³¹ Goldschmidt, K. (2020) "The COVID-19 pandemic: Technology use to support the wellbeing of children." *Journal of pediatric nursing* 53.

³² Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J, Viruleg, E. (2020) "COVID-19 and learning loss—disparities grow and students need help." *McKinsey & Company*.

Of the people living in households with a computer and internet, 76% have fixed broadband with cellular data plan as their internet (Exhibit 2.21).

Exhibit 2.21. Households with computer & internet by type (dial-up, broadband, satellite, other)

	People living in households with computer and internet (all ages)	Percent with fixed broadband and cellular data plan	Percent with fixed broadband without cellular data plan	Percent with cellular data plan without fixed broadband	Percent with dial-up internet only
Southwest Maricopa Region	295,409	76%	25%	10%	0%
Arlington	389	71%	19%	10%	0%
Avondale	73,108	73%	16%	10%	0%
Buckeye	72,362	76%	13%	10%	0%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	1,607	61%	8%	31%	0%
Goodyear	71,491	80%	13%	7%	0%
Litchfield Park	33,313	79%	13%	8%	0%
Tolleson	36,840	69%	20%	11%	0%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	6,300	65%	12%	23%	0%
Maricopa County	3,773,777	71%	15%	14%	0%
ARIZONA	5,968,639	69%	18%	12%	0%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B2808.

ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES HIGHLIGHTS

The unemployment rate in Maricopa County peaked in 2020 (8%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic but started to decline in 2021 (6%). Single-parent families who are working earn significantly less, on average, than dual-parent households. Additionally, 14% of children under age six in the region live in poverty. About three of ten (28%) residents pay 30% or more of their household income towards housing.

Below are key findings that highlight the economic assets, needs, and data-driven considerations for the region. The considerations provided below do not represent comprehensive approaches and methods for tackling the needs and assets in the region. Instead, the considerations represent possible approaches that early childhood system partners, including FTF, could take to address needs and assets in the region, as conceptualized by the authors of this report.

Assets	Considerations
The Southwest Maricopa Region has lower poverty rates than for the state as a whole (14% vs 23% for young children, and 11% vs 15% for all ages). The percentage of young children living in poverty in the Southwest Maricopa Region has decreased since the 2018 RNA (19%).	Encourage community awareness of social service resources in the region, especially in the Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-regions. Research best practices among successful anti-poverty programs and efforts.
Nearly all children (93%) under six years old live in a household where at least one adult is in the labor force.	Consider encouraging stakeholders to target job training and employment programs to the subregions with higher need to help increase employment and median incomes.

Needs	Considerations
Though the Southwest Maricopa Region has lower poverty rates than the state as a whole, there are higher rates of poverty in the Arlington (49% for young children and 21% for all ages) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (45% for young children and 42% for all ages) sub-regions.	Encourage community awareness of social service resources in the region, especially in the Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-regions.
Although nine of ten of children (0-17) in households have at least one computer with internet, less than two-thirds of children in Arlington (41%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel have computer(s) and internet.	Partner with local agencies, businesses and stakeholders that could support in technological needs for low-income families. For example, Cox has a package, Connect2Complete, that provides low-cost internet for families with K to 12 students.



EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS

EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS

Why it Matters

Early care and education helps children thrive in school. Research shows that children who participate in early care and education programs are more likely to perform better on educational indicators such as math and reading tests, attendance rates, and discipline referrals than children who do not.^{33, 34}

Educational indicators that affect student outcomes and are likely related to participation in early care and education include, but are not limited to, school attendance, proficiency exams, grades, graduation and dropout rates, and educational attainment. For example, poor attendance in school affects student outcomes because it limits children from gaining knowledge and thriving in an academic setting.

Research indicates an association between high school dropout rates and poor attendance as early as kindergarten; on average, dropouts have missed 124 days of school by the time they reach 8th grade.³⁵ In addition, irregular attendance influences school budgets and could potentially lead to fewer funds for essential classroom needs.³⁶

Notably, children's participation in quality early care and education can also yield lifelong benefits. Improved performance on standardized tests and lower drop out rates in turn increases children's likelihood of graduating from high school, earning higher monthly earnings, and owning a home. Research shows that high-quality early care and education programs can reduce disparities in college graduation, educational attainment, and wages.³⁷ Research has also shown that students dropping out of high school have an increased likelihood of earning less than high school graduates, being unemployed, receiving public assistance, and a higher chance of being incarcerated, therefore likely to confront more barriers while raising a family.³⁸ Essentially, a child's enrollment in early learning provides short-term and long-term benefits that will contribute to the child successfully transitioning into and prospering in adulthood.

³³ Bakken, L., Brown, N., Downing, B. (2017) *Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits*. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*. Volume 31. Issue 2. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1273285>

³⁴ Campbell, F., Pungello, E., Kainz, K., Burchinal, M., Pan, Y., Wasik, B., Barbarin, O., Sparling, J., Ramey, C., (2012) *Adult outcomes as a function of an early childhood educational program: an abecedarian project follow-up*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3989926/>

³⁵ GreatSchools staff. *Why attendance matters*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/school-attendance-issues/>

³⁶ National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *Every school day counts: The forum guide to collecting and using attendance data..* Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/attendancedata/chapter1a.asp>

³⁷ Bustamante, A., Dearing, E., Zachrisson, H., Vandell, D. (2021) *Adult outcomes of sustained high-quality early child care and education: Do they vary by family income?* Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13696>

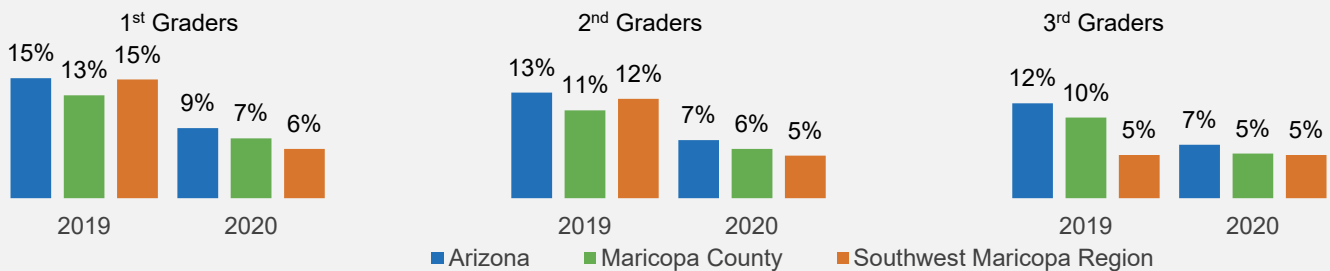
³⁸ Christle, C. A., Jolivet, K., Nelson, M. C. (2007). *School characteristics related to high school dropout rates*. *Journal of Remedial and Special Education*, 28, 15. Retrieved from www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=EJ785964

What the Data Tell Us

Student Attendance

Between 2019 and 2020, the state, Maricopa County, and the Southwest Maricopa Region experienced a decrease in the percentage of students missing ten or more days of school (Exhibit 3.1). A lower percentage of students in the region missed ten or more days of school than in the county or state as a whole. In addition, the percentage of absences decreased from 2019 to 2020 across all grade levels. It can be observed that the higher the grade level, the lower the rate of absences. There are many potential explanations for such findings, including that younger children may get sick more frequently than older children or that the perception of the value of education changes as children grow so parents of younger children are more willing to let their children miss school. Across all grade levels, the decrease in absences from 2019 to 2020 is likely related to shifts to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Younger children in 2020 remained at higher percentage absences from school. This may be due to virtual learning requiring intensive parental time and attention, so parents who worked were in a bind.

Exhibit 3.1. Percentage of students absent ten or more days from school



Arizona Department of Education (2021). *Chronic Absences*. Provided by AZ FTF.

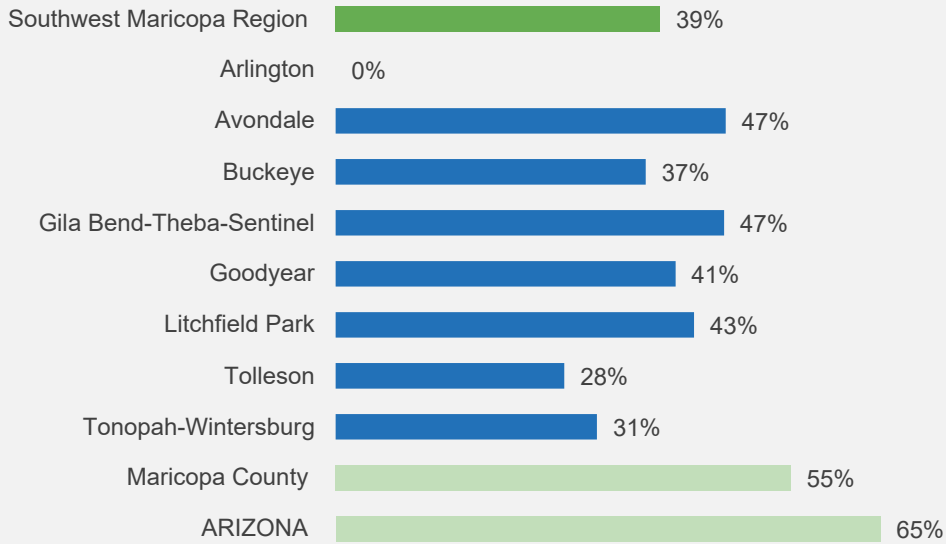
*Data available by school district

Early Achievement

A little more than one third of preschool-aged children in the Southwest Maricopa Region (39%) are enrolled in private or public school (i.e., nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten), which is significantly lower than Arizona by 26% and lower than Maricopa County by 16% (Exhibit 3.2).³⁹ Sub-regions with less than a third of children ages three to four enrolled in school include: Arlington (0%), Tolleson (28%), and Tonopah-Wintersburg (31%). Low rates of enrollment in school may be due to a limited number of schools in the area. Higher rates of participation occur in Avondale (47%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (47%).

³⁹ The American Community Survey does not have data on the status of children not enrolled in private or public school.

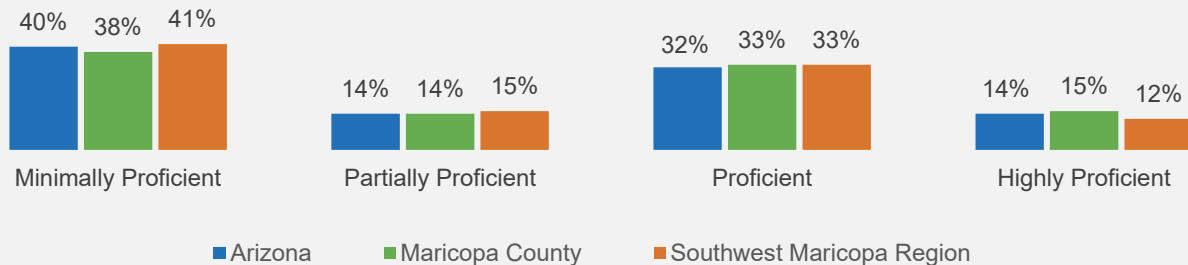
Exhibit 3.2. Percent of children ages 3-4 enrolled in private or public school



U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B2808.

Research shows that preschool attendance has an effect on future academic performance, specifically English and math scores.⁴⁰ The English Language Arts (ELA) assessment results of the AzMERIT demonstrated that 45% of all third graders in the Southwest Maricopa Region scored “proficient” or “highly proficient”, which is about one percent lower than Arizona’s state average (Exhibit 3.3).

Exhibit 3.3. 2019 AzMERIT English Language Arts assessment results for third grade students



Arizona Department of Education (2019). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

⁴⁰ Andrews, R. J., Jargowsky, P., & Kuhne, K. (2012). *The effects of Texas's targeted pre-kindergarten program on academic performance* (No. w18598). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Arizona Progress Meter’s goal for proficiency is 72% by 2030, so Southwest Maricopa Region is about 17% below the goal.⁴¹ Within the region, there were some differences in proficiency by district (Exhibit 3.4). For example, some districts were able to have higher than 60% in proficiency, while other districts had less than a third reaching proficiency.

Exhibit 3.4. AzMERIT English Language Arts test results for third-graders in 2018-19, by school district

	Minimally proficient in English Language Arts	Partially proficient in English Language Arts	Proficient in English Language Arts	Highly proficient in English Language Arts	Passing English Language Arts (proficient or highly proficient)
Southwest Maricopa Region Schools	41%	15%	33%	12%	45%
Archway Classical Academy Trivium East	37%	16%	27%	21%	48%
Archway Classical Academy Trivium West	18%	16%	46%	20%	66%
Arlington Elementary District	55%	9%	36%	*	36%
Avondale Elementary District	46%	14%	29%	10%	40%
BASIS Charter Schools, Inc.	11%	13%	56%	20%	77%
Buckeye Elementary District	50%	16%	25%	9%	34%
Gila Bend Unified District	77%	*	20%	3%	23%
Imagine Avondale Elementary, Inc.	26%	18%	44%	11%	55%
Incito Schools	58%	8%	35%	*	35%
Legacy Traditional School - Avondale	18%	14%	51%	18%	68%
Liberty Elementary District	36%	16%	34%	15%	48%
Litchfield Elementary District	29%	13%	38%	20%	59%
Littleton Elementary District	57%	14%	26%	4%	29%
P.L.C. Charter Schools	55%	22%	20%	3%	23%
Palo Verde Elementary District	29%	12%	41%	18%	59%
Paloma School District	25%	25%	50%	*	50%
Pendergast Elementary District	49%	14%	31%	6%	37%
Saddle Mountain Unified School District	51%	19%	24%	6%	30%
Sentinel Elementary District	67%	*	17%	17%	33%
The Odyssey Preparatory Academy, Inc.	34%	16%	37%	13%	51%
Tolleson Elementary District	44%	11%	36%	9%	44%
Union Elementary District	45%	14%	34%	8%	42%
Wickenburg Unified District	34%	16%	44%	6%	50%
Maricopa County Schools	38%	14%	33%	15%	48%
All Arizona Schools	40%	14%	32%	14%	46%

Arizona Department of Education (2019). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

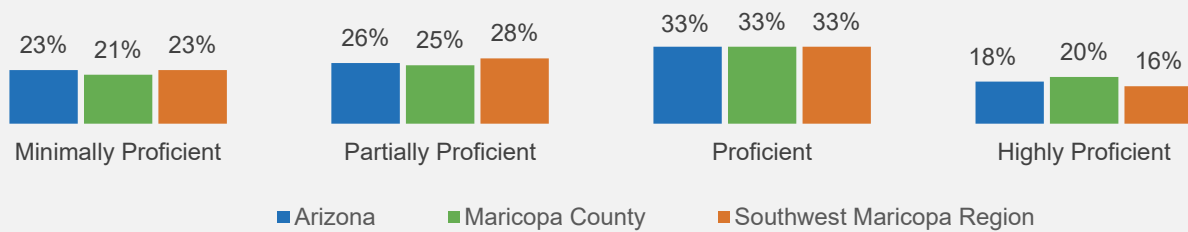
*Value is two percent or less.

Note: The school-district data in this table include only the schools that are located within the Southwest Maricopa Region

⁴¹ Center for the Future of Arizona (n.d.) Third Grade Reading. Retrieved from <https://www.arizonafuture.org/progress-meters/education/third-grade-reading/>

Slightly more, 49%, of third graders scored “proficient” or highly proficient” on the math assessment test in the Southwest Maricopa Region, two percent lower than the State (Exhibit 3.5). Within the region, there were some differences in proficiency by district (Exhibit 3.6). For example, some districts reported at least 70% or higher in proficiency, while other districts had 30% or fewer reaching proficiency. Although ELA assessment results are slightly higher than the math assessment results, overall, about half of all third graders are not meeting the proficiency standard for the two subjects.

Exhibit 3.5. 2019 AzMERIT Math assessment results for third grade students



Arizona Department of Education (2019). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 3.6. AzMERIT Math assessment results for third-graders in 2018-19, by school district

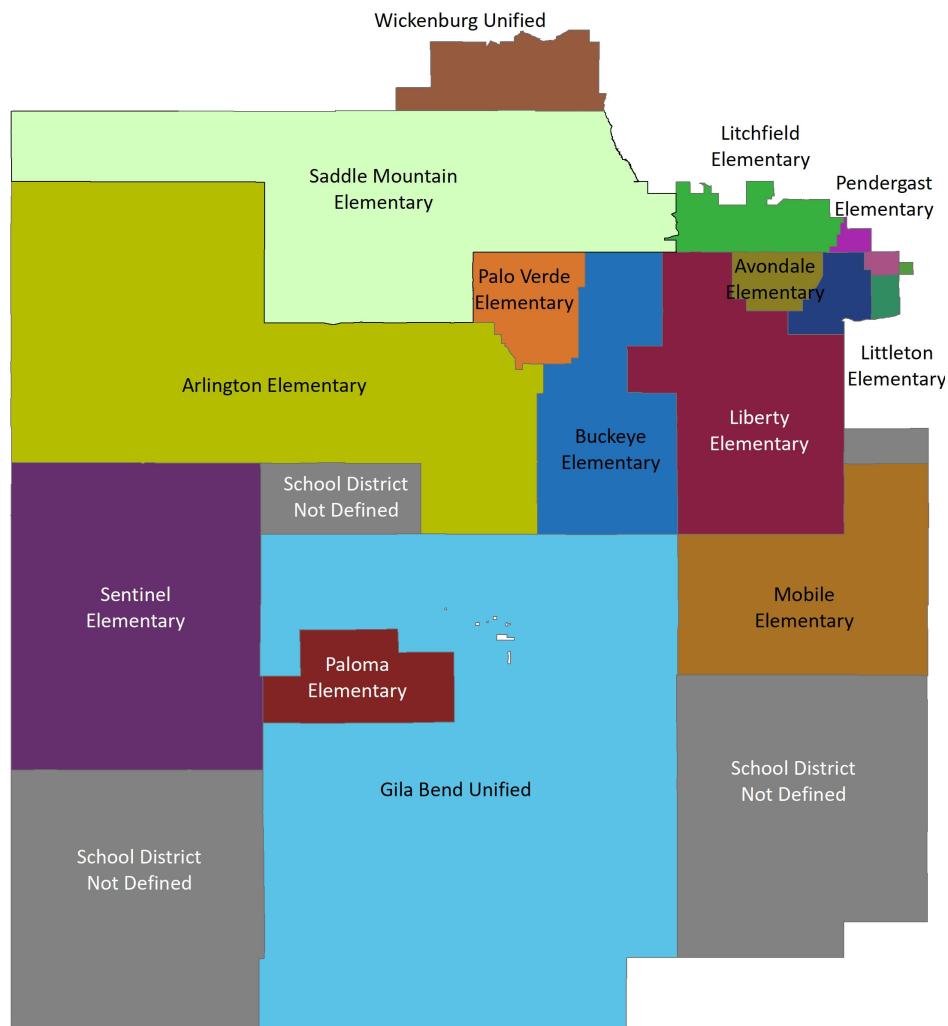
	Minimally proficient in Math	Partially proficient in Math	Proficient in Math	Highly proficient in Math	Passing Math (proficient or highly proficient)
Southwest Maricopa Region Schools	23%	28%	33%	16%	49%
Archway Classical Academy Trivium East	9%	22%	31%	38%	69%
Archway Classical Academy Trivium West	3%	15%	47%	34%	82%
Arlington Elementary District	23%	36%	32%	9%	41%
Avondale Elementary District	24%	25%	32%	19%	51%
BASIS Charter Schools, Inc.	2%	19%	49%	30%	79%
Buckeye Elementary District	35%	34%	23%	8%	31%
Gila Bend Unified District	37%	13%	27%	23%	50%
Imagine Avondale Elementary, Inc.	11%	25%	30%	33%	63%
Incito Schools	28%	35%	30%	8%	38%
Legacy Traditional School - Avondale	7%	21%	54%	19%	73%
Liberty Elementary District	20%	25%	35%	20%	54%
Litchfield Elementary District	13%	26%	39%	21%	61%
Littleton Elementary District	40%	30%	25%	5%	30%
P.L.C. Charter Schools	42%	38%	17%	3%	20%
Palo Verde Elementary District	8%	21%	40%	31%	71%
Paloma School District	25%	38%	38%		38%
Pendergast Elementary District	29%	30%	30%	11%	41%
Saddle Mountain Unified School District	34%	39%	22%	6%	27%
Sentinel Elementary District	50%	*	33%	17%	50%
The Odyssey Preparatory Academy, Inc.	9%	32%	46%	13%	59%
Tolleson Elementary District	18%	27%	36%	19%	55%
Union Elementary District	31%	23%	35%	11%	46%
Wickenburg Unified District	22%	31%	31%	16%	47%
Maricopa County Schools	21%	25%	33%	20%	53%
All Arizona Schools	23%	26%	33%	18%	51%

Arizona Department of Education (2019). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

*Value is two percent or less.

Note: The school-district data in this table include only the schools that are located within the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Exhibit 3.7. School districts of the Southwest Maricopa Region



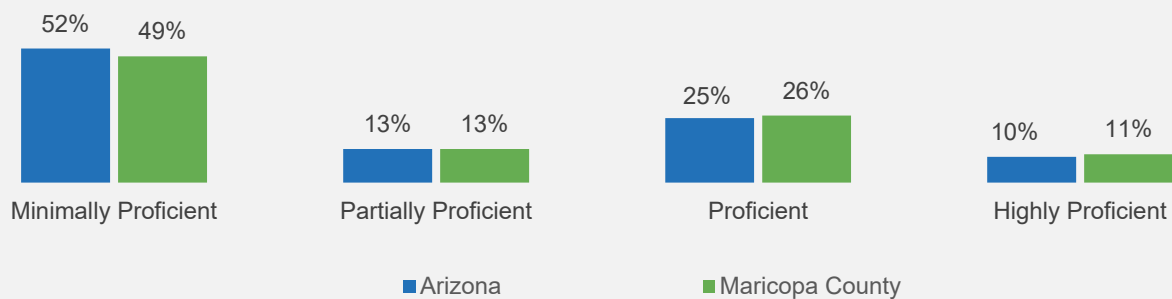
Source: Arizona Department of Education (2019).

Arizona students in grades third to eighth and tenth grade were not assessed in the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the 2020-21 school year, the AZMERIT changed the name to AzM2. For the third-grade assessment, the content areas and design were similar to the AZMERIT. In the 2021 school year, fewer students participated in the state assessments (88% to 90% of students) so it is impossible to know how the students that did not participate would perform. The ELA assessment results of the AzM2 demonstrated that 37% of all third graders in the Maricopa County scored “proficient” or “highly proficient”, which is two percent higher than Arizona (Exhibit 3.8).⁴² Slightly more, 38%, of third graders scored “proficient” or highly proficient” on the math assessment test in the

⁴² 2020-21 data was not available at the regional level.

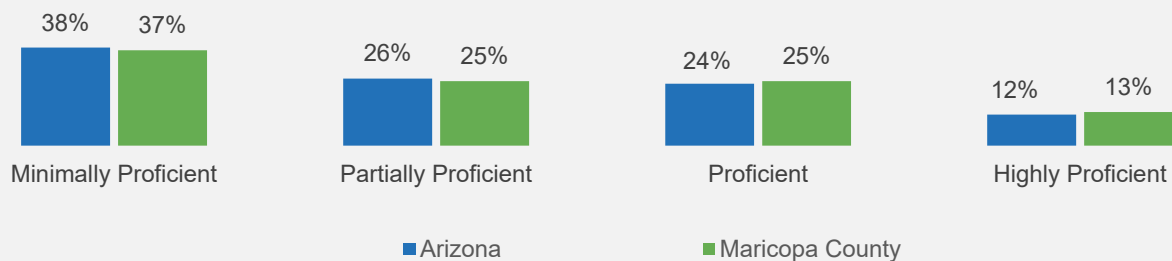
Maricopa County, two percent higher than the state (Exhibit 3.9). The COVID-19 pandemic was most likely why there was a decrease in statewide assessments from 2019. There were numerous learning disruptions from the pandemic that may have impacted students' learning, such as technology access, online learning fatigue, losing family members, caregivers losing jobs, social isolation, and mental health challenges, in unforeseen ways.^{43,44}

Exhibit 3.8. 2021 AzM2 English Language Arts assessment results for third grade students



Arizona Department of Education (2021). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 3.9. 2021 AzM2 Math assessment results for third grade students



Arizona Department of Education (2021). AzMERIT Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

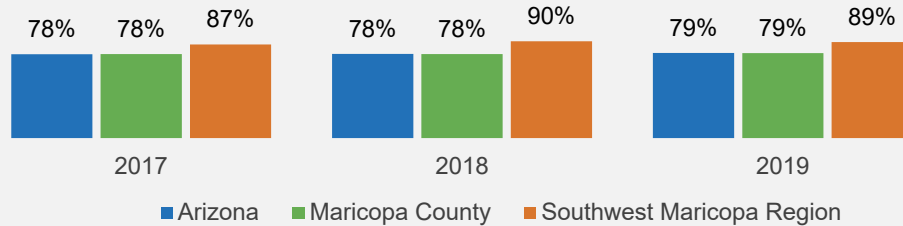
High School Graduation & Dropout Rates

⁴³ Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., Viruleg, E. (2021) McKinsey & Company. COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>

⁴⁴ The current national assessment is the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The latest results are from 2019 and report results for grades four and eight.

Between 2017 and 2019, the high school graduation rates remained steady for the Southwest Maricopa Region, Maricopa County, and Arizona. In 2019, 89% of students graduated within four-years in the region, higher than Maricopa County and Arizona (Exhibit 3.10).

Exhibit 3.10. 2017-2019 High school graduation rates: 4-year cohort

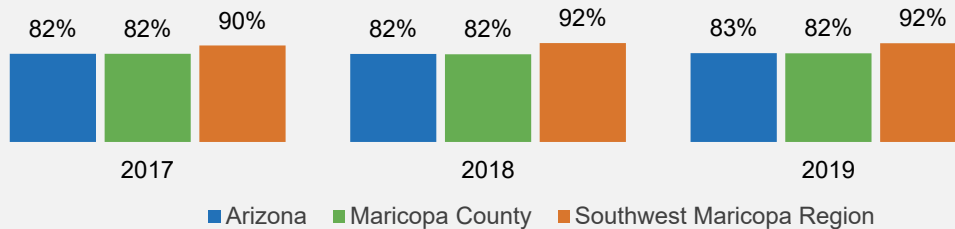


Arizona Department of Education (2021). Graduation Rate 2018 Cycle. Provided by AZ FTF.

*Data available by breakdown city, school district, school, and zip code

**The four-year graduation rate counts a student who graduates with a regular high school diploma in four years or less as a high school graduate in his or her original cohort

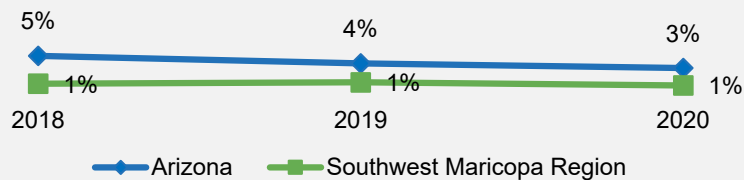
Exhibit 3.11. 2017-2019 High school graduation rates: 5-year cohort



Arizona Department of Education (2021). Graduation Rate 2018 Cycle. Provided by AZ FTF.

From 2018-2020, the percent of students dropping out of high school in Arizona remained steady (Exhibit 3.12). In the Southwest Maricopa Region, about one percent of students dropped out in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Exhibit 3.12. 2018-2020 High school dropout rates



Arizona Department of Education (2021). Graduation Rate 2018 Cycle. Provided by AZ FTF.

Educational Attainment

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 86% of adults age 25 and older have completed at least a high school education, which is a similar percentage than the county and state (Exhibit 3.13). Sub-regions with at least nine of ten adults age 25 and older that have at least completed a high school graduation include Goodyear (91%) and Litchfield Park (93%). A little less than a quarter (22%) of Southwest Maricopa Region residents have a bachelors’ degree or higher, which is lower than the proportion in Maricopa County (33%) and Arizona (29%). Those who with higher levels of education typically earn more and have lower rates of unemployment compared to those with lower education.⁴⁵

Exhibit 3.13. Level of education for the adult population (ages 25 and Older)

	Estimated population (ages 25 and older)	Percent less than high school	Percent high school or GED	Percent some college or professional education	Percent bachelor's degree or more
Southwest Maricopa Region	212,957	14%	26%	37%	22%
Arlington	516	20%	20%	51%	9%
Avondale	50,378	18%	27%	37%	18%
Buckeye	53,749	15%	28%	39%	19%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	1,347	29%	38%	23%	10%
Goodyear	54,559	9%	22%	39%	31%
Litchfield Park	22,925	7%	20%	38%	34%
Tolleson	24,358	23%	33%	30%	13%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	5,125	22%	30%	38%	9%
Maricopa County	2,878,815	12%	22%	33%	33%
ARIZONA	4,732,532	13%	24%	34%	29%

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B15002

EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTS

A child’s development during their first five years of life makes an impact on their performance in future educational endeavors. Less than 40% of preschool-age children are enrolled in early education, which is lower than Arizona and Maricopa County. Student absences for students in grades first to third are lower in the region than in Arizona. Additionally, about half of third-grade students in the Southwest Maricopa Region are scoring proficiently on the math and English Language Arts (ELA) assessments, more than the state and county for ELA but less for math. The region experienced a higher rate of students graduating from high school compared to the state and county. About 14% of



EARLY LEARNING

EARLY LEARNING

Why it Matters

Early learning fosters children's development and well-being at a critical time in their lives. Early learning is supported by early care and education (ECE), a constellation of all formal and informal educational programs and strategies designed to contribute to the growth and development of children from birth through age five.⁴⁶ Research suggests that the first five years of life are considered to be the most crucial stage in children's development, as they undergo the most rapid phase of growth during that period.⁴⁷ Research also shows that when children participate in high-quality learning environments, they learn and develop important skills and abilities such as motivation, self-control, focus and self-esteem. These skills prepare them for educational achievement later in life and reduce the need for special education programs.⁴⁸ In addition, research shows that investments in ECE have long-term health effects, helping to prevent disease and promote health.^{49, 50} For disadvantaged families, early childhood programs have benefits on health, future wages, crime reduction, and education.⁵¹ Children who participate in early care and education programs are better prepared for kindergarten, have greater success in elementary school, and are more likely to graduate from high school and prosper well into adulthood.^{52, 53}

Key indicators of early learning that help identify the needs of children include, but are not limited to, the availability of ECE centers and homes; enrollment in ECE programs; compensation and retention of ECE professionals; costs of child care and availability of child care subsidies or scholarships; and capacity to serve children with special needs.

⁴⁶ *What is the purpose of early childhood education? Why it's so important* (2021) University of Massachusetts Global. Retrieved from: <https://www.umassglobal.edu/news-and-events/blog/what-is-purpose-of-early-childhood-education>

⁴⁷ *Early Childhood Education*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://teach.com/where/levels-of-schooling/early-childhood-education/>

⁴⁸ McCoy, C., Yoshikawa, H., Ziol-Guest, K. (2017) *Impacts of early childhood education on medium- and long-term educational outcomes*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189X17737739>

⁴⁹ Garcia, J., Heckman, J., Ziff, A. (2019) *Early Childhood education and crime*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21759>

⁵⁰ Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Pungello, E., & Pan, Y. (2014). *Early childhood investments substantially boost adult health*. *Science*, 343(6178), 1478-1485.

⁵¹ Garcia, J., Heckman, J., Leaf, D., Prados, M. (2016) *The life-cycle benefits of an influential early childhood program*. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22993>

⁵² Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Ou, S. R., Robertson, D. L., Mersky, J. P., Topitzes, J. W., & Niles, M. D. (2007). *Effects of a school-based, early childhood intervention on adult health and well-being: A 19-year follow-up of low-income families*. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 161(8), 730-739.

⁵³ Weiland, C., & Yoshikawa, H. (2013). *Impacts of a prekindergarten program on children's mathematics, language, literacy, executive function, and emotional skills*. *Child Development*, 84(6), 2112-2130.

What the Data Tell Us

Early Care and Education

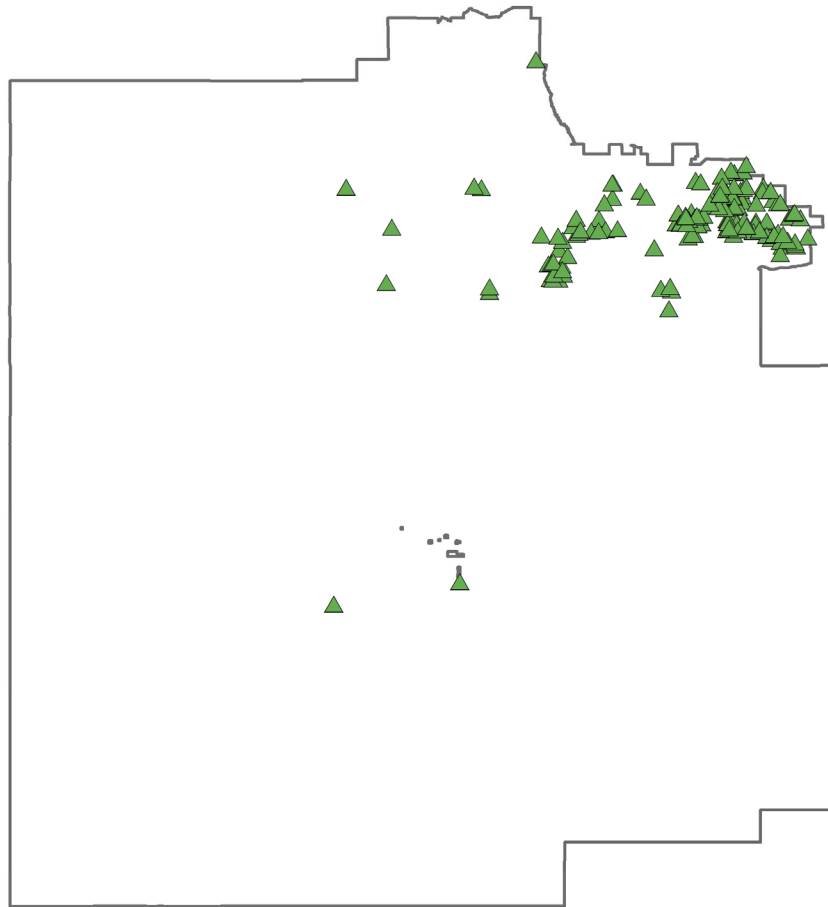
There are 243 ECE centers and homes with a capacity of 27,649 children in the Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 4.1). Although the total licensed capacity may be high, the actual facility may choose not to enroll the total number of children they are licensed to serve. The number of children served mainly depends on the center’s ability to meet the adult to child ratio, which varies by child’s age and must comply with licensing requirements.

Exhibit 4.1. Childcare capacity

	Number of ECE facilities	Capacity
Southwest Maricopa	243	27,649
Arlington	1	59
Avondale	55	5,132
Buckeye	59	3,992
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	4	133
Goodyear	74	12,333
Litchfield Park	20	4,498
Tolleson	27	1,272
Tonopah-Wintersburg	3	230
Maricopa County	2,595	285,959
ARIZONA	4,307	395,787

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020) and Arizona Department of Health Services. Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 4.2. Child care locations in the Southwest Maricopa Region



Legend

▲ CCRNR

Source: Arizona Department of Economic Security (2019-2020) and Arizona Department of Health Services (2020).
Provided by AZ FTF.

As previously mentioned, 39% of children between the ages of three and four are enrolled in ECE programs in the Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 3.2). This is much lower than what is presumably needed to meet the demand for child care since 64% of children live in a household where all adults are employed (Exhibit 2.5). Parents who do not have access to stable child care may find themselves missing work to care for their children. In addition, research has consistently demonstrated that lack of access to child care has negative effects on families and decreases parents’ chances of sustaining employment.⁵⁴

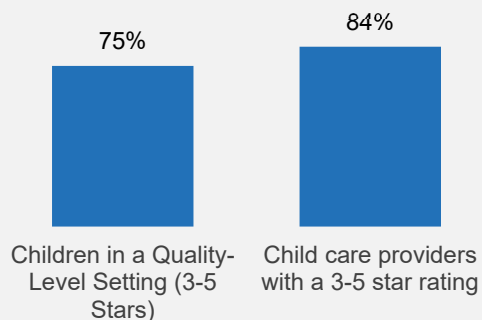
⁵⁴ Greenberg, M. (2007). *Next steps for federal child care policy. The Next Generation of Antipoverty Policies*, 17, 2. <http://www.futureofchildren.org/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=33&articleid=67§ionid=353>

Quality of Early Care and Education

Quality First is a signature program of FTF that is designed to improve the quality of early learning for children birth to age five. Quality First partners with ECE providers across Arizona to provide coaching and funding that is meant to improve the quality of their services. Quality First implemented a statewide standard of quality for ECE programs along with associated star ratings. The star ratings allow parents to easily take quality into consideration when deciding on care providers. The star ratings range from one to five indicating the level of quality and attainment of quality standards.⁵⁵ In the Southwest Maricopa Region, out of the 2,062 children enrolled in a Quality First site, 1,545 are enrolled in three, four or five star centers or homes (75%). Moreover, 21 out of 25 (84%) childcare providers in Quality First have received a three-to-five-star rating (Exhibit 4.3).

	Highest Quality	Far exceeds quality standards
	Quality Plus	Exceeds quality standards
	Quality	Meets quality standards
	Progressing Star	Approaching quality standards
	Rising Star	Committed to quality improvement
	No Rating	Program is enrolled in Quality First but does not yet have a public rating

Exhibit 4.3. Percentage of 3 to 5 star ratings at Quality First centers in Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona First Things First (July 2020). Quality First. Data retrieved July 2021.

There is a total of 25 Quality First sites across the Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 4.4). Overall, many sites (n=20) have at least a 3-star rating. Most these sites have a 3-star rating (n=12), which is given to programs that “meet quality standards.” Moreover, four of the sites have a 5-star rating indicating that they are “committed to quality improvement,” the highest star rating.

⁵⁵ *Arizona First Things First (October 2021). Quality First.*

Exhibit 4.4. Numbers and capacities of Quality First sites, 2020, by star rating

	Number and capacity of 1-star QF sites		Number and capacity of 2-star QF sites		Number and capacity of 3-star QF sites		Number and capacity of 4-star QF sites		Number and capacity of 5-star QF sites		Number and capacity of QF sites not publicly rated		Total number and total capacity of all QF sites	
Southwest Maricopa Region	0	0	3	433	12	1,115	4	264	4	71	2	179	25	2,062
Maricopa County	0	0	37	3,480	104	8,288	92	6,370	22	1,026	55	3,730	310	22,894
ARIZONA	0	0	161	10,800	360	21,393	296	17,229	85	3,659	173	8,812	1,075	61,893

Arizona First Things First (July 2020). Quality First. Data retrieved July 2021.

Costs of Child Care & Access

In addition to supporting improvements in the quality of child care, FTF provides scholarships for low-income children to attend quality ECE programs. Previous research has shown that low-income mothers receiving child care subsidies, a form of financial assistance, are more likely than other low-income mothers to work, sustain employment, and work longer hours.⁵⁴ Further, the negative effects of not accessing child care include the possibility of incurring financial debt, choosing child care that is lower quality and less stable, and losing time from work.

Across the Southwest Maricopa Region, state and Maricopa County, licensed centers have the highest cost per day, followed by certified group homes. Approved family homes have the lowest cost per day (Exhibit 4.5). The median costs per day of licensed centers, approved family homes and certified group homes in Southwest Maricopa Region are greater than the state and Maricopa County. High child care prices likely place a financial strain on families who already report barely making ends meet and having difficulty affording housing and food.

Based on the median cost per day, the median cost of child care per year for one infant in Southwest Maricopa Region totals to approximately \$12,000 a year for licensed centers, \$9,000 per a year for certified group homes, and approximately \$6,500 a year for approved family homes. Compared against the median income of families in Maricopa County with children under 18 (Exhibit 2.7), licensed centers comprise approximately 15% and approved family homes and certified group homes comprise about seven to ten percent of the regional median income.

The median cost per year of child care comprises an even higher amount of the median income for single-parent led families with children under 18 in Maricopa County and is considerably higher for single-female families compared to single-male families. Based on the median income of single-female

families (Exhibit 2.7), licensed centers make up 35% of their median income and approved family homes and certified group homes make up 15% to 23% of their median income. High costs can be a barrier in affording quality child care especially for single-female families.

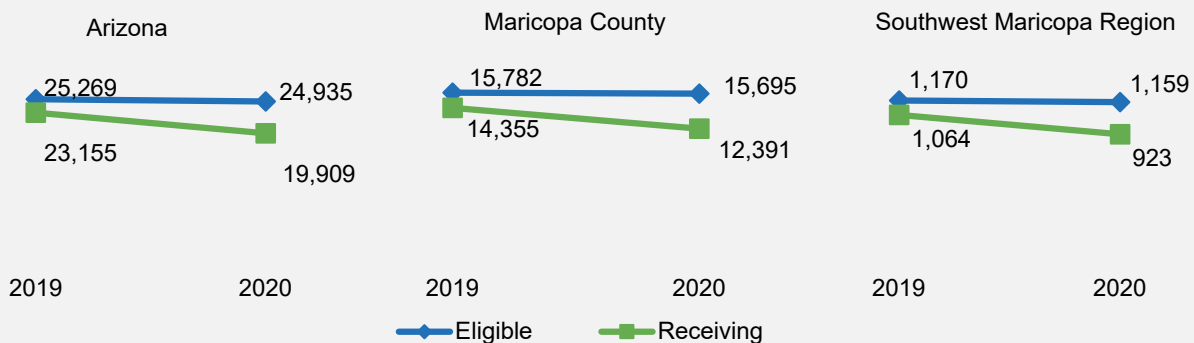
Exhibit 4.5. 2018 Median cost per day of early childhood care

	Southwest Maricopa Region	Maricopa County	Arizona
Cost for one infant Licensed Centers	\$48.00	\$44.99	\$43.03
Cost for one infant Approved Family Homes	\$25.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
Cost for one infant Certified Group Homes	\$36.00	\$30.00	\$30.00
Cost for one child (1 to 2 years old) Licensed Centers	\$41.80	\$40.00	\$38.00
Cost for one child (1 to 2 years old) Approved Family Homes	\$25.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
Cost for one child (1 to 2 years old) Certified Group Homes	\$34.00	\$28.50	\$28.00
Cost for one child (3 to 5 years old) Licensed Centers	\$30.17	\$34.00	\$33.00
Cost for one child (3 to 5 years old) Approved Family Homes	\$24.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
Cost for one child (3 to 5 years old) Certified Groups	\$32.00	\$28.00	\$30.00

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2018). Child Care Market Rate Survey. Provided by AZ FTF.

From 2019-2020, Arizona, Maricopa County and the Southwest Maricopa Region both experienced a slight decrease in the number of children eligible for Department of Economic Security (DES) child care subsidies (Exhibit 4.6). During the same time period, the state, Maricopa County, and the Southwest Maricopa Region experienced a decrease in the number of children receiving child care subsidies. For example, in 2019 and within the Southwest Maricopa Region, 91% of children that were eligible for child care subsidies received subsidies compared to 80% of children in 2020. The decrease in the number of children eligible and receiving child care subsidies in 2020 may be due to COVID-19 pandemic as centers were closed.

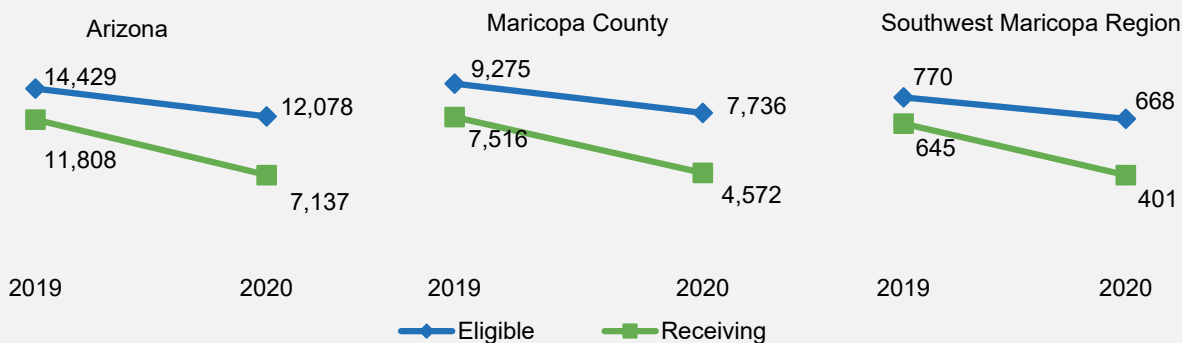
Exhibit 4.6. 2019-2020 Number of children eligible and receiving child care subsidies



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Child Care (CCA) Subsidies. Provided by AZ FTF.

For Department of Child (DCS)-involved children, they had similar trends of a decrease in the number of children eligible and receiving child care subsidies across the state, county and region (Exhibit 4.7). In addition, the proportion of children eligible for child care subsidies has decreased from 2019 to 2020. For example, in 2019 and within the Southwest Maricopa Region, 84% of DCS-involved children that were eligible for child care subsidies received subsidies compared to 60% of children in 2020. This proportion is also lower than non-DCS children.

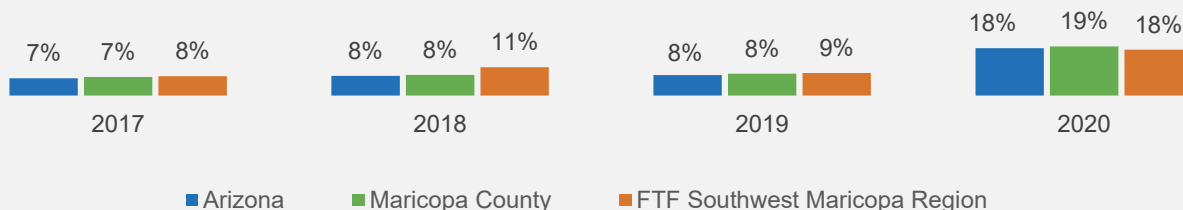
Exhibit 4.7. 2019-2020 Number of DCS-involved children eligible and receiving child care subsidies



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Child Care (CCA) Subsidies. Provided by AZ FTF.

The proportion of eligible families not using DES child care subsidies has remained steady between 2017 to 2019, but increased in 2020 across the state, county and region. In 2020, 18% of families in the Southwest Maricopa Region did not use their child care subsidies compared to eight percent of families in 2017 (Exhibit 4.8). The decrease in families using child care subsidies may have been due to the closure of child care sites in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exhibit 4.8. 2017-2020 Percent of eligible families not using DES child care subsidies



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Child Care (CCA) Subsidies. Provided by AZ FTF.

Developmental Delays and Special Needs

Issues in teaching young children with special needs reflect significant changes in public policy and professional philosophy across the nation. There are diverse perspectives on how to effectively teach young children with developmental delays and special needs.⁵⁶ The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (ages zero to two) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages three to 21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B.⁵⁷

AZEIP is a statewide system that offers services and assistance to families and their children with disabilities or developmental delays under the age of three. The purpose of the program is to intervene at an early stage to help children develop to their highest potential.⁵⁸ Research shows that children and youth with mild intellectual disabilities are behind in academic skills compared to their peers.⁵⁹ Without proper intervention, this can lead to delays in learning to read and perform basic math and to further difficulties in other academic areas that require use of those skills. A child is eligible for AZEIP if he/she is between birth and 36 months of age and is developmentally delayed or has an established condition with a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay, as defined by the state.⁶⁰ A child is considered to be developmentally delayed when s/he has not reached 50% of the milestones expected at her/his chronological age in one or more of the areas of development: cognitive, physical, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive.

From 2018-2020, Southwest Maricopa Region, Maricopa County and Arizona experienced a decrease in the number of children receiving AZEIP referrals and services (Exhibit 4.9). Compared to 2018, the number of children receiving referrals in the Southwest Maricopa region in 2020 slightly increased by three children. In the Southwest Maricopa Region, of those who received referrals to AZEIP, about a third received services. Not all referred children receiving services may be due to the high eligibility threshold of having a 50% or greater delay in development.

⁵⁶ Dyson, A. (2001). *Special needs education as the way to equity: an alternative approach?* *Support for Learning*, 16, 3.

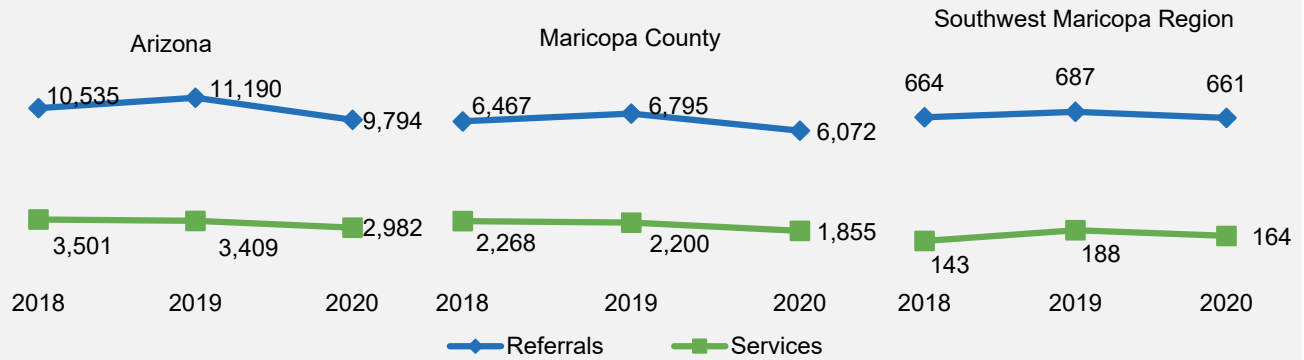
⁵⁷ US Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/osep-idea.html>

⁵⁸ Arizona Department of Economic Security (n.d.). *Arizona Early Intervention Program*. Retrieved from: <https://des.az.gov/services/disabilities/developmental-infant>

⁵⁹ Rosenberg, L., Bart, O., Ratzon, N., Jarus, T. (2013) *Personal and Environmental Factors predict participation of children with and without mild developmental disabilities*. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-012-9619-8>

⁶⁰ Arizona Department of Economic Security (n.d.) *Eligibility for the Arizona Early Intervention Program*. Retrieved from: <https://des.az.gov/services/disabilities/early-intervention/arizona-early-intervention-program-azeip-eligibility>

Exhibit 4.9. 2018-2020 Children receiving AzEIP referrals and services in Maricopa County and the Southwest Maricopa Region

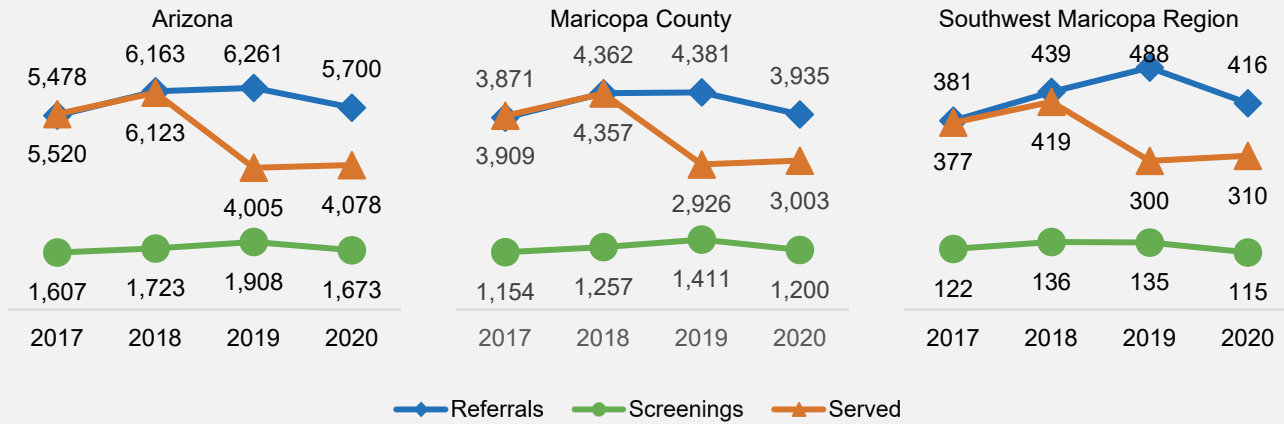


Arizona Department of Economic Security (2021). AzEIP Referred and Served Children. Provided by AZ FTF.

To qualify for Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) services an individual must have a cognitive disability, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, or be at risk for a developmental disability. Children under the age of six are eligible if they show significant delays and a strong potential that they will have a developmental disability, indicated by a 50% delay in one or more of these areas of development: physical, cognitive, communication, social-emotional, or self-help.

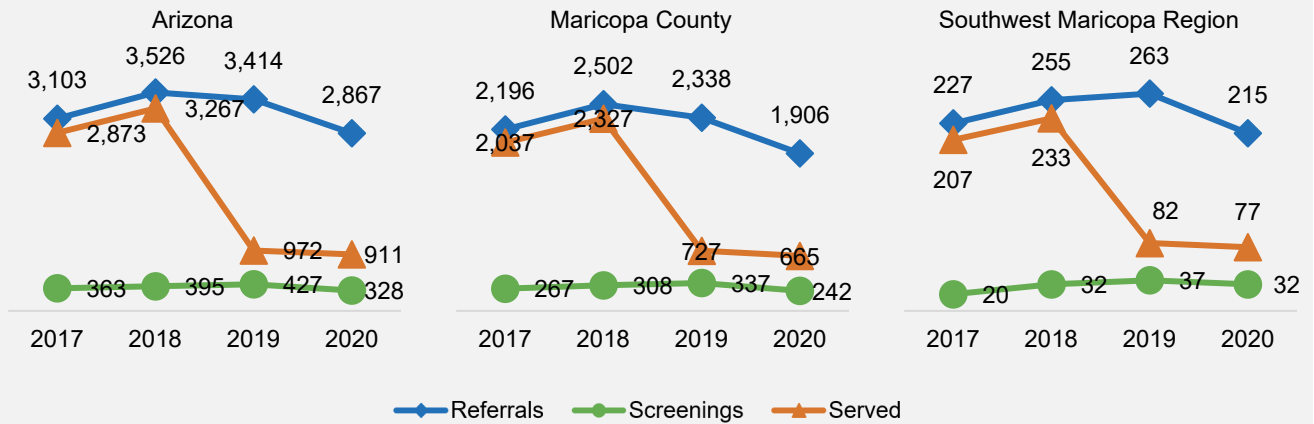
Between 2017 to 2020, the rates of children receiving referrals and services through the DDD were similar for Arizona, Maricopa County, and the Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 4.10). Overall, across Arizona, Maricopa County, and the Southwest Maricopa Region, the number of referrals increased from 2017 to 2018 and 2019 but decreased in 2020. In addition, the number of children receiving services peaked in 2018 across the state, county and region but started to decline in 2019 and continued to decline in 2020. This decline may be due to changes in agencies' service capacity over time. Similar to the total number of children served, the number of children 0 to 2 served started to decline in 2019 and continue in 2020 (Exhibit 4.11). In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 82 children 0-2 were served, a decline from 233 in 2018. Despite the decreases in the number of children served, DDD was able to provide services to children with needs.

Exhibit 4.10. 2017-2020 Number of children (0-5) receiving referrals, screenings, and services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Arizona, Maricopa County, and Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Division of Developmental Disabilities. Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 4.11. 2017-2020 Number of children (0-2) receiving referrals, screenings, and services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Arizona, Maricopa County, and Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Division of Developmental Disabilities. Provided by AZ FTF.

Special Education

In 2020, the most common types of disabilities for preschool children were developmental delays and speech/language impairment (Exhibit 4.12).⁶¹ None of the children enrolled in any of the Southwest Maricopa Region schools have a hearing impairment. Across Southwest Maricopa districts, there were districts with high concentrations of preschool students with special needs. In the Arlington Elementary District and Pendergast Elementary District, 98% or more preschool students in special education had a speech or language impairments. Moreover, a high percentage of preschool students in special education had a developmental delay at Gila Bend Unified District (80%) and Tolleson Elementary District (67%).

For students in kindergarten to 3rd grade within the region in 2020, 11% were enrolled in special education services (not shown in Exhibit). This percentage was consistent with the county (11%) and the state (12%). Similar to the disabilities of preschool children, the most common disabilities for students in kindergarten to 3rd grade were developmental delays and speech/language impairments.

Exhibit 4.12. Types of disabilities among preschoolers in special education, 2020

	Developmental Delay	Hearing Impairment	Other	Preschool Severe Delay	Speech/ Language Impairment
Southwest Maricopa Region Schools	49%	<2%	<2%	24%	27%
Arlington Elementary District	<2%	<2%	<2%	<2%	>98%
Avondale Elementary District	48%	<2%	<2%	15%	37%
Buckeye Elementary District	38%	<2%	<2%	42%	20%
Gila Bend Unified District	80%	<2%	<2%	<2%	20%
Liberty Elementary District	62%	<2%	<2%	27%	12%
Litchfield Elementary District	55%	<2%	<2%	20%	25%
Littleton Elementary District	46%	<2%	<2%	18%	36%
P.L.C. Charter Schools	60%	<2%	<2%	<2%	40%
Palo Verde Elementary District	20%	<2%	<2%	20%	60%
Pendergast Elementary District	<2%	<2%	<2%	<2%	>98%
Saddle Mountain Unified School District	21%	<2%	<2%	28%	52%
Tolleson Elementary District	67%	<2%	<2%	12%	21%
Union Elementary District	38%	<2%	<2%	24%	38%

⁶¹ Examples of developmental delays for preschoolers include, but not limited to, cognitive, motor, social/emotional/behavioral or speech.

	Developmental Delay	Hearing Impairment	Other	Preschool Severe Delay	Speech/ Language Impairment
Maricopa County Schools	45%	<2%	<2%	21%	32%
All Arizona Schools	43%	<2%	<2%	20%	34%

Arizona Department of Education (2020). [Special education]. Unpublished data.

Note: The school-district data in this table include only the schools that are located within the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Note: The data presented in this table are unduplicated (i.e., children diagnosed with multiple disabilities are counted only one time in the Federal Primary Need (FPN) category)

EARLY LEARNING HIGHLIGHTS

About 39% of preschool-aged children in the region are enrolled in ECE programs, which is less than the 64% assumed to need child care based on their parents’ employment status. A contributing factor may be the high cost of child care. With respect to child care subsidies, fewer children are becoming eligible for, receiving, and remaining on the waitlist for the subsidies. The most common disabilities for preschoolers are Preschool Severe Delays and Developmental Delays.

Below are key findings that highlight the early learning assets, needs, and data-driven considerations for the Southwest Maricopa Region. The considerations provided below do not represent comprehensive approaches and methods for tackling the needs and assets in the region. Instead, the considerations represent possible approaches that early childhood system partners, including FTF, could take to address needs and assets in the region, as conceptualized by the authors of this report.

Assets	Considerations
Quality First has been increasing the quality of child care programs in the region. Of the children enrolled in a Quality First site, 75% are enrolled in a three, four or five star center or home.	Support Quality First efforts in the region to increase the opportunities for children to receive quality early care and education experiences.
Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) was able to continue to provide necessary services for 115 children ages zero to five within the Southwest Maricopa Region.	Continue to support young children with developmental delays.

Needs	Considerations
The data shows that childcare cost is higher in Southwest Maricopa Region than in the county or state.	Increase the availability of different resources to help families afford childcare. This can include spreading awareness about the availability of scholarships and subsidies for child care, especially for low-income families.
In some sub-regions, such as Arlington, Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel, and Tonopah-Wintersburg, there are less than five Early Care and Education centers and homes in the area.	Provide early learning resources to parents/guardians in areas with less Early Care and Education centers and home to help young children.
Among the children with special needs in the Southwest Maricopa Region, more children in the region have a developmental delay (49%) compared to the state (43%) or in the county (45%).	Consider investing in support services for families with young children who have special needs.



CHILD HEALTH

CHILD HEALTH

Why it Matters

Ensuring healthy development through early identification and treatment of children's health issues helps families understand healthy developmental pathways and how health issues affect children and their school readiness.⁶² There are many health factors that impact the well-being of young children and their families. Research has shown that high quality prenatal care improves maternal health and health behaviors during pregnancy and after childbirth.⁶³ For example, during prenatal care visits, expectant mothers are provided with information and resources to promote a healthy pregnancy and increase the healthy development of their child. At routine prenatal visits, physicians often remind expectant mothers of the importance of abstaining from substance use, maintaining a healthy diet, and the benefits of breastfeeding, all of which influence a baby's development. For example, maternal overweight and obesity have been associated with risks of gestational diabetes mellitus, caesarean delivery, large for gestational age, pre-eclampsia, preterm birth, and admission to special care nursery or intensive care unit.⁶⁴

Engaging in healthy preventative practices, such as breastfeeding and vaccinating children during early childhood, may help protect children from negative health outcomes and developmental delays. Breastfeeding provides children with the nutrition they need early in life.⁶⁵ Children who have not been vaccinated are at a higher risk of contracting diseases and tend to have more health issues later in life. Research has found that it is important for children to receive their immunizations early in life. Children under the age of five are at the highest risk of contracting severe illnesses because their bodies have not built a strong immune system yet.⁶⁶ Another factor that may impact health outcomes and may be deemed less important by parents is early screening for hearing loss. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hearing loss can impact a child's ability to develop communication, language, and social skills.⁶⁷ Fortunately, early screening for hearing loss can connect children with services that can increase the likelihood of the child reaching their full potential.

This chapter provides an overview of the health indicators for this region that highlight the well-being of

⁶² *Schools & Health* (2016). *Impact of Health on Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/pages/Anthropometricstatusgrowth.aspx>

⁶³ Yan, J. (2016) *The effects of prenatal care utilization on maternal health and health behaviors*. *Health Economics*. Volume 26 Issue 8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3380>

⁶⁴ Yang, Z., Phung, H., Freebairn, L., Sexton, R., Raulli, A., Kelly, P. (2018) *Contribution of maternal overweight and obesity to the occurrence of adverse pregnancy outcomes*. *ANZJOG*. Volume 59 Issue 3. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajo.12866>

⁶⁵ Office on Women's Health (2014). *Why breastfeeding is important*. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-benefits.html>

⁶⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). *Infant Immunizations*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/parent-questions.html>

⁶⁷ Center for Disease Control and Prevention Division (2020). *Hearing Loss*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/index.html>

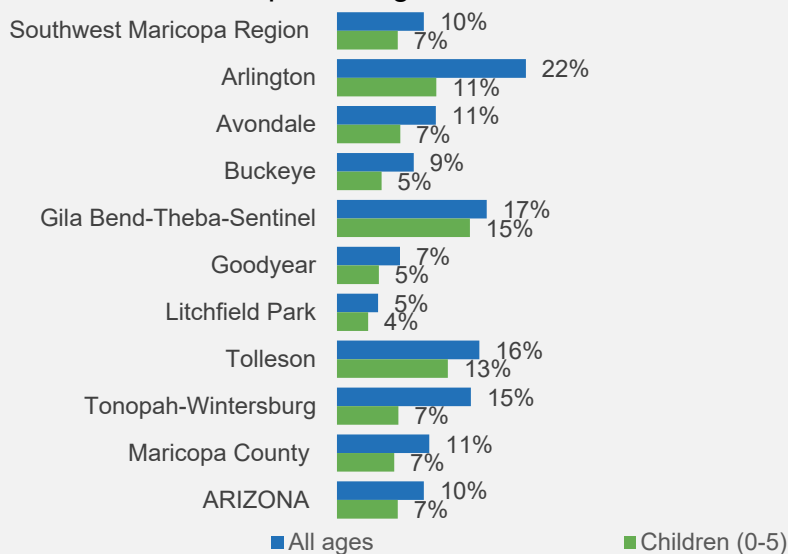
children under age six and their families. Healthy People 2030 (HP 2030) set 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. Healthy People established these benchmarks to encourage collaborations across communities and sectors, empower individuals to make informed health decisions, and measure the impact of prevention activities.⁶⁸ When appropriate, these benchmarks will be presented throughout this chapter as comparison points for local indicators.

What the Data Tell Us

Access to Health Services

One indication of people’s access to health services is whether they have health insurance coverage that helps make health care affordable. When children lack health insurance, they are at risk of poor health outcomes and long-term complications if their families avoid or delay medical care because of cost. The HP 2030 target is for 92.1% of Americans to have medical insurance by 2030.⁶⁹ Overall, Southwest Maricopa’s rates for individuals and young children between the ages of 0 to 5 is consistent with Maricopa County and Arizona (Exhibit 5.1). Across the state, county, and region, about one of ten of individuals do not have health insurance and seven percent of children between the ages of 0 to 5 do not have health insurance. Sub-regions with high rates of no health insurance include Arlington (22% for all ages and 11% for children 0-5) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (17% for all ages and 15% for children 0-5).

Exhibit 5.1. Estimated percentage without health insurance



U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B27001

⁶⁸ Healthy People 2030. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ODPHP Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. <https://health.gov/healthypeople>

⁶⁹ Healthy People 2030. About Health People Retrieved from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/health-care-access-and-quality/increase-proportion-people-health-insurance-ahs-01>

Hospitalizations

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, there have been 128 non-fatal inpatient hospitalizations for children from 2016 to 2020, most commonly due to falling or poisoning (Exhibit 5.2). These children were the most likely to be male (58%) and identify as either Latino or Hispanic (44%) or white (43%) (not shown in Exhibit). As for non-fatal emergency department visits, Southwest Maricopa Region had a total of 9,845 visits between 2016 to 2020 (Exhibit 5.2). Similar to the children that were hospitalized, children that experienced emergency department visits were most likely to be male (56%) and identify as Latino or Hispanic (48%) or white (40%) (not shown in Exhibit). The most common reasons for visits include falls or being ‘struck by or against’ an object or person (not shown in Exhibit). Accidents such as these further emphasize the importance of health insurance coverage for families and their children, as rapid medical response can prevent long term or more severe health complications later in life.

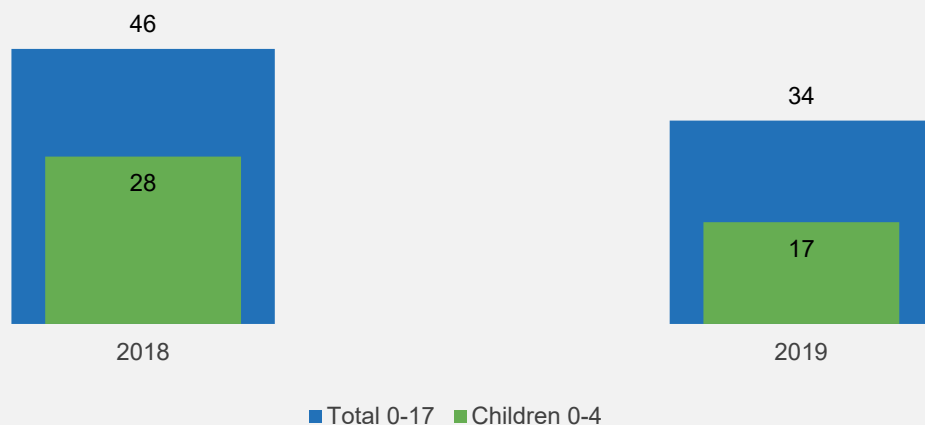
Exhibit 5.2. Injury hospitalizations and ED visits for children 0-4, ADHS (2016-2020)

Indicator	Arizona	Maricopa County	Southwest Maricopa Region
Number of Non-Fatal Hospitalizations	2,890	1,790	128
Number of ED Visits	181,035	116,180	9,845

Arizona Department of Health Services (July 2020). *Unintentional Injuries in Children 0-5, Arizona 2016-2020*. Provided AZFTF

Between the years 2018 and 2019, in the Southwest Maricopa Region, the total number of deaths for children 0 to 17 years old decreased from 46 to 34 (Exhibit 5.3). The majority of these deaths across both years were of young children 0 to 4 years. Within Arizona, the most common reason for childhood deaths include accidents, congenital malformations, and short gestation and low birth weight.

Exhibit 5.3. 2018-2019 total number of deaths for children 0-17 in Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Health Services (July 2020). *Child mortality, Arizona 2018-2019*. Provided AZFTF

From 2016 to 2020, there were a total of 265 inpatient hospitalizations for children 0 to 14 years old in Southwest Maricopa Region for asthma (Exhibit 5.4). Children 0 to 14 that were hospitalized for asthma were most likely to identify as male (62%) and Hispanic or Latino/a (42%) or white Non-Hispanic (34%) (not shown in Exhibit). Throughout the Southwest Maricopa Region, 40% of children inpatient hospitalization were 0 to 4 years old (Exhibit 5.4).

Exhibit 5.4. Inpatient hospitalizations for asthma for children 0-14 compared to children 0-4 (2016-2020)

	#Inpatient hospitalization of children 0-4	#Inpatient hospitalization of children 0-14	Percent of children inpatient hospitalization that were 0-4
Southwest Maricopa Region	106	265	40%
Maricopa County	1,339	3,700	36%
ARIZONA	2,214	5,672	39%

Arizona Department of Health Services (July 2020). Asthma, Arizona 2016-2020. Provided AZFTF

From 2016 to 2020, there was a total of 72 emergency visits and six inpatient hospitalizations for children 0 to 17 years old in Southwest Maricopa Region for diabetes (Exhibit 5.5). The Southwest Maricopa Region consists of 12% of the emergency room visits and eight percent of the inpatient hospitalizations in Maricopa County.

Exhibit 5.5. Inpatient hospitalizations for diabetes for children 0-17 (2016-2020)

	#Inpatient hospitalizations	Average length of stay (days) for hospitalization	#Emergency room visits
Southwest Maricopa Region	6	2.7	72
Maricopa County	72	3.2	618
ARIZONA	150	3.0	1,002

Arizona Department of Health Services (July 2020). Asthma, Arizona 2016-2020. Provided AZFTF

Pregnancies and Birth

During calendar year 2019, Southwest Maricopa Region residents gave birth to 4,689 babies, which was nine percent of all babies born in Maricopa County and six percent of all births in the state (Exhibit 5.6).

Exhibit 5.6. Live births during calendar year 2019, by people giving birth place of residence

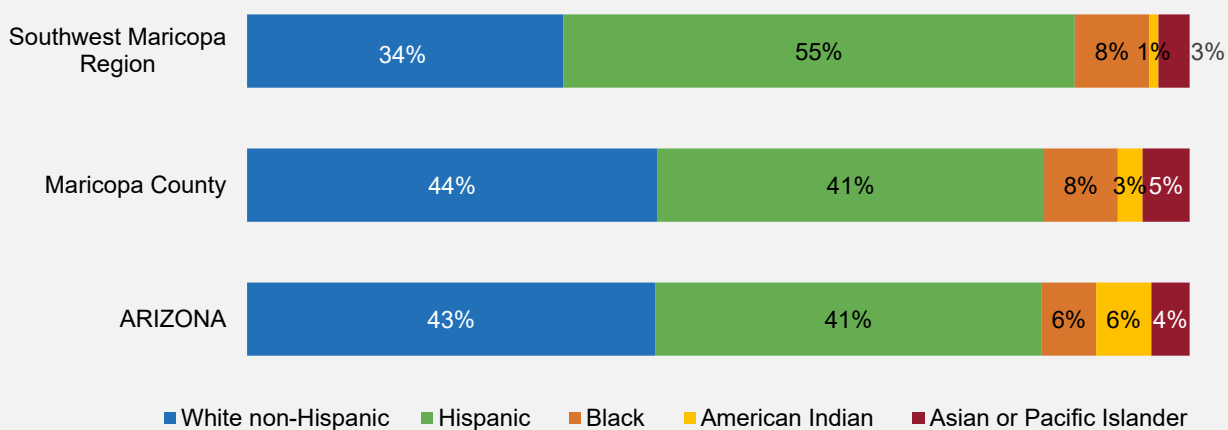
Total number of births to Arizona-residents in 2019	
Southwest Maricopa Region	4,689
Maricopa County	50,998
ARIZONA	79,183

Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). [Vital Statistics Births dataset]. Unpublished data

Characteristics of People Giving Birth

Of the 4,689 people who gave birth in the Southwest Maricopa Region in 2019, 55% were Hispanic or Latina, 34% were non-Hispanic white, eight percent were Black or African American, three percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and one percent were American Indian or Alaska Native (Exhibit 5.7). Compared to people giving birth across Maricopa County and the state as a whole, people in the Southwest Maricopa Region were more likely to be Hispanic or Latina, and less likely to be white Non-Hispanic or Native American.

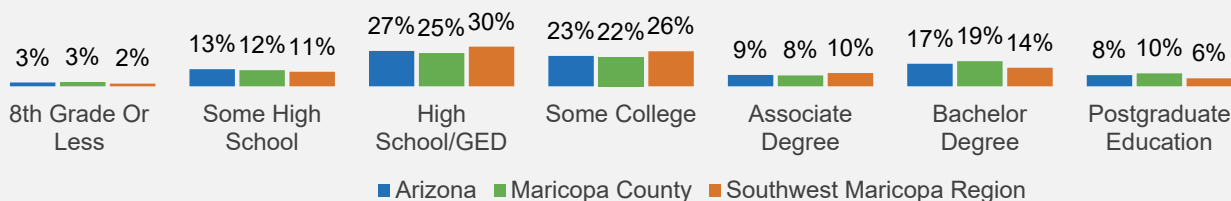
Exhibit 5.7. Race and ethnicity of people giving birth in 2019



Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). [Vital Statistics Births dataset]. Unpublished data

Those who gave birth in the Southwest Maricopa Region had a slightly lower level of educational attainment (56% had some education beyond high school) than all people in the state (57% post-high school) (Exhibit 5.8).

Exhibit 5.8. 2019 Percentage of live births by person's educational attainment



Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). Vital Statistics. Provided by AZ FTF.

The population of those who gave birth in the Southwest Maricopa Region was also similar to their counterparts across the county and statewide on other attributes. About six percent were in their teens (5% county, 6% statewide) (Exhibit 5.9). In Southwest Maricopa, less than half of births (47%) were to people relying on AHCCCS or Indian Health Service (IHS) coverage, which was similar to the county percentage (46%) and statewide proportion of 50%. In addition, a slightly less proportion of people in Southwest Maricopa Region reported tobacco use during pregnancy (2%) compared to the statewide (4%) and county (3%) proportion.

Exhibit 5.9. Other characteristics of people giving birth in 2019

	Person was 19 or younger	Person was 17 or younger	Birth was covered by AHCCCS or Indian Health	Tobacco use during pregnancy
Southwest Maricopa Region	5%	1%	47%	2%
Maricopa County	5%	1%	46%	3%
ARIZONA	6%	1%	50%	4%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). *Vital Statistics*. Provided by AZ FTF.

Prenatal Care

Research suggests that a lack of prenatal care is associated with many negative health issues for both the person giving birth and the child.⁷⁰ Research also shows that children of people who did not obtain prenatal care were three times more likely to have a low birth weight and five times more likely to experience die in infancy than those born to people who did receive prenatal care.⁷¹ In addition, studies show that people who are at the highest risk of not receiving prenatal care are parents younger than 19 years old and single parents.^{72,73} Educational attainment has also been associated with people receiving prenatal care, such that the higher a person’s educational attainment, the more likely they are to seek prenatal care.⁷⁴ It is important that people seek and receive prenatal care at an early stage in their pregnancy so physicians can treat and prevent any health issues that may occur.⁷⁵

HP 2030 aims to bring the proportion of pregnant people who receive early and adequate prenatal care

⁷⁰ *Prenatal Care Effects Felt Long After Birth*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://toosmall.org/blog/prenatal-care-effects-felt-long-after-birth>

⁷¹ *Womens Health* (n.d.). *Prenatal care fact sheet*. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/prenatal-care.html#b>

⁷² *Center for Disease Control and Prevention* (n.d.). *Vital Statistics Online*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/vitalstatsonline.htm

⁷³ *Institute of Medicine (US) Committee to Study Outreach for Prenatal Care*; Brown SS, editor. *Prenatal Care: Reaching Mothers, Reaching Infants*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 1988. Chapter 1, *Who Obtains Insufficient Prenatal Care?* Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK217693/>

⁷⁴ *National Center for Health Statistics* (1994). *Vital and Health Statistics: Data from the National Vital Statistics System*. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=z1FPAQAAlAAJ&pg=RA2-PA19&lpg=RA2PA19&dq=lack+of+prenatal+care+linked+with+mothers+educational+attainment&source=bl&ots=ilqp_JVnA&sig=SQBGbmIlhOG9JNrgFLEjMOVkt90&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjM6vH_6vFPAhWCjlQKHWRjCwkQ6AEIVDAH#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁷⁵ *Womens Health* (n.d.). *Prenatal care fact sheet*. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/prenatal-care.html#b>

to 80.5%.⁷⁶ In 2019, within the Southwest Maricopa Region, the percentage of people who began prenatal care in the first trimester was 73%, which is about eight percent lower than HP goal but slightly higher than the county (72%) and state proportion (69%) (Exhibit 5.10). In 2019, only one percent of people did not receive prenatal care which is lower the proportion in the state (3%) and county (2%) (Exhibit 5.10). Moreover, 79% of people received at least nine prenatal care visits.

Exhibit 5.10. Live births during calendar year 2019, by number of prenatal visits

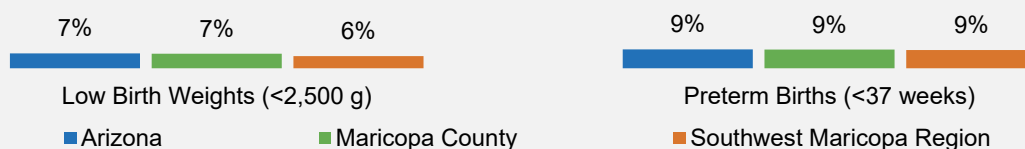
	No visits	1 to 4 visits	5 to 8 visits	9 to 12 visits	13 or more visits	Percent of births with fewer than five prenatal care visits	Percent of births with prenatal care begun in first trimester
Southwest Maricopa Region	1%	4%	15%	47%	32%	5%	73%
Maricopa County	2%	4%	16%	45%	31%	6%	72%
ARIZONA	3%	6%	18%	43%	29%	8%	69%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). Vital Statistics. Provided by AZ FTF.

Birth Outcomes

Birth outcomes were similar among babies from the Southwest Maricopa Region compared to babies born statewide. In the region in 2019, six percent of babies were low birth weight, compared to seven percent across the state and the percent of premature births was also the same as the region and state at nine percent (Exhibit 5.11). The Healthy People 2030 goal is fewer than 9.4% are born preterm, meaning that the Southwest Maricopa Region has achieved the Healthy People 2030 goal for preterm births.

Exhibit 5.11. Percentage of births with low birth weights (<2,500 g) and preterm births (<37 weeks) in 2019



Arizona Department of Health Services (2019). Vital Statistics. Provided by AZ FTF.

⁷⁶ Healthy People 2030. About Health People Retrieved from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/pregnancy-and-childbirth/increase-proportion-pregnant-women-who-receive-early-and-adequate-prenatal-care-mich-08>

There were some differences in the percentages of births with low birth weights and preterm births between 2017 to 2019 at the sub-regional level. For example, the Tonopah-Wintersburg sub-region had the highest percentage of low birth weights and preterm births between 2017 to 2019 amongst the sub-regions (10% for low birth weight and 14% for preterm births) (Exhibit 5.12).

Exhibit 5.12. Percentage of births with low birth weights (<2,500 g) and preterm births (<37 weeks) in 2017 to 2019, by sub-region*

	Total number of births from 2017-2019	Percentage Low Birth Weights (<2,500 g)	Percentage of Preterm Births (<37 weeks)
Arlington	9	4%	**
Avondale	1,327	7%	9%
Buckeye	1,210	7%	10%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	49	**	**
Goodyear	893	6%	8%
Litchfield Park	336	6%	9%
Tolleson	706	6%	8%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	83	10%	14%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). [Vital Statistics Births dataset]. Unpublished data.

*Data not available at the county, state or region level.

**Cells suppressed due to small percentages.

In 2019, the percentage of newborns admitted to the NICU in the region (6%) was slightly lower than the county (7%) and state (8%) (Exhibit 5.13). Moreover, from 2016 to 2020, 396 newborns were hospitalized after birth because they were affected by maternal use of drugs during pregnancy (not shown in Exhibit). They consisted of four percent of the newborns hospitalized after birth due to material use of drugs during pregnancy in Arizona.

Exhibit 5.13. NICU admissions in 2019

Newborns admitted to intensive care unit	
Southwest Maricopa Region	6%
Maricopa County	7%
ARIZONA	8%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). [Vital Statistics Births dataset]. Unpublished data

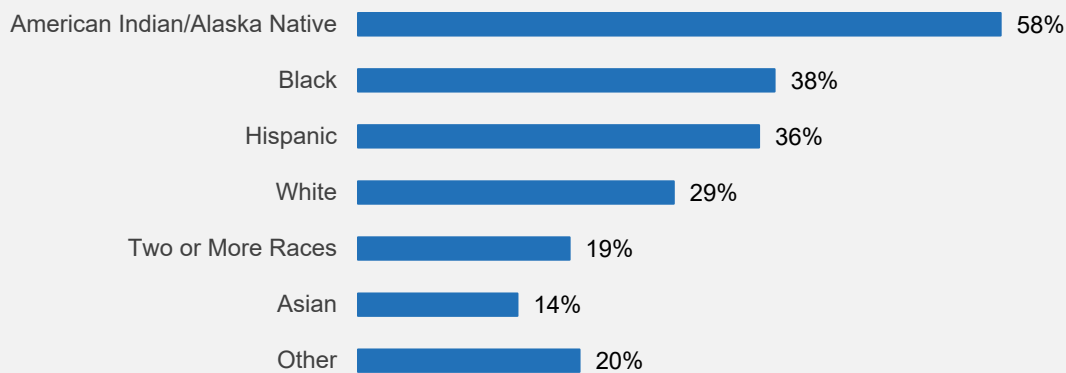
Obesity

Obesity has been a concern in the US due to associated health outcomes, such as higher risks for diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.⁷⁷ Diabetes has also been associated with many negative health complications such as blindness, kidney failure, and amputation of limbs.⁷⁸

According to the College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), people who are obese during pregnancy are at higher risk of developing gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and sleep apnea.⁷⁹

According to the CDC, diabetes and obesity can be largely prevented by increasing physical activity and maintaining a healthy diet.⁸⁰ HP 2030 aims to reduce the proportion of adults who are obese to 36% and the proportion of children and adolescents who are obese to 15.5%.⁸¹ In Arizona overall, the percentage of adults with obesity was 31% in 2019, and Exhibit 5.14 shows the differences across racial and ethnic groups. Among racial and ethnic groups, American Indians and Alaska Natives adults have the highest rates of obesity (58%) followed by Black adults (38%) and Hispanic adults (36%).

Exhibit 5.14. Percentage of adults with obesity in Arizona by race/ethnicity, 2019



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). *Obesity*.

In the Southwest Maricopa Region, and the state as a whole, over 60% of parents participating in The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) reported being overweight or obese pre-pregnancy in 2020 (Exhibit 5.15). The rate of people being overweight or obese pre-pregnancy has remained consistent from 2017 to 2020. Families participating in WIC are likely opting for less expensive food options which often tend to be less healthy as well. Furthermore, there are very few recreation and fitness facilities where residents of Southwest Maricopa Region can

⁷⁷ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Adult Obesity Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

⁷⁸ Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (n.d.). *Diabetes At A Glance Reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/diabetes.htm>

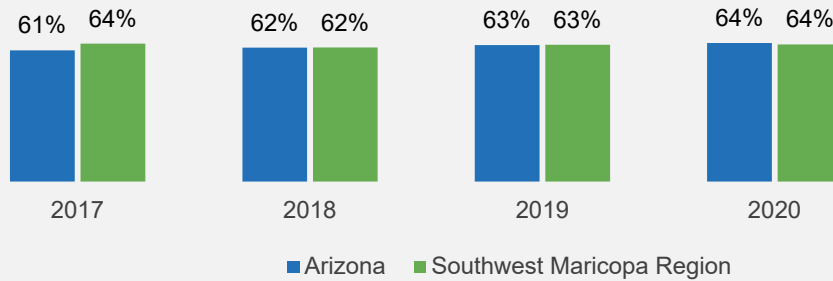
⁷⁹ ACOG (2016). *Obesity and Pregnancy*. Retrieved from <http://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Obesity-and-Pregnancy>

⁸⁰ Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (n.d.). *Diabetes At A Glance Reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/diabetes.htm>

⁸¹ Healthy People 2030. *About Health People* Retrieved from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/overweight-and-obesity/reduce-proportion-adults-obesity-nws-03>

stay active.⁸² The combination of having only a few grocery stores and places where residents can engage in physical activity may contribute to the increasing rate of obesity and diabetes in Maricopa County.

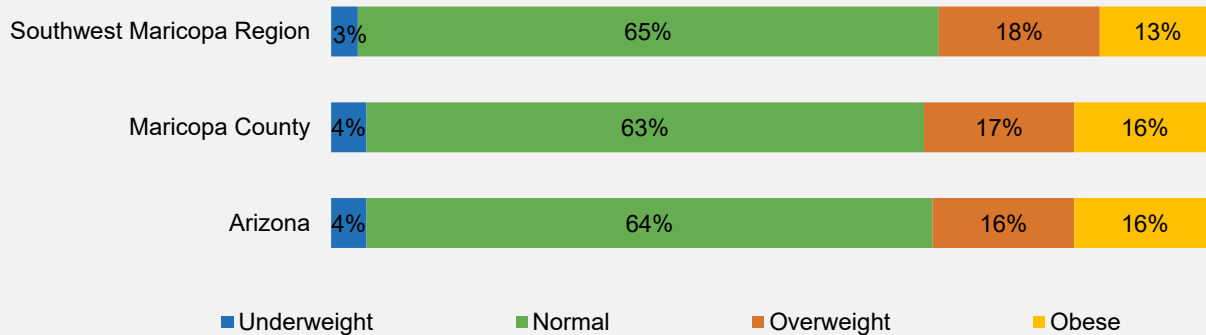
Exhibit 5.15. Percentage of people overweight and obese pre-pregnancy



Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF.

Compared to the proportion of people participating in WIC reported being overweight or obese pre-pregnancy, children ages 2 to 5 participating in WIC were less likely be obese. In the Southwest Maricopa Region, the percentage of children participating in WIC that were overweight or obese was 31% in 2020. This proportion was slightly lower than Maricopa County (33%) and Arizona (32%). Across the region, state and county, about six of ten children are considered to be normal weight (Exhibit 5.16).

Exhibit 5.16. WIC children's weight status (ages 2 to 5), 2020



Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF.

⁸² United States Department of Agriculture and Economic Research Service (2012). Food Environment Atlas.

Over time from 2017 to 2018, the proportion of children with obesity increased between 2017 and 2020, increasing from 28% in 2017 to 31% in 2020. This pattern is also similar throughout the county and state (Exhibit 5.17).

Exhibit 5.17. WIC children's obesity rates (ages 2 to 5), 2017 to 2020

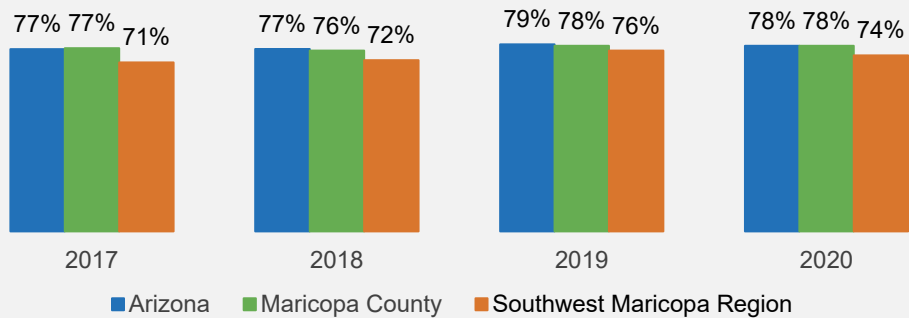
	Childhood rate, 2017	Childhood rate, 2018	Childhood rate, 2019	Childhood rate, 2020	Percentage change from 2017 to 2020
Southwest Maricopa Region	28%	29%	30%	31%	+3%
Maricopa County	30%	31%	31%	33%	+3%
ARIZONA	30%	30%	31%	32%	+2%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF.

Engaging in Healthy Preventive Practices

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that people breastfeed for the first six months after giving birth.⁸³ Breast milk has antibodies that decrease the likelihood of babies from getting ill and babies becoming obese.⁸⁴ In the Southwest Maricopa Region, the percentage of people participating in WIC who ever breastfed their infant on average at least once per day increased from 2017 to 2020 by three percent (71% to 74%). In 2020, this percentage was four percent lower than the state (Exhibit 5.18).

Exhibit 5.18. Percentage of people who ever breastfed their infant



Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF

*Breastfeeding is defined as the practice of feeding a person's breast milk to their infant(s) on the average of at least once a day

Vaccinations can protect children from measles, mumps, and whooping cough, which are all severe illnesses currently present and potentially fatal to young children.⁸⁵ Receiving timely vaccinations is not

⁸³ American Academy of Pediatrics (2012). Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/3/e827.full#content-block>

⁸⁴ Office on Women's Health (2014). Why breastfeeding is important. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-benefits.html>

⁸⁵ Basic Vaccines (2016). Importance of Vaccines. Retrieved from <http://www.vaccineinformation.org/vaccines-save-lives/>

only a protective factor to oneself, but to the community’s immunity.⁸⁶ In the Southwest Maricopa Region, the percentage of children in child care who were exempt from immunizations for religious reasons was consistent the state (Exhibit 5.19). Compared to the state, the region has a slightly higher percentage of children who received Hib, DTaP, MMR, Hep B, Polio, and Varicella vaccines (Exhibits 5.19 and Exhibit 5.20). The number of infectious disease cases per year for children less than five years of age in Maricopa County has increased from 5,585 cases in 2018 to 6,991 cases in 2020.⁸⁷

Exhibit 5.19. Vaccination rates and exemption rates for children in childcare

	Students enrolled	Four or more DTAP	Three or more Polio	Two or more MMR	Three or more HIB	Two Hep A	Three or more Hep B	One or more Varicella	Religious exemption	Medical exemption
Southwest Maricopa Region	3,074	92%	94%	94%	94%	88%	94%	94%	5%	0.1%
Maricopa County	57,253	91%	92%	92%	93%	87%	92%	92%	6%	0.5%
ARIZONA	85,805	92%	93%	93%	93%	85%	92%	93%	5%	0.4%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Immunization Data Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 5.20. Vaccination rates and exemption rates for children in kindergarten

	Students enrolled	Four or more DTAP	DTAP Exempt	Three or more Polio	Polio Exempt	Two or more MMR	MMR Exempt	Three or more Hep B	Hep B Exempt	One or more Varicella	Varicella Exempt
Southwest Maricopa Region	4,898	94%	4%	94%	4%	94%	4%	95%	4%	97%	3%
Maricopa County	54,687	93%	5%	93%	5%	93%	5%	94%	5%	95%	4%
ARIZONA	330,412	93%	5%	94%	5%	93%	5%	95%	4%	96%	4%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Immunization Data Reports. Provided by AZ FTF.

⁸⁶ U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2016). Community Immunity. Retrieved from http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/immunization/vaccine_safety/

⁸⁷ Arizona Department of Health Services (2020)

CHILD HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS

The diversity of the Southwest Maricopa Region presents both assets and challenges for supporting the health of pregnant women, young children, and their families. The percentage of young children without health insurance is similar to the state and county, though variable by area. Additionally, most people who gave birth received prenatal care and many begun their care in the first trimester. However, the region, just like the state and county has an increasing percentage of children that are overweight or obese.

Below are key data trends that highlight the health assets, needs, and data-driven considerations for the region. The considerations provided below do not represent comprehensive approaches and methods for tackling the needs and assets in the region. Instead, the considerations represent possible approaches that early childhood system partners, including FTF, could take to address needs and assets in the region, as conceptualized by the authors of this report.

Assets	Considerations
The percentage of people participating in WIC who ever breastfeed their child has been increasing and reached 74% in 2020.	Continue to provide public education about the benefits of breastfeeding and consider supporting workplace efforts to encourage breastfeeding practices for working parents.
According to the Arizona Department of Health Services, 79% of people giving birth received at least nine prenatal care visits in the Southwest Maricopa Region.	Promote the importance of early prenatal care and provide education on the impact of prenatal care on the parent and child's future well-being.

Needs	Considerations
The percentage of children (ages 2 to 5) that are enrolled in WIC are overweight or obese has increased from 2017(28%) to 2020 (31%).	Address root causes of obesity in low-income communities by pursuing improved neighborhood safety, opportunities for outdoor activity, and better access to low-cost healthy food options. Seek ideas from and partnership with community members to create culturally meaningful, lasting change.
In the Southwest Maricopa Region about one of ten (10%) of individuals do not have health insurance and seven percent of children between the ages of 0 to 5 do not have health insurance. Sub-regions with high rates of no health insurance include Arlington (22% for all ages and 11% for children 0-5) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (17% for all ages and 15% for children 0-5).	Provide low-income families information with multi-lingual information and support in enrolling in Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System.



FAMILY SUPPORT

FAMILY SUPPORT

Why it Matters

The first five years of life have a significant impact on children’s intellectual, social, and emotional development, and research shows that parents have a profound impact on their child’s development during this time.⁸⁸ Support for young families is an essential piece of the holistic efforts around kindergarten readiness and long-term success for children. First Things First supports families through home visitation and parent outreach and education programs. Evidence-based Parenting Education and supports to improve parenting practices can reduce stressors and lead to enriched child development and reduction of removals of children from their homes.

Given the importance of the first years of life on children’s development and the role that parents can play, it is crucial for parents to receive support and access to programs that provide tools and knowledge about their child’s needs and effective parenting techniques. Providing more knowledge about parenting and child development supports parents in improving their parenting practices and providing their children with the experiences they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.⁸⁹ Public assistance programs in the United States can play an important role in providing adequate socioeconomic conditions for families to raise their children. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been associated with helping families move out of poverty, guarantee food security, and improve child health and school performance.⁹⁰ Research has also shown that the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) could prevent child maltreatment due to increased cash benefits and access that have been associated with decreased physical abuse.⁹¹ The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has reduced the prevalence of child food insecurity. Further, the revisions made to the WIC food package in October 2009 have been associated with reduced maternal preeclampsia and gestational weight gain, as well as improvements in infant gestational age and birth weight.^{92, 93}

⁸⁸ Center for the Study of Social Policy (2013). *Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development*. Retrieved from http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/SF_Knowledge-of-Parenting-and-Child-Development.pdf

⁸⁹ Center for the Study of Social Policy (2013). *Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development*. Retrieved from http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/SF_Knowledge-of-Parenting-and-Child-Development.pdf

⁹⁰ Carlson, S., Rosenbaum, D., Keith-Jennings, B., Nchako, C. (2016) *SNAP works for America’s Children*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/9-29-16fa.pdf>

⁹¹ Spencer, R., Livingston, M., Komro, K., Sroczynski, N., Rentmeester, S., Woods-Jaeger, B. (2021) *Association between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child maltreatment among a cohort of fragile families*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Volume 120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105186>

⁹² Kreider, B., Pepper, J., Roy, M. (2016) *Identifying the effects of WIC on food insecurity among infants and children*. *Southern Economic Association*. Volume 82 Issue 4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/soej.12078>

⁹³ Hamad, R., Collin, D., Baer, R., Jelliffe-Pawlowski, L. (2019) *Association of revised WIC food package with perinatal and birth outcomes*. <https://jamaneetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2737097>

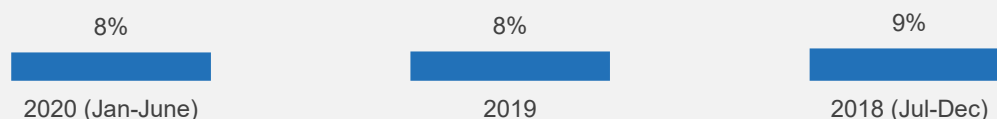
Promoting a safe home environment for children is another key aspect of family support. The adverse and long-term effects of childhood trauma have become well-documented. For example, children who are exposed to domestic violence or experience abuse or neglect are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, physical aggression, and behavior problems.⁹⁴ Children who are exposed to opioid misuse are more likely to experience mental health problems, drug use, accidental opioid poisoning, substance use disorder, family dissolution, foster care placement or the death of a parent due to an opioid overdose.⁹⁵ Children in foster care are particularly likely to have had trauma exposure and are more likely than other children to have poor mental and physical health.^{96, 97} Understanding the impact of trauma has led to identifying opportunities to both prevent and mitigate its adverse effects. Opportunities include family support services like home visitation and parent education, as well as prioritizing out-of-home placements with family members or foster families before turning to congregate care in a residential facility.

What the Data Tell Us

Child Safety and Domestic Violence

Understanding the scope of child removals in a region can help policy makers and organizations better support this vulnerable group. The percentage of child removals in Southwest Maricopa Region by the Department of Child Safety (DCS) remained steady from 2018 to 2020 (Exhibit 6.1). These percentages represent the percentage of children removed from their homes in Arizona that were from the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Exhibit 6.1. Percentage of children removed in Arizona by the Department of Child Safety that resided in Southwest Maricopa Region



Source: Arizona Department of Child Safety. (2019). *Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report*.

⁹⁴ Evans, S. E., Davies, C., & DiLillo, D. (2008). Exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis of child and adolescent outcomes. *Aggression and violent behavior, 13*(2), 131-140.

⁹⁵ Winstanley, E., Stover, A. (2019) *The impact of the opioid epidemic on children and adolescents. Clinical Therapeutics. Volume 41 Issue 9.* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clinthera.2019.06.003>

⁹⁶ Dorsey S, Burns BJ, Southerland DG, Cox JR, Wagner HR, Farmer EM. Prior Trauma Exposure for Youth in Treatment Foster Care. *J Child Fam Stud.* 2012 Oct;21(5):816-824. doi: 10.1007/s10826-011-9542-4. PMID: 23730144; PMCID: PMC3667554

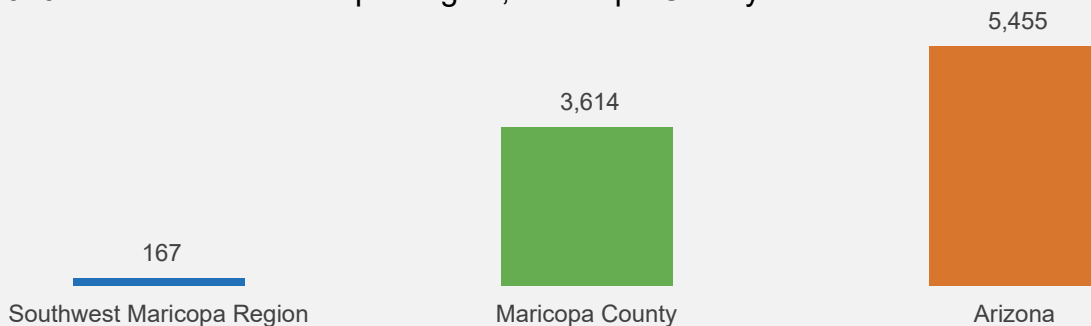
⁹⁷ Turney K, Wildeman C. Mental and Physical Health of Children in Foster Care. *Pediatrics.* 2016 Nov;138(5):e20161118. doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-1118. Epub 2016 Oct 17. PMID: 27940775

Substance Use

As of 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency to address the national opioid crisis.⁹⁸ While substance abuse is risky for users themselves, parents who misuse substances also expose their children to risks. Specifically, when parents use opiates or opioids, they are more likely to expose their children to maltreatment and neglect.⁹⁹ Children in these situations are more likely to suffer later mental health disorders, their own substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁰⁰

From 2017 to 2020, the number of fatal opioid deaths in the Southwest Maricopa Region was 167, which consisted of three percent of the total deaths in Arizona (Exhibit 6.2).

Exhibit 6.2. Number of fatal overdoses from opiates or opioids from 2017 to 2020 in Southwest Maricopa Region, Maricopa County and Arizona



Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). *Opioids Overdoses*. Provided by AZ FTF

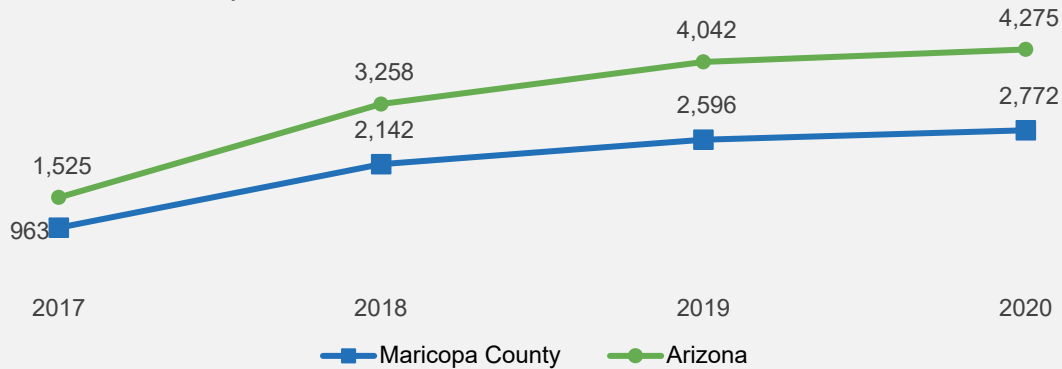
⁹⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017) *HHS Acting Secretary Declares Public Health Emergency to Address National Opioid Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://public3.pagefreezer.com/browse/HHS.gov/31-12-2020T08:51/https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2017/10/26/hhs-acting-secretary-declares-public-health-emergency-address-national-opioid-crisis.html>

⁹⁹ Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.) *The Opioid Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/bhw/impact-substance/opioid-crisis/>

¹⁰⁰ American Society for the Positive Care of Children (n.d.) *The Opioid Crisis and the Effect on Children*. Retrieved from <https://americanspcc.org/the-opioid-crisis-and-the-effect-on-children/>

In Maricopa County and Arizona, the number of non-fatal overdoses from opiates or opioids increased from 2017 to 2020 (Exhibit 6.3). In Maricopa County, the number of non-fatal overdoses has drastically increased by 187% from 963 in 2017 to 2,772 in 2020. This trend was similar in Arizona with a 180% increase of non-fatal overdoses from 2017 to 2020.

Exhibit 6.3. Number of non-fatal overdoses from opiates or opioids from 2017 to 2020 in Maricopa and Arizona



Arizona Department of Health Services (2021). Opioids Overdoses. Provided by AZ FTF

Services to Help Families

Numerous federal and local programs and services aim to provide families with food security, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Program (SFP), and free and reduced priced lunch programs for children in schools.

Despite the prevalence of these programs, in recent years the number of children and families receiving assistance has decreased. Federal programs such as SNAP and TANF have decreased from 2017 to 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Exhibit 6.4 and Exhibit 6.5 show how the number of children and families receiving assistance has decreased in recent years.

For SNAP benefits, the percentage that families and children that received benefits decreased by nine percent in Southwest Maricopa Region from 2017 to 2020. As of 2020, the program supports approximately 11,000 children and 7,000 families annually in the Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 6.4 and Exhibit 6.5).

Exhibit 6.4. Numbers of young children (ages 0 to 5) receiving SNAP benefits, 2017 to 2020

	FY 2017	F7 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Change from 2017 to 2020
Southwest Maricopa Region	11,793	11,176	10,744	10,696	-9%
Maricopa County	142,724	131,473	120,427	113,174	-21%
ARIZONA	247,414	229,275	211,814	198,961	-20%

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

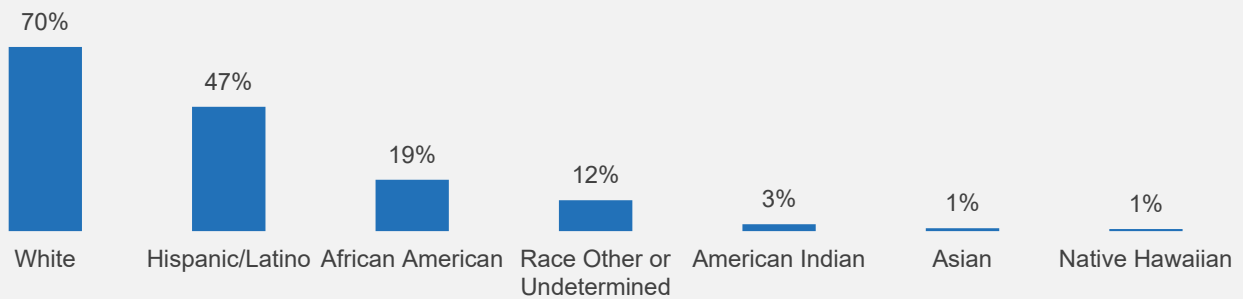
Exhibit 6.5. Numbers of families receiving SNAP benefits, 2017 to 2020

	FY 2017	F7 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Change from 2017 to 2020
Southwest Maricopa Region	7,746	7,367	7,081	7,045	-9%
Maricopa County	93,992	86,352	78,980	74,572	-21%
ARIZONA	164,092	151,816	140,056	132,466	-19%

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

In 2020, most of the young children enrolled in SNAP were white (70%), almost half were Hispanic/Latino (47%), and about one of five were African American (19%) (Exhibit 6.6).¹⁰¹

Exhibit 6.6. Young children (0-5) enrolled in SNAP in 2020 by race/ethnicity in Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Similar to the SNAP benefits, the number of children and families receiving TANF benefits decreased from 2017 to 2020 in Southwest Maricopa, Maricopa County and Arizona. In 2020, approximately 550 families and 800 young children received TANF benefits (Exhibits 6.7 and 6.8). TANF benefits are typically the primary cash assistance program for families with low incomes.¹⁰² Some research has

¹⁰¹ Respondents were allowed to select more than one response; thus, the total is more than 100%.

¹⁰² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (n.d.) Office of Family Assistance. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/temporary-assistance-needy-families-tanf>

criticized that TANF does a poor job in providing enough assistance to Hispanic/Latino and African American families, especially those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰³

Exhibit 6.7. Numbers of families receiving TANF benefits, 2017 to 2020

	FY 2017	F7 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Change from 2017 to 2020
Southwest Maricopa Region	609	533	539	540	-11%
Maricopa County	6,873	5,745	5,063	5,300	-23%
ARIZONA	12,315	10,538	9,360	9,947	-19%

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

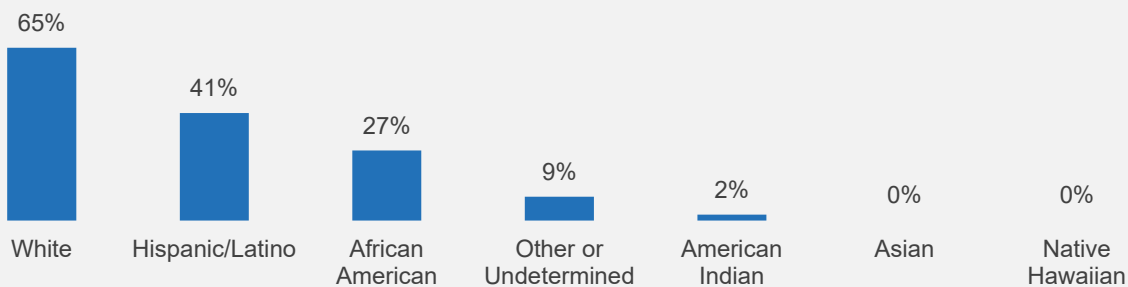
Exhibit 6.8. Numbers of young children (ages 0 to 5) receiving TANF benefits, 2017 to 2020

	FY 2017	F7 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Change from 2017 to 2020
Southwest Maricopa Region	879	755	756	776	-12%
Maricopa County	9,696	8,017	7,103	7,452	-23%
ARIZONA	17,143	14,659	13,029	13,747	-20%

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

In the Southwest Maricopa Region in 2020, most of the children that received TANF benefits identified as white (65%) or Hispanic/Latino (41%) and about one quarter were African American (27%) (Exhibit 6.9).¹⁰⁴

Exhibit 6.9. Young children (0-5) enrolled in TANF in 2020 by race/ethnicity in Southwest Maricopa Region



Arizona Department of Economic Security (2020). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

¹⁰³ Safawi, A., Reyes, C., (2021) States must continue recent momentum to further improve TANF benefit levels. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-benefits-still-too-low-to-help-families-especially-black>

¹⁰⁴ Respondents were allowed to select more than one response; thus, the total is more than 100%.

Due to mandatory school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Arizona Department of Economic Security, the US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, and the Arizona Department of Education issued the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program to current SNAP households and non-SNAP households with children eligible for free and reduced price school meals.¹⁰⁵ Enrolled families were given a pre-loaded EBT card to purchase groceries. The number of families with children 0 to 5 years old that were enrolled in P-EBT from March 2021 to May 2021 decreased by about 18 to 19% across the Southwest Maricopa Region, Maricopa County and Arizona. Although the number of families with young children who received the benefits have decreased, in May 2021, within the Southwest Maricopa Region, P-EBT provided financial relief to 1,864 families (Exhibit 6.10). Families with young children consisted of eight percent of the families enrolled in P-EBT from March to May 2021.

Exhibit 6.10. Number of families with children 0-5 enrolled in P-EBT, March 2021 to May 2021

	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021	Change from March 2021 to May 2021
Southwest Maricopa Region	2,280	2,072	1,864	-18%
Maricopa County	23,577	21,438	19,422	-18%
Arizona	36,971	33,431	30,066	-19%

Arizona Department of Economic Security (2021). EBT Enrollment.

¹⁰⁵ Arizona Department of Economic Security (n.d.) Arizona P-EBT Benefits. Retrieved from <https://des.az.gov/services/basic-needs/food-assistance/other-food-programs/arizona-p-ebt-benefits>

Through federal grants, WIC provides nutrition, education and breastfeeding support services, supplemental nutritious foods and referrals to health and social services for women, infants, and children under five years old. In 2020, within the Southwest Maricopa Region, WIC served a total of 17,412 women (n=4,224), infants (n=4,841), and children (n=8,347). Within the Southwest Maricopa Region, many of the WIC enrollees resided in Avondale, Buckeye or Tolleson sub-regions (Exhibit 6.11).

Exhibit 6.11. Number of women, infants and children enrolled in the WIC program during 2020

	Total	Women	Infants	Children
Southwest Maricopa Region	17,412	4,224	4,841	8,347
Arlington	52	13	13	26
Avondale	5,437	1,351	1,514	2,572
Buckeye	4,846	1,125	1,307	2,414
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	282	67	80	135
Goodyear	2,474	605	685	1,184
Litchfield Park	848	203	247	398
Tolleson	3,035	757	882	1,396
Tonopah-Wintersburg	400	93	102	205
Maricopa County	155,754	38,545	43,050	74,159
ARIZONA	256,733	63,111	70,242	123,380

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF

The WIC enrollment for children under 5 years old slightly decreased from 2017 (49% of children under five) to 2020 (46% of children five) in Southwest Maricopa Region (Exhibit 6.12).

Exhibit 6.12. Infants and children (ages 0 to 4) enrolled in the WIC program as a percentage of the population, 2017 to 2020

	Number of children (ages 0-4) in the 2010 US Census	Number and percentage of children (0 to 4) enrolled, 2017		Number and percentage of children (0 to 4) enrolled, 2018		Number and percentage of children (0 to 4) enrolled, 2019		Number and percentage of children (0 to 4) enrolled, 2020	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Southwest Maricopa Region	28,512	13,854	49%	13,489	47%	13,252	46%	13,188	46%
Maricopa County	339,217	137,050	40%	130,101	38%	122,607	36%	117,209	36%
ARIZONA	546,609	221,387	41%	211,732	39%	201,644	37%	193,622	37%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF.

Exhibit 6.13 provides a single month snapshot of participation in the program in November 2020; 89% of women, 93% of infants, and 87% of children who were enrolled in WIC in the region claimed their benefits in the month of November. There were some differences by sub-region on which sub-regions claimed their benefits: the highest rates of participation included those enrolled in Arlington (94%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (93%) and lowest in Tonopah-Wintersburg (81%). Those who are enrolled in WIC may not participate due to logistical barriers, such as job conflicts, lack of transportation, not enough time to wait at WIC appointments, and lack of child care.¹⁰⁶ Maricopa County WIC streamlined their services with an electronic portal where participants can make appointments and view their benefits to help enrolled participants claim their benefits.¹⁰⁷ This system may explain the high participation rate within Maricopa County and the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Exhibit 6.13. WIC participation rates by enrollees during November 2020

	Total	Women	Infants	Children
Southwest Maricopa Region	89%	89%	93%	87%
Arlington	94%	100%	100%	89%
Avondale	89%	90%	93%	87%
Buckeye	90%	90%	94%	89%
Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel	93%	92%	97%	92%
Goodyear	86%	85%	89%	85%
Litchfield Park	87%	88%	92%	84%
Tolleson	88%	89%	93%	85%
Tonopah-Wintersburg	81%	78%	81%	82%
Maricopa County	89%	89%	93%	88%
ARIZONA	89%	89%	93%	88%

Arizona Department of Health Services (2020). Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Provided by AZ FTF.

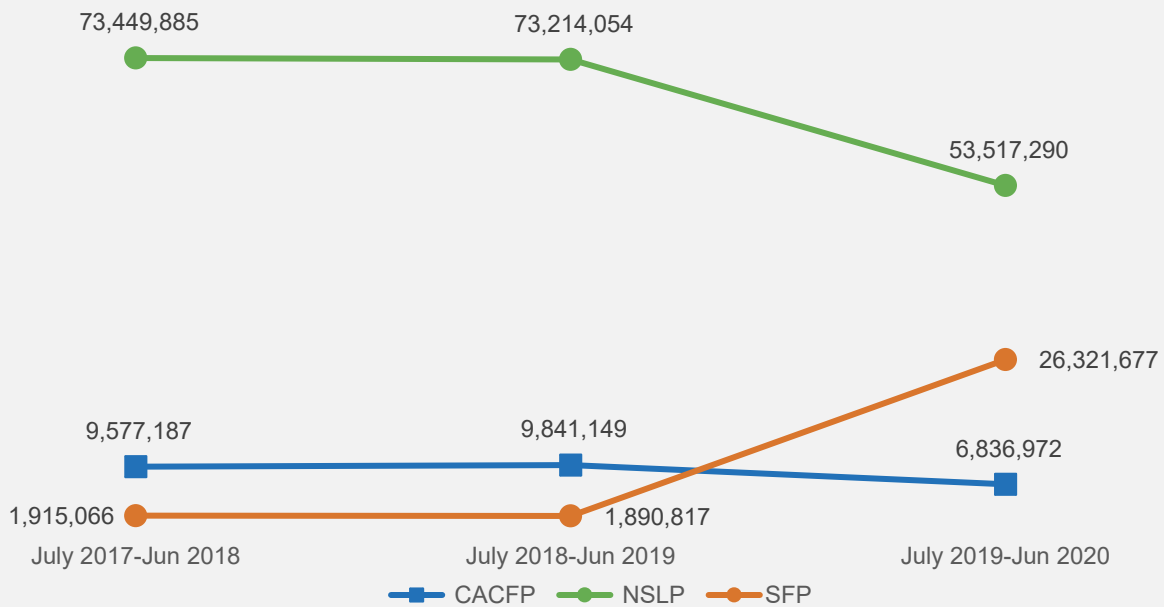
Note: The participation rate is the number of persons receiving WIC benefits during November 2020, divided by the total number of persons enrolled in the program.

¹⁰⁶ Whaley, S. E., Martinez, C. E., Paolicelli, C., Ritchie, L. D., & Weinfeld, N. S. (2020). Predictors of WIC participation through 2 years of age. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 52(7), 672-679.

¹⁰⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2021). *WIC Case Study: Maricopa County, Arizona*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/8-30-19fa-casestudies-maricopa-county.pdf>

Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Summer Food Program (SFP), and free and reduced priced lunch programs for children in schools are able to provide needy families assistance. Despite the prevalence of these programs, from June 2018 to June 2020, the number of children and families receiving assistance has decreased for CACFP and NSLP but increased dramatically for SFP (Exhibit 6.14).

Exhibit 6.14. Number of free meals provided by CACFP, NSLP and SFP to children and adults in Maricopa County



Arizona Department of Education (2020). Child and Adult Care Food Program. Provided by AZ FTF.
 Arizona Department of Education (2020). National School Lunch Program. Provided by AZ FTF.
 Arizona Department of Education (2020). Summer Food Program. Provided by

Schools are an important part of the nutrition assistance system, especially for children experiencing food insecurity. Almost 60% of all public- and charter-school students in the Southwest Maricopa Region have been eligible for free or reduced-price lunch since 2018 (Exhibit 6.15). This is comparable to the statewide percentage, which has hovered around 55% to 57%. Over the last three years, the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch has stayed fairly constant in most school districts in the region, although the percentage has increased noticeably in the Pendergast Elementary District (from 53% in 2018 to 64% in 2020). The school districts in the region with the lowest rates of eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch in 2020 are Litchfield (27%) and Wickenburg (31%), while Pensar Academy (93%) and Tolleson Elementary District (86%) had the highest rates of eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. (Note that the data in Exhibit 6.15 refer only to schools located inside the Southwest Maricopa Region boundaries).

Exhibit 6.15. Proportion of students (pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade) eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2018 to 2020

	2018	2019	2020
Southwest Maricopa Region Schools	57%	56%	55%
Agua Fria Union High School District	38%	36%	34%
American Charter Schools Foundation d.b.a. Estrella High School	73%	56%	71%
Arlington Elementary District	78%	81%	74%
Avondale Elementary District	68%	66%	68%
Buckeye Elementary District	66%	65%	65%
Buckeye Union High School District	49%	50%	47%
Gila Bend Unified District	75%	75%	75%
Imagine Avondale Elementary, Inc.	68%	69%	69%
Imagine Avondale Middle, Inc.	74%	66%	66%
Incito Schools	50%	39%	58%
Kaizen Education Foundation dba Skyview High School	73%	41%	60%
Legacy Traditional School - Avondale	N/A	N/A	37%
Legacy Traditional School - Goodyear	N/A	N/A	46%
Liberty Elementary District	46%	44%	42%
Litchfield Elementary District	28%	26%	27%
Littleton Elementary District	80%	80%	78%
Mobile Elementary District	85%	80%	78%
P.L.C. Charter Schools	83%	83%	71%
Palo Verde Elementary District	78%	73%	72%
Paloma School District	83%	83%	83%
Pendergast Elementary District	53%	61%	64%
Pensar Academy	98%	>98%	93%
Saddle Mountain Unified School District	70%	63%	63%
Sentinel Elementary District	74%	74%	74%
Tolleson Elementary District	89%	86%	86%
Tolleson Union High School District	65%	64%	62%
Union Elementary District	84%	84%	63%
Wickenburg Unified District	34%	29%	31%
Maricopa County Schools	54%	53%	51%
All Arizona Schools	57%	56%	55%

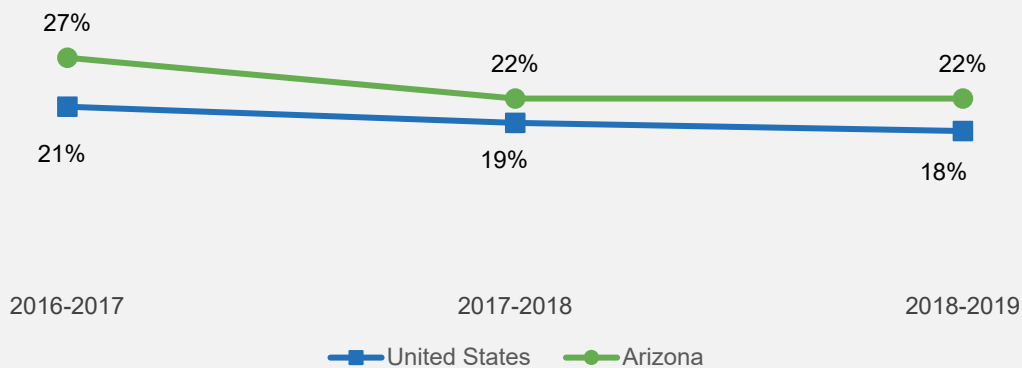
Arizona Department of Education (2020). [Free and reduced lunch dataset]. Unpublished data.

Note: The school-district data in this table include only the schools that are located within the Southwest Maricopa Region.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Unfortunately, not all children are able to begin their lives in positive, stable, nurturing environments. Experiences early in life can have lasting impacts on an individual's mental and physical health. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events (such as physical or emotional abuse, alcohol and/or drug abuse in the household or emotional or physical neglect) that occurs during childhood (0-17 years old).¹⁰⁸ When one experiences more ACEs during their childhood then they are more at-risk for future risky health behaviors (such as smoking, drug use, and alcoholism), chronic health conditions (including diabetes, depression, and obesity), poorer life outcomes (such as lower educational achievement and increased lost work time), and early death.¹⁰⁹ In 2018 to 2019, children (0 to 17 years old) in Arizona were more likely to have experienced two or more ACEs (22%) than children nationwide (18%). As shown in Exhibit 6.16, this trend was consistent since 2016. To help decrease ACEs in Arizona, the Arizona ACE Consortium has been working with professionals and agencies to increase awareness around the causes, effects and opportunities around decreasing ACEs in Arizona.

Exhibit 6.16. Percent of children (0-17 years old) with 2 or more ACEs



Trend: Percent of children with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by total: State Health Access Data Assistance Center. Trend | Percent of children with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by Total | State Health Access Data Assistance Center. (n.d.).

¹⁰⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, April 6). *Fast facts: Preventing adverse childhood experiences | violence prevention | injury Center | CDC. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facesstudy%2Ffastfact.html*

¹⁰⁹ *Overcoming adverse childhood experiences - azaces.org. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://azaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACEs.pdf>*

FAMILY SUPPORT HIGHLIGHTS

In the Southwest Maricopa Region there is opportunity to strengthen parental knowledge about child development and engaging in positive parenting practices. With regard to opioid overdoses, in Southwest Maricopa Region, there were 167 fatal overdoses from opiates and opioids from 2017 to 2020 and the percentage of non-fatal overdoses in Maricopa County increased to 187% from 2017 to 2020. The number of families and young children receiving federal program assistance, such as SNAP, WIC and TANF, decreased from 2017 to 2020.

Below are some data trends that highlight the family support related assets, needs, and data-driven considerations for the region.

Assets	Considerations
About 90% of women, infants, and children enrolled in WIC claimed their benefits.	Continue to support women, infants and children to participate in WIC and claim their benefits, including through an ongoing effort to streamline the participation process and reduce burdens on enrollees.

Needs	Considerations
Despite the need of federal program assistance, enrollment in SNAP, WIC, and TANF has decreased.	Encourage grantmaking partners and stakeholders to promote federal program assistance for low-income families. Work with partners to streamline the participation process and reduce logistical burdens on participants.

CONCLUSION

The Southwest Maricopa Region has both strengths and opportunities for improvement. The region has higher employment, median income and economic resources than other parts of the state and county. Parents in the region are educated but may benefit from more information and awareness of age-appropriate child development and the impact they have on their child’s readiness to learn and grow.

The region has many strong providers who are continuing to build a more efficient system of care dedicated to the well-being of the region’s youngest children and their families, yet could use support to overcome barriers like limited funding and competition for resources. First Things First is a great asset in the region as they play a large role in funding and supporting the area’s early childhood system. The following tables include the assets, needs and considerations from the eight domains presented in this report. These key findings are intended to provide information to the Southwest Maricopa Regional Partnership Council and the community as a whole around the needs and assets of the region’s zero to five population and their families.

Assets	Considerations
Population Characteristics	
The data from 2018 shows that by 2050 the population of children under the age of six is projected to grow at a steady rate. The region may foresee and need to prepare for the growing demands of their youngest residents.	Discuss tactics for planning ahead for the projected slow, but steady, growth of the under six population and the needs that accompany that growth, such as healthcare and childcare needs for young children.
Thirty-two percent of Southwest Maricopa residents speak a language other than English, and twenty-eight percent of residents speak Spanish. Over 20% of Southwest Maricopa residents speak another language at home and speak English "very well."	Provide materials and information in multiple languages, especially in Spanish, to account for residents that speak languages other than English.
Economic Circumstances	
The Southwest Maricopa Region has lower poverty rates than for the state as a whole (14% vs 23% for young children, and 11% vs 15% for all ages). The percentage of young children living in poverty in the Southwest Maricopa Region has decreased since the 2018 RNA (19%).	Encourage community awareness of social service resources in the region, especially in the Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-regions. Research best practices among successful anti-poverty programs and efforts.
Nearly all children (93%) under six years old live in a household where at least one adult is in the labor force.	Consider encouraging stakeholders to target job training and employment programs to the subregions with higher need to help increase employment and median incomes.
Education	
In 2018 to 2019, about nine of ten high school students graduated within four-years in the region. This was higher than Maricopa County and Arizona.	Increase awareness for parents to support each other and share knowledge and attitudes around the importance of education.
Early Learning	

Quality First has been increasing the quality of child care programs in the region. Of the children enrolled in a Quality First site, 75% are enrolled in a three, four or five star center or home.	Support Quality First efforts in the region to increase the opportunities for children to receive quality early care and education experiences.
Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) was able to continue to provide necessary services for 115 children ages zero to five within the Southwest Maricopa Region.	Continue to support young children with developmental delays.
Child Health	
The percentage of people participating in WIC who ever breastfeed their child has been increasing and reached 74% in 2020.	Continue to provide public education about the benefits of breastfeeding and consider supporting workplace efforts to encourage breastfeeding practices for working parents.
According to the Arizona Department of Health Services, 79% of people giving birth received at least nine prenatal care visits in the Southwest Maricopa Region.	Promote the importance of early prenatal care and provide education on the impact of prenatal care on the parent and child's future well-being.
Family Support	
About 90% of women, infants, and children enrolled in WIC claimed their benefits.	Continue to support women, infants and children to participate in WIC and claim their benefits, including through an ongoing effort to streamline the participation process and reduce burdens on enrollees.

Needs	Considerations
Population Characteristics	
In the Southwest Maricopa Region, 13% of children under 18 years are living in a grandparent's household and the grandparent is responsible for the child (with no parent present). Higher percentages of children living with grandparents with no parent present occur in the Arlington (100%), Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (38%), and Tonopah-Wintersburg (33%) sub-regions.	Enhance support services, such as financial support and access to food, specifically designed for grandparents raising grandchildren and targeted in the Arlington, Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel and Tonopah-Wintersburg sub-regions, to help them support the young children in their homes.
Economic Circumstances	
Though the Southwest Maricopa Region has lower poverty rates than the state as a whole, there are higher rates of poverty in the Arlington (49% for young children and 21% for all ages) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (45% for young children and 42% for all ages) sub-regions.	Encourage community awareness of social service resources in the region, especially in the Arlington and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel sub-regions.
Although nine of ten of children (0-17) in households have at least one computer with internet, less than two-thirds of children in Arlington (41%) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel have computer(s) and internet.	Partner with local agencies, businesses and stakeholders that could support in technological needs for low-income families. For example, Cox has a package, Connect2Complete, that provides low-cost internet for families with K to 12 students.
Education	
The 2021 AzM2 assessments show that more than half of third graders in Maricopa County are not meeting proficiency standards for English Language Arts (37%) and Math (38%).	Increase parent outreach and awareness of early education programs to support learning and school readiness from an early age.
According to the American Community Survey, 39% of preschool-aged children in the Southwest Maricopa Region are enrolled in school, compared to 65% statewide and 55% in Maricopa County. Less than	Promote the importance of high-quality early education among community members by sharing the benefits of these programs. Advocate for public investments in early education in sub-regions, such as Arlington and Tolleson, with low numbers

30% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in school in the Arlington (0%) and Tolleson (28%) sub-regions.	of children enrolled in school.
Early Learning	
The data shows that childcare cost is higher in Southwest Maricopa Region than in the county or state.	Increase the availability of different resources to help families afford childcare. This can include spreading awareness about the availability of scholarships and subsidies for child care, especially for low-income families.
In some sub-regions, such as Arlington, Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel, and Tonopah-Wintersburg, there are less than five Early Care and Education centers and homes in the area.	Provide early learning resources to parents/guardians in areas with less Early Care and Education centers and home to help young children.
Among the children with special needs in the Southwest Maricopa Region, more children in the region have a developmental delay (49%) compared to the state (43%) or in the county (45%).	Consider investing in support services for families with young children who have special needs.
Child Health	
The percentage of children (ages 2 to 5) that are enrolled in WIC are overweight or obese has increased from 2017(28%) to 2020 (31%).	Address root causes of obesity in low-income communities by pursuing improved neighborhood safety, opportunities for outdoor activity, and better access to low-cost healthy food options. Seek ideas from and partnership with community members to create culturally meaningful, lasting change.
In the Southwest Maricopa Region about one of ten (10%) of individuals do not have health insurance and seven percent of children between the ages of 0 to 5 do not health insurance. Sub-regions with high rates of no health insurance include Arlington (22% for all ages and 11% for children 0-5) and Gila Bend-Theba-Sentinel (17% for all ages and 15% for children 0-5).	Provide low-income families information with multi-lingual information n and support in enrolling in <i>Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System</i> .
Family Support	
Despite the need of federal program assistance, enrollment in SNAP, WIC, and TANF has decreased.	Encourage grantmaking partners and stakeholders to promote federal program assistance for low-income families. Work with partners to streamline the participation process and reduce logistical burdens on participants.