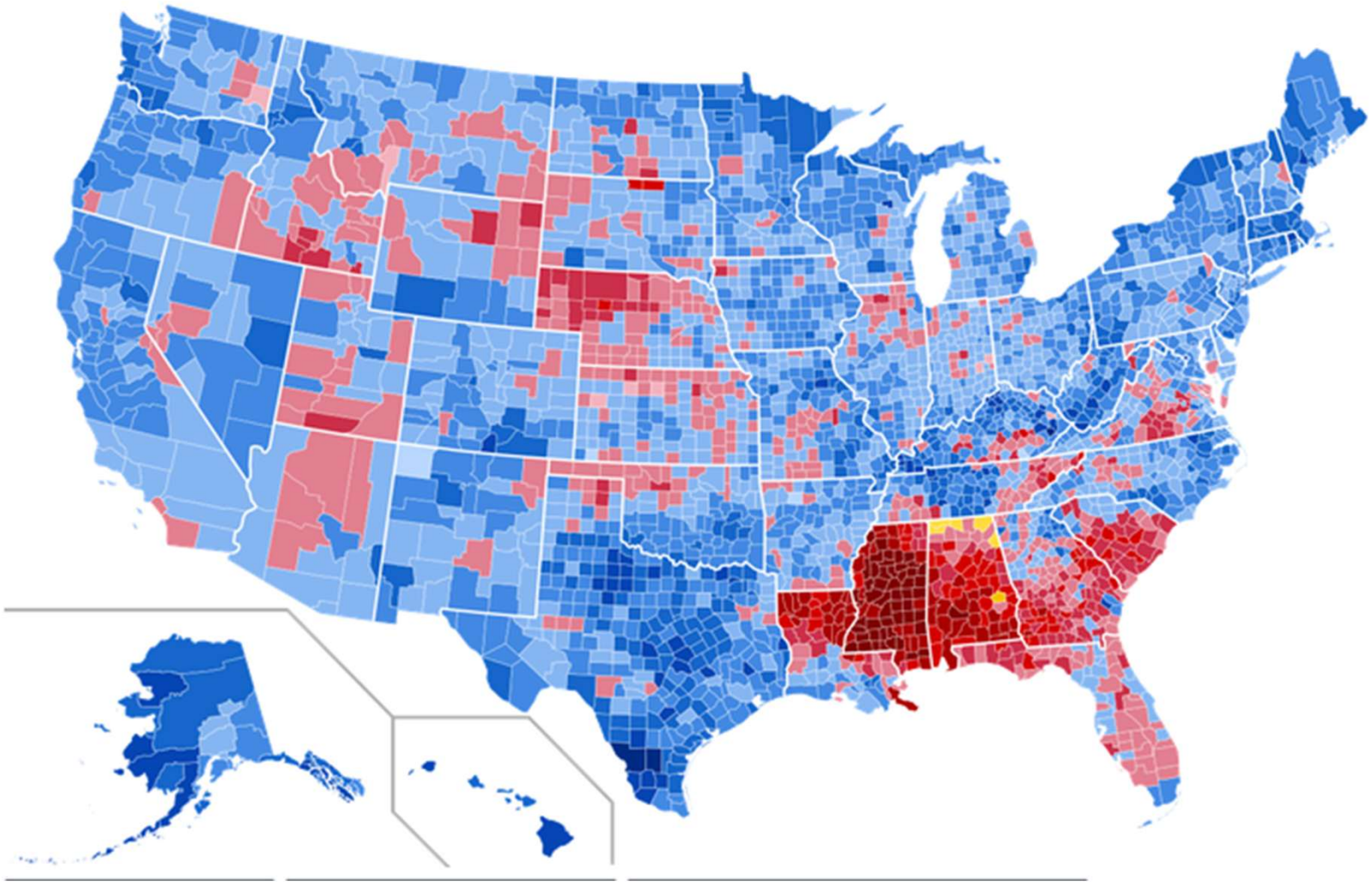


November 9, 2026

Matt Beienburg
Director of Education Policy &
Van Sittert Center for Constitutional Advocacy

1964 Election
– Barry Goldwater



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1964_United_States_presidential_election_results_map_by_county.svg



We Are Fighting in Courtrooms Across the Country

The Goldwater Institute fights in court to advance freedom and defend individual rights.

Empowering all Americans to live freer, happier lives

The Goldwater Institute accomplishes real results for liberty by working in state courts, legislatures, and communities nationwide to advance, defend, and strengthen the freedom guaranteed by the constitutions of the United States and the fifty states.

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AMERICAN CIVICS INITIATIVE

VAN SITTERT CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY



EDUCATION | FEATURED

Goldwater Launches $300K+ Landmark American Civics Initiative for 2nd Year

November 9, 2026

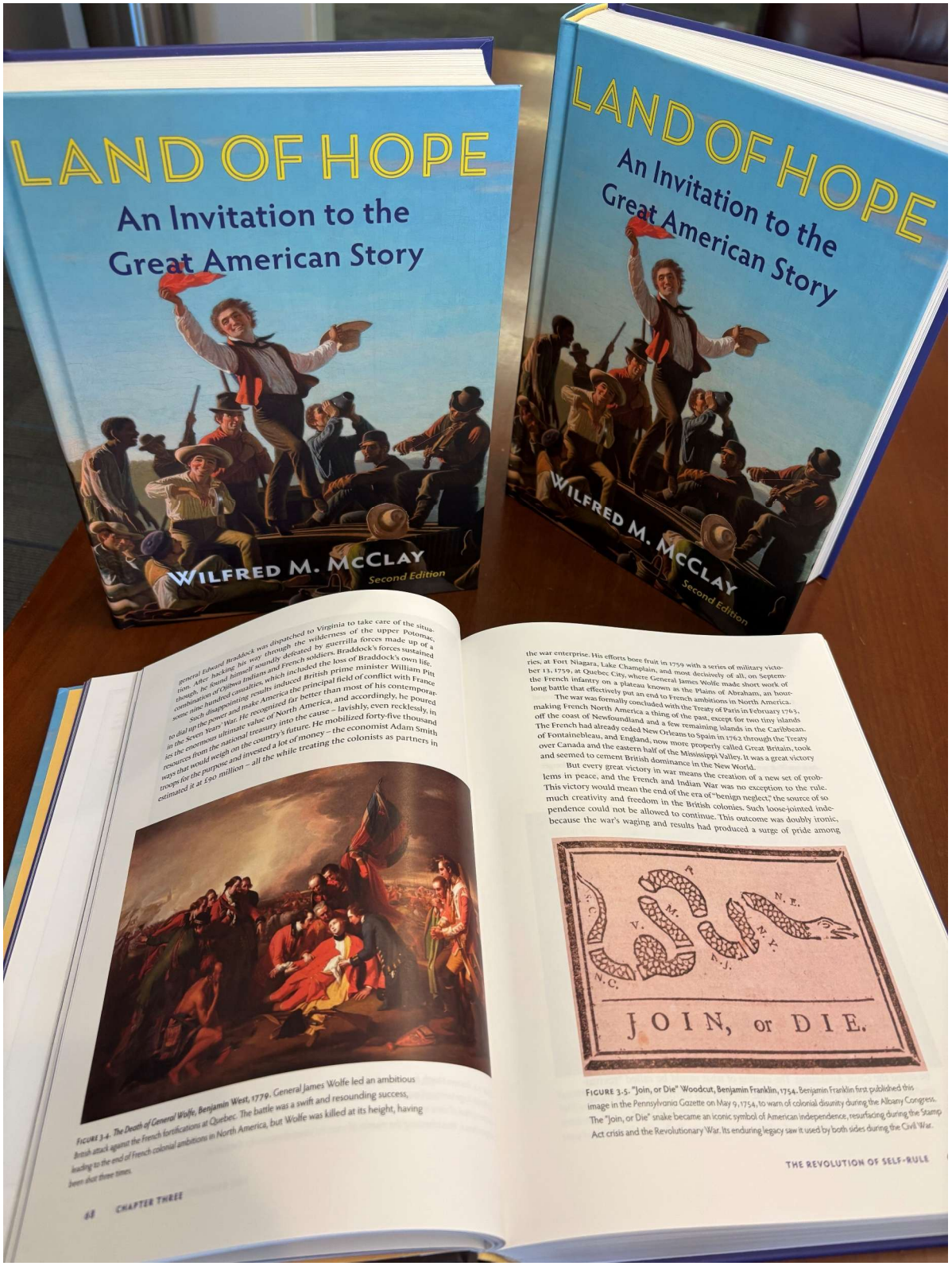
Americancivicsnow.com

The Excellence in Civics Education School District Grant Program (2027-2028)

Awarding up to $300,000 in support of a selected public school district, charter, and/**or private school via:**

- **New hardback U.S. history textbooks**
- **Curriculum guides**
- **$3,000 per teacher stipends**
- **Professional development**
- **Paid guest speakers (e.g. Victims of Communism Foundation)**
- **Additional resources (e.g. A is for the American Dream)**

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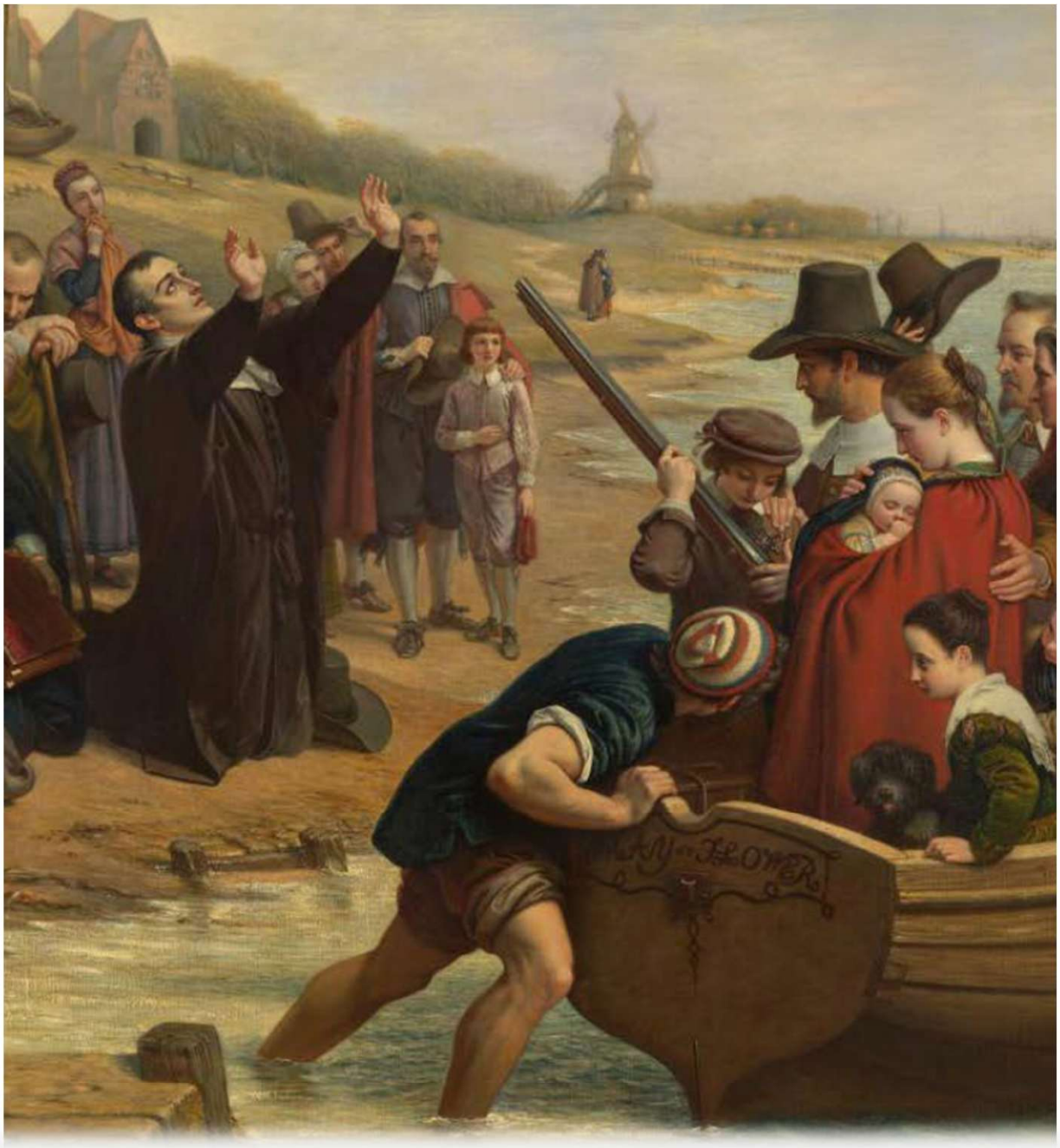

LAND OF HOPE
An Invitation to the Great American Story
WILFRED M. McCLAY
Second Edition
LAND OF HOPE
An Invitation to the Great American Story
WILFRED M. McCLAY
Second Edition
General Edward Braddock was dispatched to Virginia to take care of the situation. After hacking his way through the wilderness of the upper Potomac, he found himself soundly defeated by guerrilla forces made up of a combination of Ohio Indians and French soldiers. Braddock's forces sustained some nine hundred casualties, which included the loss of Braddock's own life.
to dial up the power and make America the principal field of conflict with France in the Seven Years' War. He recognized far better than most of his contemporaries the enormous ultimate value of North America, and accordingly, he poured resources from the national treasury into the cause – lavishly, even recklessly, in ways that would weigh on the country's future. He mobilized forty-five thousand troops for the purpose and invested a lot of money – the economist Adam Smith estimated it at £90 million – all the while treating the colonists as partners in
FIGURE 3.4. The Death of General Wolfe, Benjamin West, 1779. General James Wolfe led an ambitious British attack against the French fortifications at Quebec. The battle was a swift and resounding success, leading to the end of French colonial ambitions in North America, but Wolfe was killed at its height, having been shot three times.
62 CHAPTER THREE
the war enterprise. His efforts bore fruit in 1759 with a series of military victories, at Fort Niagara, Lake Champlain, and most decisively of all, on September 13, 1759, at Quebec City, where General James Wolfe made short work of the French infantry on a plateau known as the Plains of Abraham, an hour-long battle that effectively put an end to French ambitions in North America.
The war was formally concluded with the Treaty of Paris in February 1763, making French North America a thing of the past, except for two tiny islands off the coast of Newfoundland and a few remaining islands in the Caribbean. The French had already ceded New Orleans to Spain in 1762 through the Treaty of Fontainebleau, and England, now more properly called Great Britain, took over Canada and the eastern half of the Mississippi Valley. It was a great victory and seemed to cement British dominance in the New World.
But every great victory in war means the creation of a new set of problems in peace, and the French and Indian War was no exception to the rule. This victory would mean the end of the era of "benign neglect," the source of so much creativity and freedom in the British colonies. Such loose-jointed independence could not be allowed to continue. This outcome was doubly ironic, because the war's waging and results had produced a surge of pride among
A
S. C.
M.
V.
N. E.
N. Y.
N. J.
N. C.
JOIN, or DIE.
FIGURE 3.5. "Join, or Die" Woodcut, Benjamin Franklin, 1754. Benjamin Franklin first published this image in the Pennsylvania Gazette on May 9, 1754, to warn of colonial disunity during the Albany Congress. The "Join, or Die" snake became an iconic symbol of American independence, resurfacing during the Stamp Act crisis and the Revolutionary War. Its enduring legacy saw it used by both sides during the Civil War.
THE REVOLUTION OF SELF-RULE

Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story

(Revised 2nd Edition, 2026)



Wilfred M. McClay, Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization at Hillsdale College



"This is the most cheerful and inspiring history of America written so far this century. Where most historians emphasize fragmentation and oppression, McClay makes the case for a unified national story characterized by optimism and achievement"



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8SxZmmoItU

Americancivicsnow.com

The Arizona Civics Scholars Program:

Scholarships up to $1,500 to 50 graduating high school seniors and college students who enroll in partnering higher education programs focused on civics, public policy, constitutionalism, and/or classical education:

1) "the Civics School" at ASU

ASU Arizona State University **School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership**

(priority for up to 40 students)

2) Canyon Civic Institute at GCU

CANYON CIVIC INSTITUTE **Grand Canyon University**

(priority for up to 10 students)

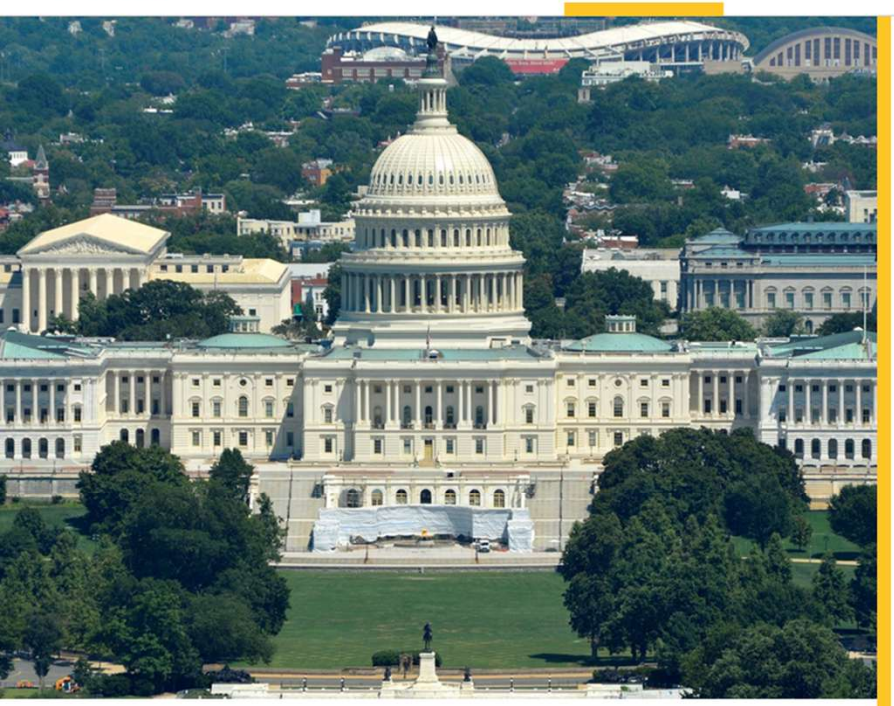
GOLDWATER INSTITUTE

The “Civics School” (SCETL) at ASU



CEL 350: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics
CEL 394: James Madison & the Constitutional Convention
CEL 475: Statesmanship & American Grand Strategy
CEL 420: Topic: C.S. Lewis: Reason, Imagination, and Politics
CEL 307: Reason and Revelation: Medieval Political Thought

- “Examines classics of medieval political philosophy across Christianity…including such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, ….What can we know about the good by nature? Can reason suffice for determining laws governing the common good or do human beings need recourse to divine revelation? Is God bound by natural law or is God's will independent of reason?”



Saturday, November 14, 2026 at Chandler Innovation Center - American Institutions I and II

Join ASU SCETL Professor Sean Beienburg for a two-part workshop exploring some of America core political institutions: federalism, separation of powers, and judicial review. Designed especia for Arizona K-12 educators, this workshop series will help deepen content knowledge and strengthen civic education in the classroom.

Because Institutions 2 builds directly on Institutions 1, participants must attend Institutions 1 in or to participate in Institutions 2. Educators are encouraged to register for both sessions to get the f experience.

Chandler Innovation Center

Register Today

Saturday, February 6, 2027 Lake Havasu City - American History





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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: "CONTRASTING THE

- “My view on the U.S. Constitution has really opened my eyes. **I never really thought too deeply about it, but now I really appreciate the Constitution.”**

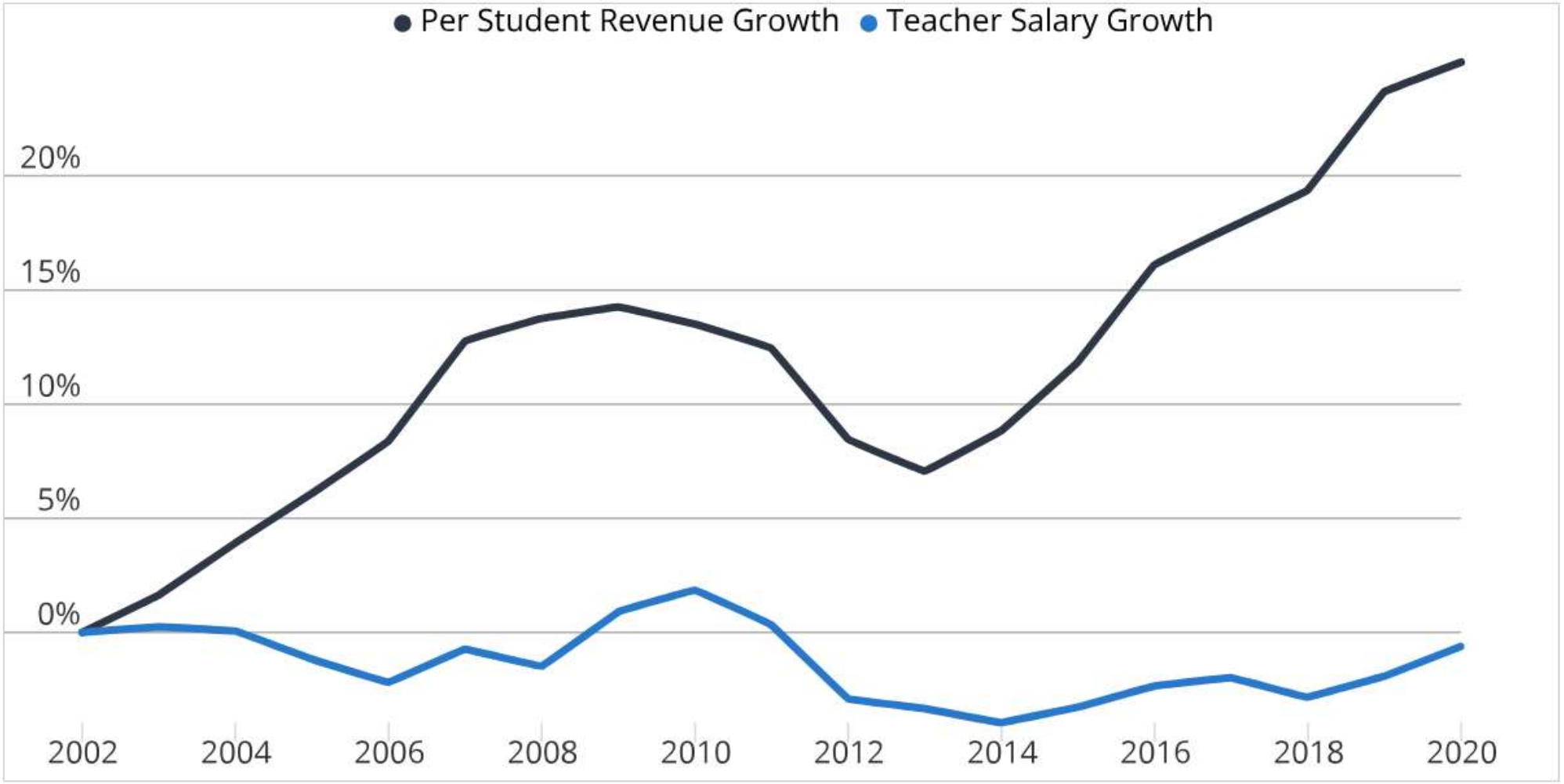
- “It helped me see how the framers intentionally designed the government to prevent tyranny by ensuring that no single branch could dominate the others. **Learning how this framework functions** and sometimes struggles in today’s political climate **made the Constitution feel both historically brilliant** and currently challenged.”

- “Prior to the Bootcamp, I thought my views aligned with a living Constitution interpretation, however, after diving so deeply into the history and primary sources, **I found myself gaining a rich appreciation for the Originalists on the Court (especially Justice Thomas**). The framers were by no means perfect people, but they used language in our Constitution in such a way that allows for much more flexibility than what I think many people in our modern era commonly acknowledge.”

- **“Hearing a personal account** of growing up under a Communist regime **made the abstract concepts of authoritarianism and lack of freedom more tangible and emotionally resonant**. I plan to incorporate more personal narratives and primary sources in my teaching to humanize political systems and engage students on a deeper level.”

Looking Ahead: Arizona Education Policy, School Choice, & More

Figure 1: U.S. Revenue per Student Growth vs. Average Teacher Salary Growth (2002-2020, Inflation Adjusted)



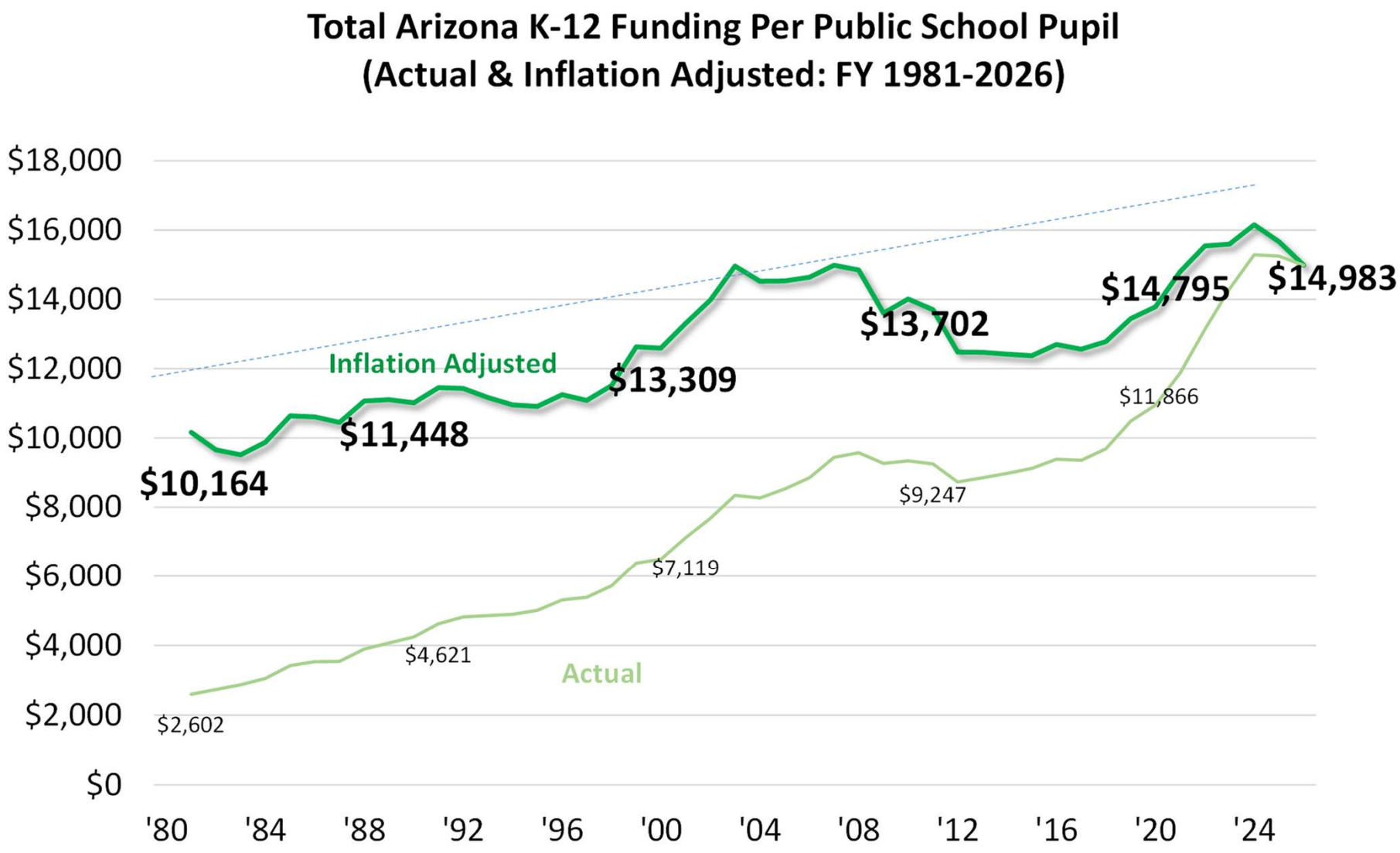
Source: Public education at a crossroads: A comprehensive look at K-12 resources and outcomes (reason.org)

Key U.S. Public School Spending, Staffing, and Enrollment Trends (2002 – 2020, Inflation-Adjusted)

Category	2002	2020	Growth
Revenue Per Student	$ 12,852	$ 16,065	25.0%
Benefit Spending Per Student	$ 1,907	$ 3,406	78.6%
Student Enrollment	47,671,870	50,796,445	6.6%
Total Staff	5,904,195	6,683,302	13.2%
Non-Teachers	2,904,667	3,485,132	20.0%
Teachers	2,999,528	3,198,170	6.6%
Average Teacher Salaries	$ 64,522	$ 64,133	-0.6%

Source: Public education at a crossroads: A comprehensive look at K-12 resources and outcomes (reason.org)

- **Nearly 50% increase in real AZ public school per pupil $ long-term**
- **Total $ has declined slightly from COVID era high point as federal COVID funds expire…**



JLBC All Funding tables: “State, Local, and Federal” funding totals. Adjusted for inflation by Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI

Per student spending by area and national comparisons

Compare:

State-wide FY 2024 average vs. FY 2025 average spending

Area	State-wide FY 2024	State-wide FY 2025	1-year change
Classroom spending			
Instruction	$6,511	$6,541	+$30
Student support	$1,210	$1,243	+$33
Instruction support	$764	$751	-$13
Nonclassroom spending			
Administration	$1,276	$1,309	+$33
Plant operations	$1,476	$1,535	+$59
Food service	$565	$590	+$25
Transportation	$569	$584	+$15
Total operational	**$12,371**	**$12,553**	+$182
Land and buildings	$1,582	$1,929	+$347
Equipment	$801	$804	+$3
Interest	$348	$421	+$73
Other	$280	$275	-$5
Total nonoperational	**$3,011**	**$3,429**	+$418
Total per student spending	**$15,382**	**$15,982**	+$600

https://sdspending.azauditor.gov/State

District Funds Up. Teacher Pay Down

- Arizona district schools are now receiving a record-breaking $16,000+ annually per student as of the 2026-2027 school year.

- Per pupil, inflation-adjusted funding increase among district schools (excluding charters) is approx. $2,500 per kid, or $50,000 per classroom of 20 students since 2001

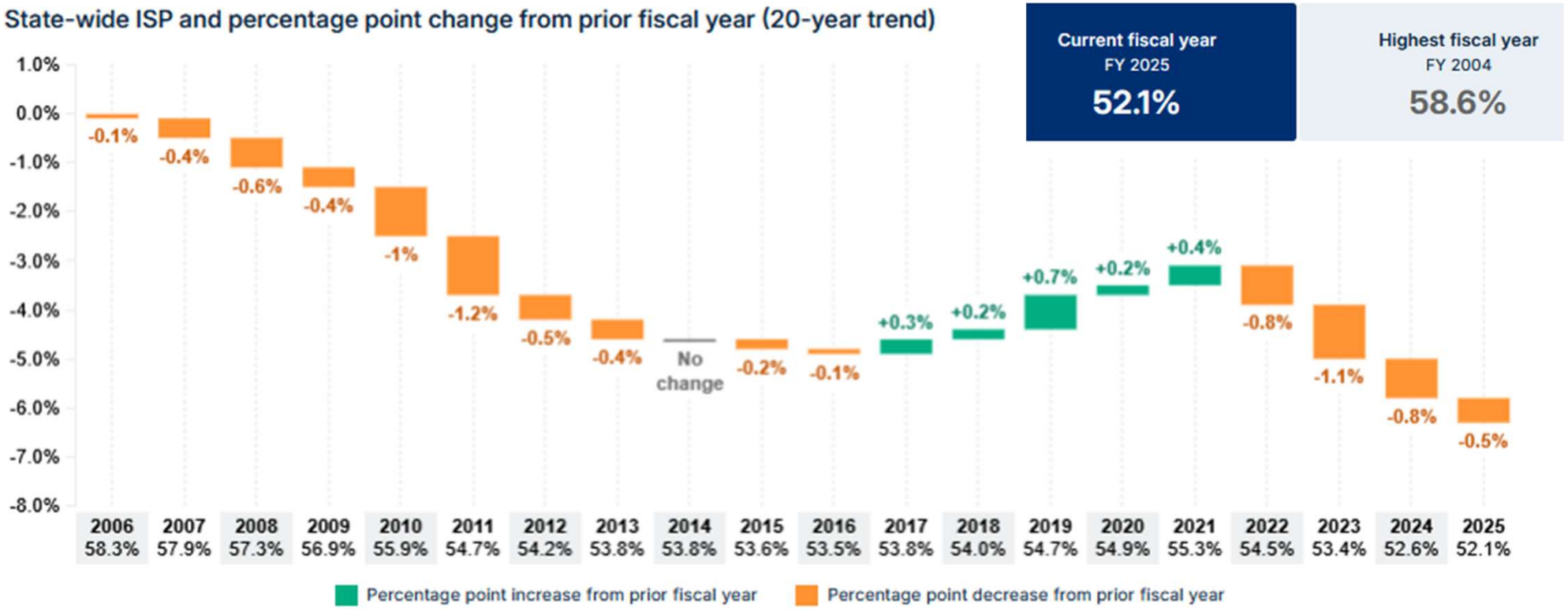
- Yet average teacher pay is *down* by thousands of dollars per teacher after accounting for inflation over the same period.

    - The state's average teacher pay was $37,176 for the 2000-2001 school year, which translates to $72,067 in today's dollars.

    - Yet according to the Auditor General's FY 2025 school district spending report (the latest year available), teacher pay in Arizona had dropped to $65,613 as of FY 2025.

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/az-school-funding-at-record-high-prop-320-ensures-dollars-go-to-classrooms/

Yet Districts Have Shifted Funds away from Instruction



"If school districts had spent the same proportion of total operational spending on instruction in FY 2025 as they did in FY 2004—the year with the highest ISP since we have been monitoring it—districts would have spent an additional $682 million for instruction, or $813 per student"

ARIZONA Auditor General
Making a Positive Difference

https://sdspending.azauditor.gov/

AZ districts directed less than 20% of their new (inflation adjustment) funding to instruction in 2025.

Districts should be using their annual funding formula increases (along with additional increases from the state Classroom Site Fund) to *increase*, not *decrease*, the share of funding going to instruction each year

Per student spending

Why monitor per student spending?

Considering spending on a per student basis controls for differences or changes in the number of students attending district schools. This spending measure can be used to evaluate how much a district or the State spent for each student, on average, compared to other districts, states, or the nation, and to analyze spending changes over time. It also provides context for spending percentages because sometimes, a small change in spending percentage can equate to a large change in dollars spent. Per student operational spending represents how much money school districts spent per student for their day-to-day functions or activities such as for instruction, administration, and plant operations (see the "Spending areas" section of the Glossary page for descriptions of all operational areas).

State-wide per student operational spending increased

↑ Per student operational spending increased ↑

Current year (FY 2025)

$12,553

Change in dollars

+$182

Percent change

+1.5%

The slight increase is largely due to a higher FY 2025 base-level funding amount, which included a statutorily required inflation adjustment. The FY 2025 adjusted base funding level provided an additional $122 million to districts compared to FY 2024. However, districts spent only 17% of the operational spending increase on instruction, or about $30 per student, which is a lower proportion than in previous years.

State-wide per student operational spending comparisons

State-wide FY 2025 per student operational spending:

Compared to State-wide FY 2024 per student operational spending (1-y...

	FY 2024	FY 2025	Change
Students attending	**849,452**	**839,126**	-10,326
Operational area			
Instruction	$6,511	$6,541	+$30
Student support	$1,210	$1,243	+$33
Instruction support	$764	$751	-$13
Administration	$1,276	$1,309	+$33
Plant operations	$1,476	$1,535	+$59
Food service	$565	$590	+$25
Transportation	$569	$584	+$15
Totals	**$12,371**	**$12,553**	+$182

As shown above, spending on a per student basis increased in most operational spending areas. This is largely due to an increase to base level funding and a State-wide decline in the number of students attending.

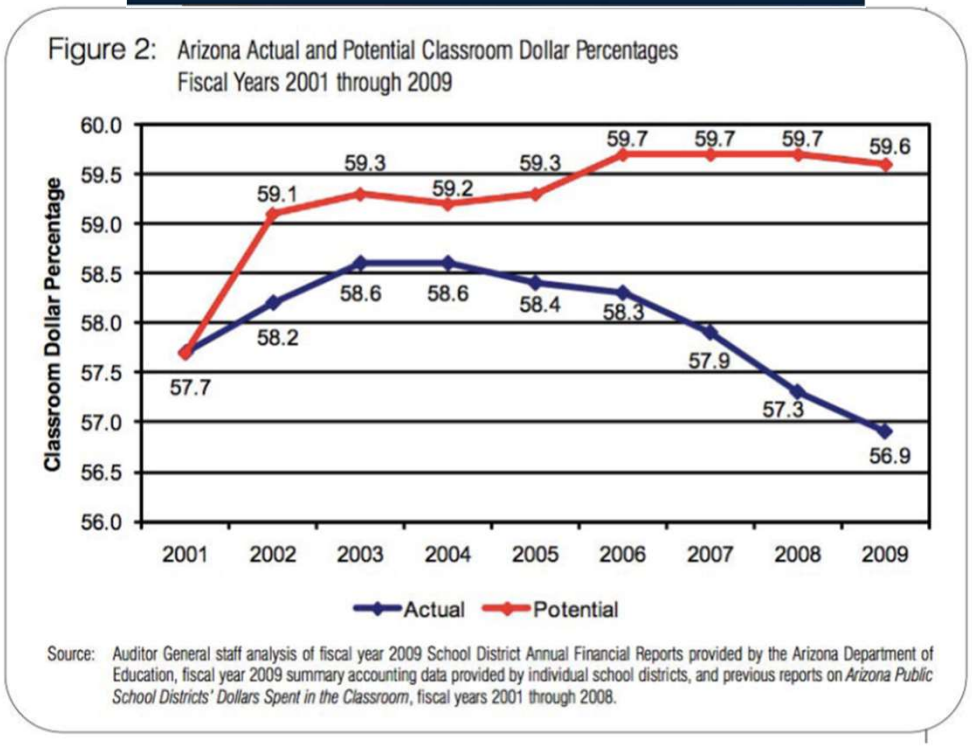
https://sdspending.azauditor.gov/

Auditor General warns districts have violated statute & voter intent by shifting funds from instruction

- "One reason the declining classroom dollar percentage merits attention is that it is the opposite result of what was expected when voters authorized Proposition 301, which was intended to increase classroom spending…primarily for increasing teacher pay…"

- "Arizona's declining classroom dollar percentage indicates that many districts are likely using these CSF monies to supplant other district monies, **which is a violation of Arizona Revised Statutes** §15-977(A)."

ARIZONA Auditor General
Making a Positive Difference



" If districts had continued spending their non-CSF monies in the classroom at the same rate they did prior to receiving CSF monies … teacher salaries would have been about $7,500 higher, on average"

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/teacher-pay-FINAL-5-12-21.pdf#page=10

PROPOSITION 320

Last Updated: November 9, 2026, 9:58:53 AM (4 minutes ago)

REFERRED TO THE PEOPLE BY THE LEGISLATURE RELATING TO SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGETS

Response	Percentage	Votes
NO	51.88%	1,247,193
YES	48.12%	1,156,850

Yavapai County

Vote Method

Response	Percentage	Votes
YES	57.44%	65,306
NO	42.56%	48,385

Precincts reporting **55/57** ⓘ as of *5 minutes ago*

View results by precinct

PROPOSITION 142

Vote Method Follow

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION BY THE LEGISLATURE RELATING TO THE PROHIBITION OF PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Response	Percentage	Votes
NO	59.92%	1,453,480
YES	40.08%	972,114

Localities reporting **15/15** as of *9 minutes ago*

View results by County

Yavapai County

Vote Method

Response	Percentage	Votes
NO	51.52%	59,461
YES	48.48%	55,953

Precincts reporting **55/57** ⓘ as of *8 minutes ago*

View results by precinct

Wisconsin voters approve Republican-backed amendment on DEI and "government discrimination"

By Eric Henderson

November 4, 2026 / 2:12 PM CST / CBS Chicago

Add CBS News on Google

Wisconsin voters approved a constitutional amendment Tuesday that prohibits governmental entities from discriminating against or granting preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin, a measure Republicans backed as a way to limit diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Question 3 passed with 56.4% of the vote. With 98% of votes counted, 1,446,384 voters supported it and 1,116,741 opposed it, a margin of 329,643 votes. The amendment covers public employment, education, contracting and administration.

~~Prop 212~~

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Union Activists Launch Full Scale Attack on Students, Families in AZ

abc 15 ARIZONA

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26 WX Alerts | Investigations | Uplifting Arizona | Let ABC15 Know | Let's Talk | Things To Do | More +

'Protect Education Act' campaign, ESA reform initiative turns in 420K signatures

Protect Education Act campaign communications manager Olivia Fierro says the coalition collected 421,451 signatures, well above the required minimum of about 256,000

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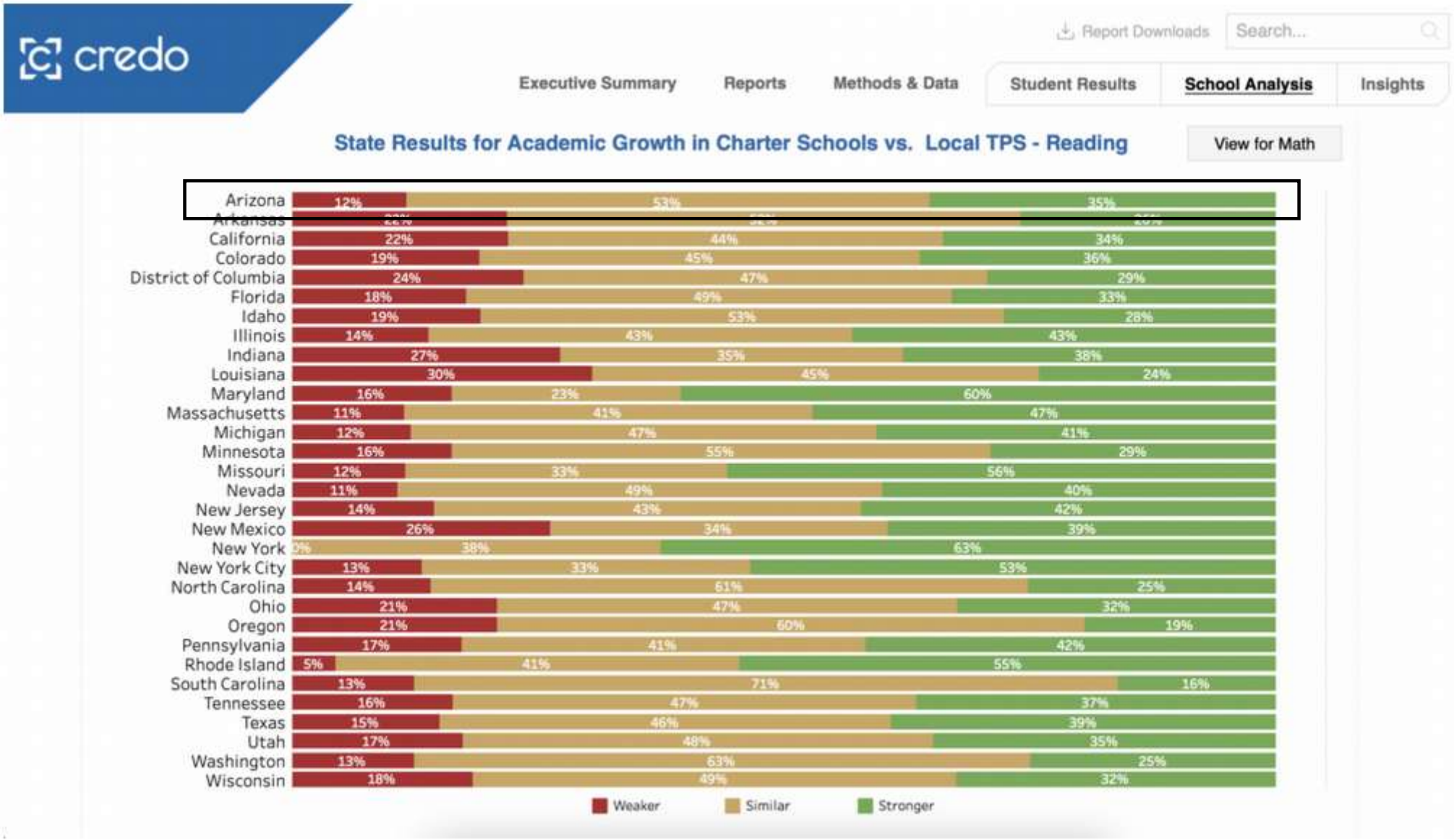
SCHOOL CHOICE | FEATURED

Union Attack on School Choice Fails Miserably

August 18, 2026

School Choice & School Closures?

Stanford: Arizona charter schools deliver higher academic growth to students than local district schools do 35% of the time, compared to just 12% who do worse.



https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/new-study-az-students-learn-more-in-charter-schools-than-districts/

Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA)

- All Arizona K-12 students eligible
- ~$7,500+ per student
- Private school, tutoring, at-home curriculum, etc



ESA Parent Testimonials

"I am a parent of three children on ESA, but I also have a master's degree in elementary education, and ESA has saved the educational lives of my three children. …

We have tried public, private, and charter schools … [and] my child was able to meet some of her IEP (Individualized Education Program) goals in four months that no school had helped her to achieve in four years."

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GWI-DECADE-OF-SUCCESS.FINAL_.pdf

ESA Parent Testimonials

“In my community … school district students have an average math proficiency score of 8%. In reading, it’s 14%.

I’m thrilled my daughter has chosen to homeschool her five children, all of whom were adopted out of the foster care system…

Where needed, she secures specialized tutoring, such as in the case of one granddaughter who’s dyslexic. **She spent her first four years in public school where she did not learn to read and was promoted year after year. After two years of homeschooling, she can now read at second grade level, and I’m so proud of her work.”**

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/#_edn23



- More than 10 times as many families in the Roosevelt district that the *Post* featured have opted out of the district's schools to attend neighboring *public schools,* compared to how many are utilizing an ESA.
- More than 8,000 (over *half)* of the students who reside within the Roosevelt elementary district have abandoned the district to enroll in a different public charter or district school, versus just 800 who've chosen an ESA.
- Just 124 ESA students previously *attended* Roosevelt

https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/08/05/arizona-public-school-closures-voucher-program/;
https://townhall.com/columnists/matt-beienburg/2025/08/21/school-choice-isnt-the-cause-of-arizona-district-dysfunction-n2662099

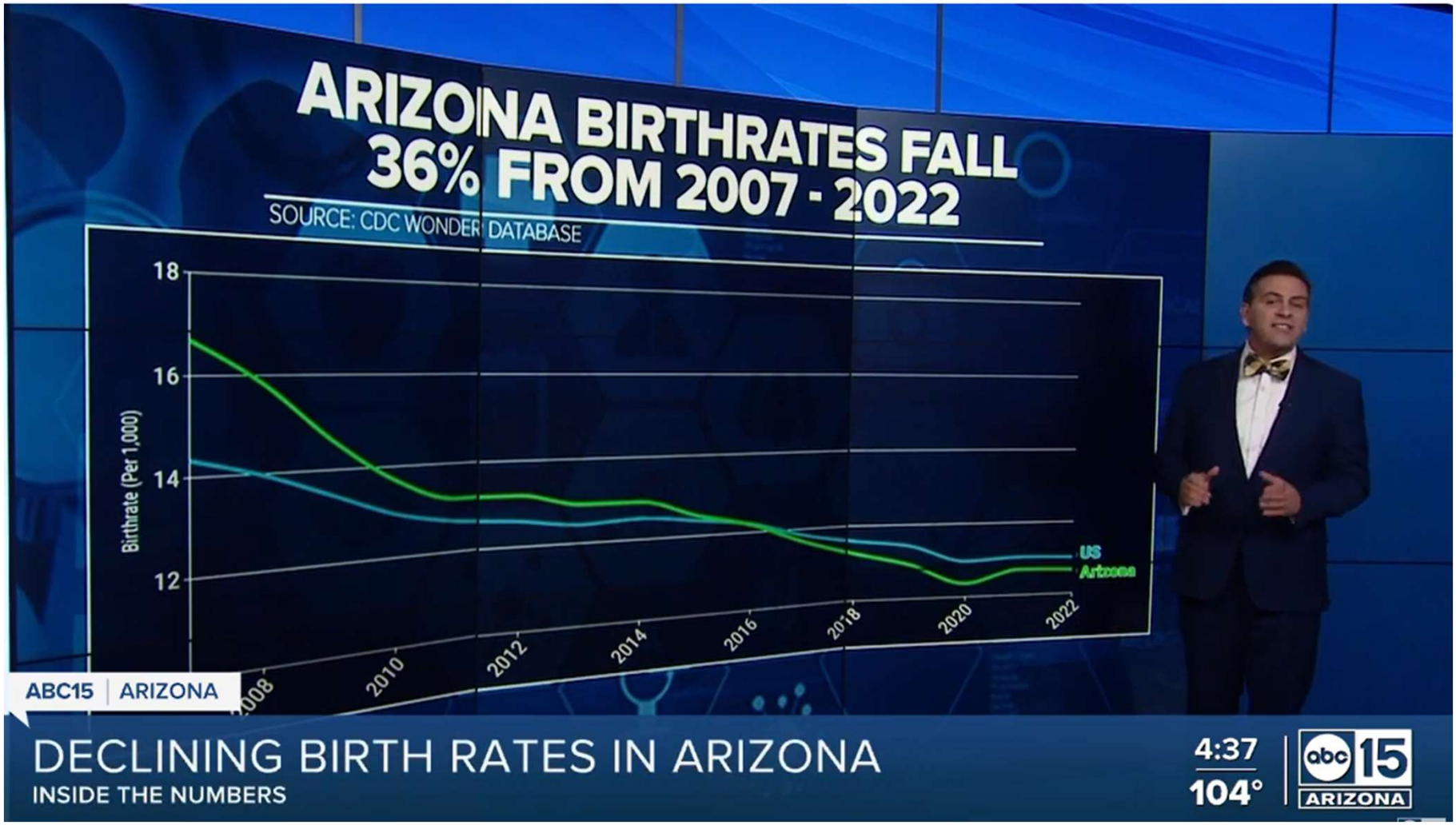
Empty Schools?

“Between fiscal years 2004 and 2017, Arizona school districts added 22.6 million square feet of building space—a 19 percent increase— despite a student enrollment increase of only 6 percent during this same period. …

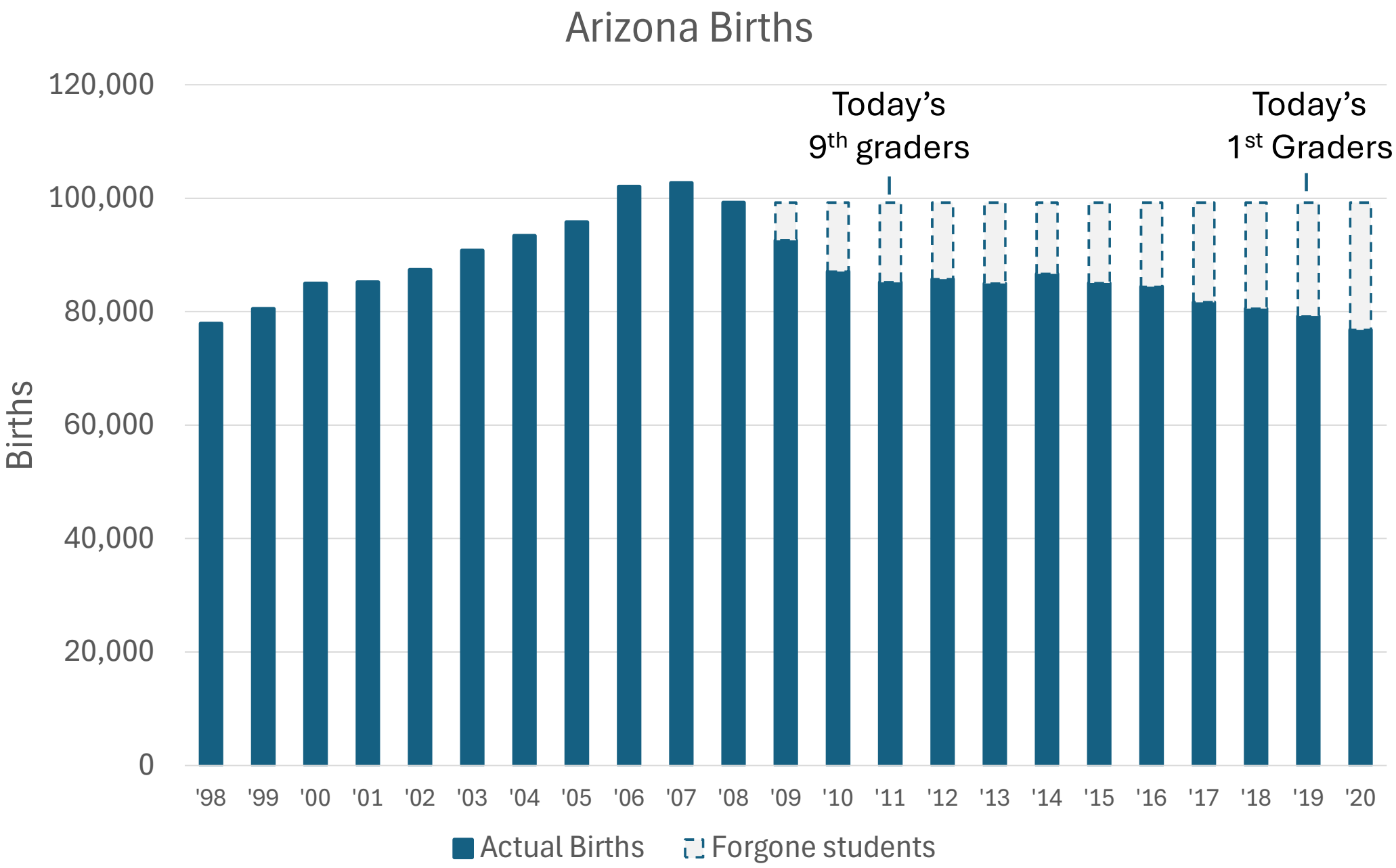
School districts … built additional schools when they already had low-capacity usage rates at their existing schools.”



https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/18-203_Report_No_Pages.pdf

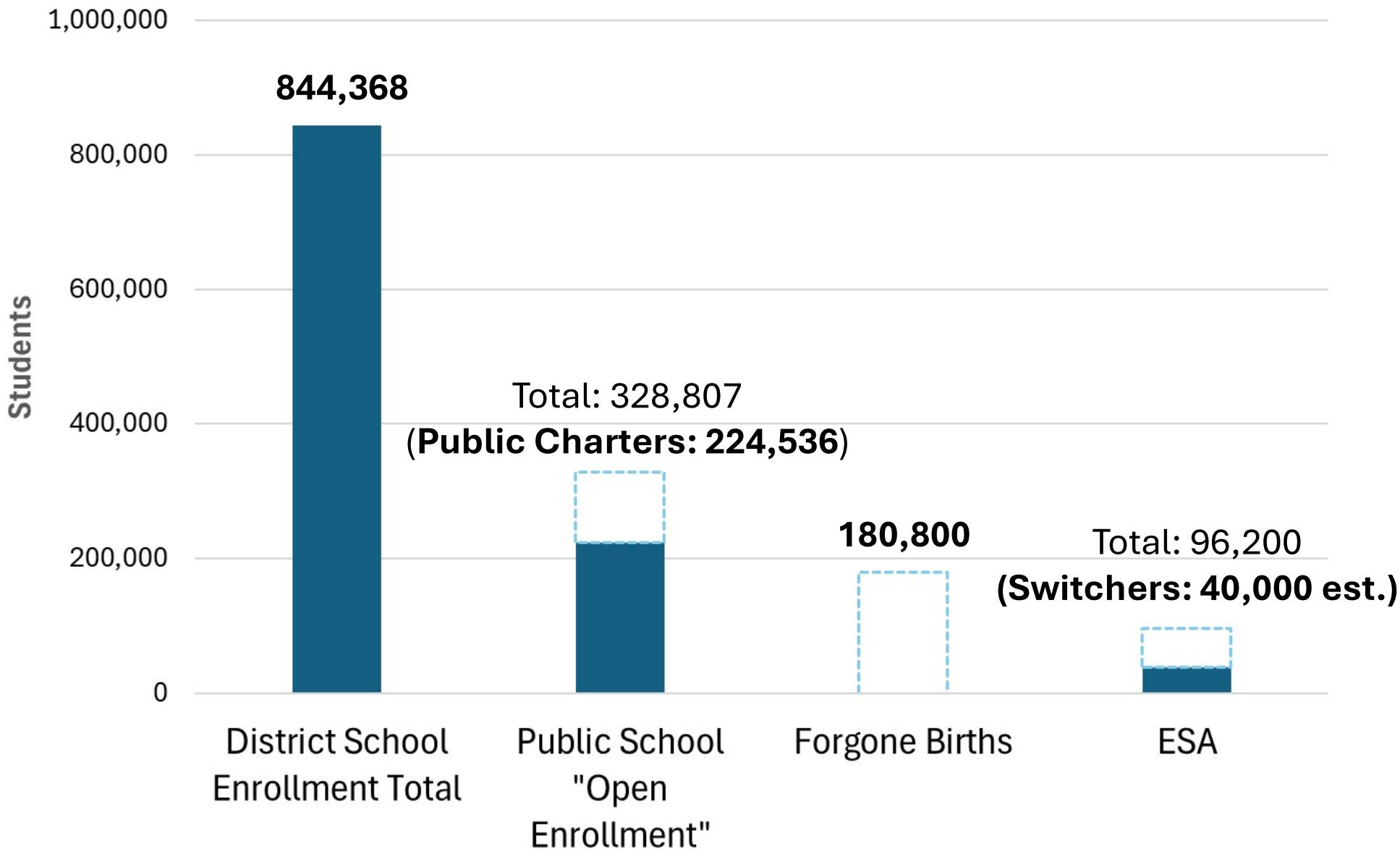


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2HOK7Sd1yM



Forgone births based on cumulative reduction in AZ DHS reported AZ annual births by year from 2008-2020, relative to 2008 baseline; https://pub.azdhs.gov/health-stats/report/ahs/ahs2022/pdf/5b3.pdf, https://pub.azdhs.gov/health-stats/report/ahs/ahs2022/pdf/8a1.pdf

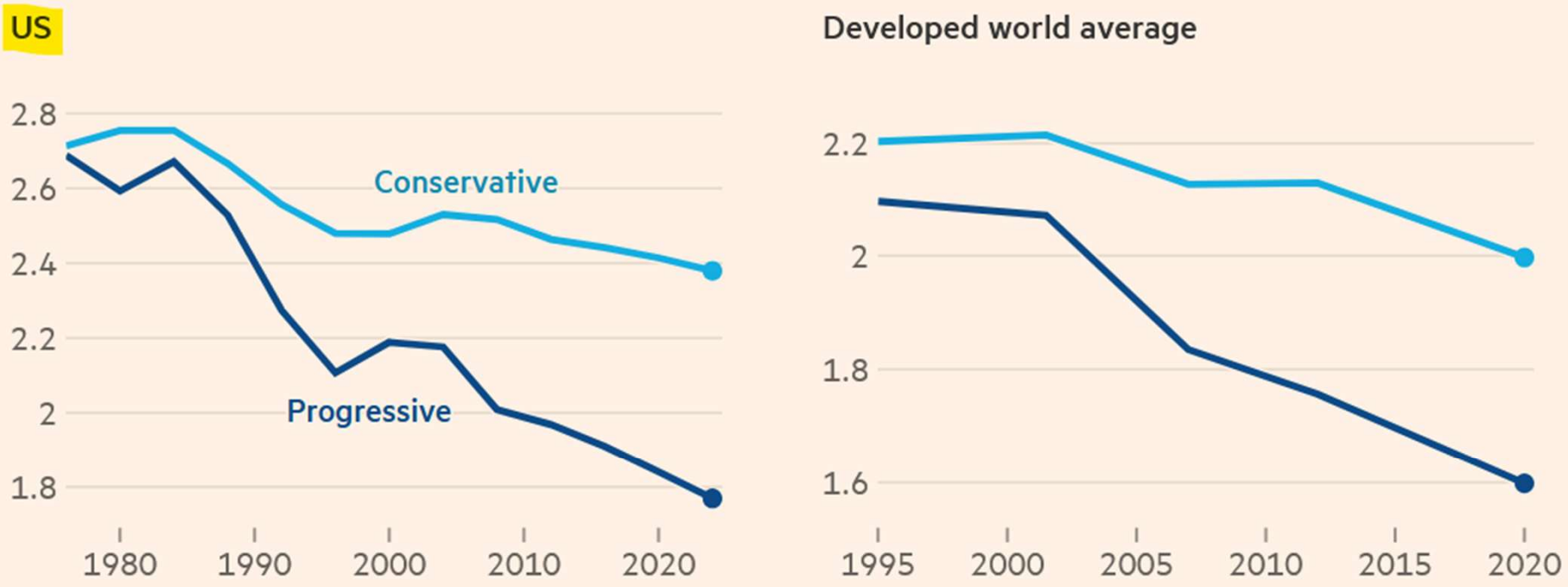
AZ K-12 Enrollment Pressures



Open Enrollment Data (FY2025): https://www.azed.gov/finance/data-collection-reporting-school-and-student-membership-data
District & Charter Totals(FY 2026 est): https://www.azjlbc.gov/26AR/ade.pdf
ESA totals: FY 2026, as reported by ADE as of 11/3/2025; FY 2025 Q4 Report documents 33,439 ESA who attended a public school prior to enrolling in program, through FY 2025; This chart assumes a similar rate (57%) of new ESA students joining for FY 2026 switched from the public school system
https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2025/09/ESA%20FY25%20Q4%20Executive%20_%20Legislative%20Report.pdf#page=7
Forgone births based on cumulative reduction in AZ DHS reported AZ annual births by year from 2008-2020, relative to 2008 baseline; https://pub.azdhs.gov/health-stats/report/ahs/ahs2022/pdf/5b3.pdf, https://pub.azdhs.gov/health-stats/report/ahs/ahs2022/pdf/8a1.pdf

Birth rates are falling more steeply among progressives than conservatives

Average number of children born to people with different political ideologies



Birth rates calculated for all adults aged 35+

Source: FT analysis of the US General Social Survey and World Values Survey, based on prior work by Fieder et al (2018)

FT graphic: John Burn-Murdoch / @jburnmurdoch

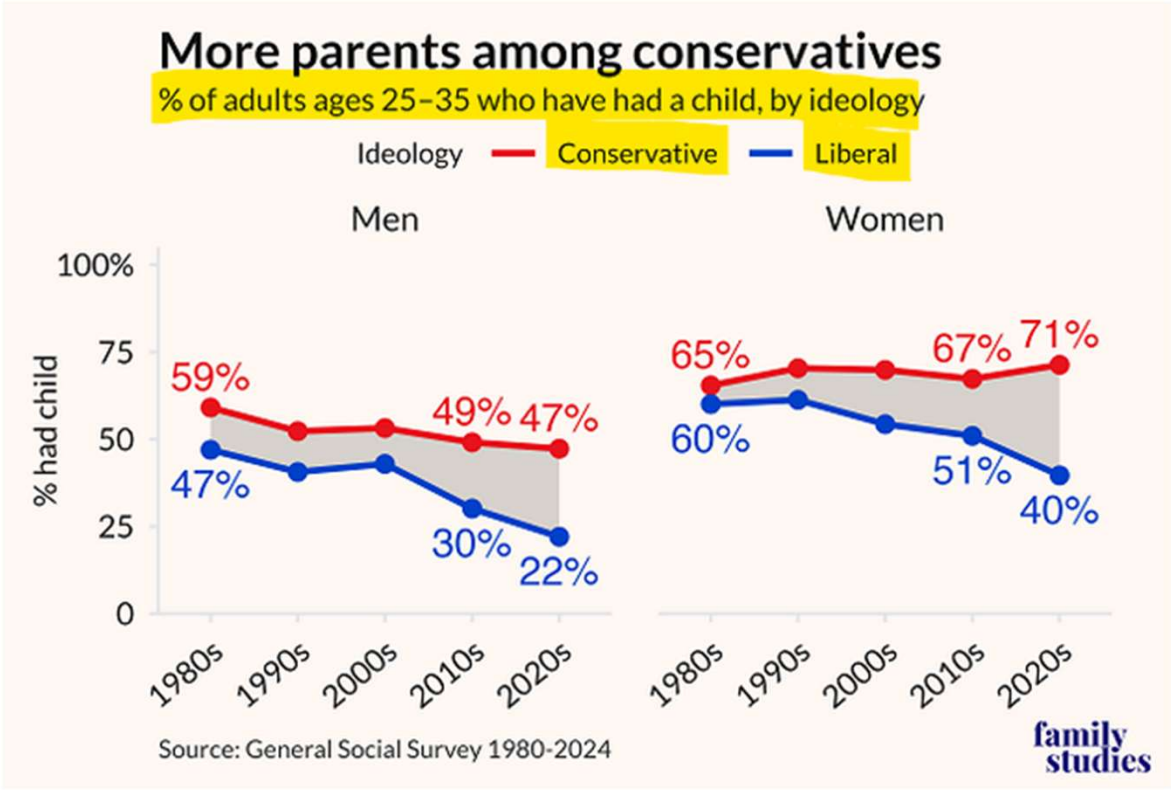
©FT

https://www.ft.com/content/a08ca4a6-d86e-41dc-9327-da0f2c418c98

Institute for family studies

Having Children

Just as conservatives are marrying at higher rates, they are also more likely to have children during young adulthood. Indeed, we don't see a large decline in the share of conservatives ages 25 to 35 who are parents from the 1990s to the present.



But we do see a large decline in parenthood among liberal young adults.

https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-lefts-family-problem-marriage-and-kids-cratering-among-liberal-young-adults

Brad Wilcox is Melville Foundation Jefferson Scholars Foundation University Professor of Sociology and Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia

AP

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CLIMATE

Anxiety over global warming is leading some young Americans to say they don't want children



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> New On The Conversation: Children Are Expensive – Not Just For Parents, But The Environment – So How

New on The Conversation: Children are expensive – not just for parents, but the environment – so how many is too many?

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By Trevor Hedberg, W.A. Franke Honors College

March 1, 2024

https://news.arizona.edu/employee-news/new-conversation-children-are-expensive-not-just-parents-environment-so-how-many-too

https://apnews.com/article/climate-anxiety-impact-children-parent-environment-change-b29d351efd43d6fc79e5ae6c7510dfeb

OUR Kids Arizona

A Network for School Choice Families

https://ourkidsarizona.org/

Connect

Join a statewide network of school choice families and all who want to preserve the opportunities we have in Arizona.

Understand

Stay informed about the policies, proposals, and decisions affecting school choice in Arizona - with clear, Arizona-specific information and policy expertise.

Participate

Get involved in the way that works for you - stay informed, share your experience, attend events, or make your voice heard.

Costly Bottlenecks & Artificial Barriers: Teacher Prep Programs (aka Teachers Colleges)

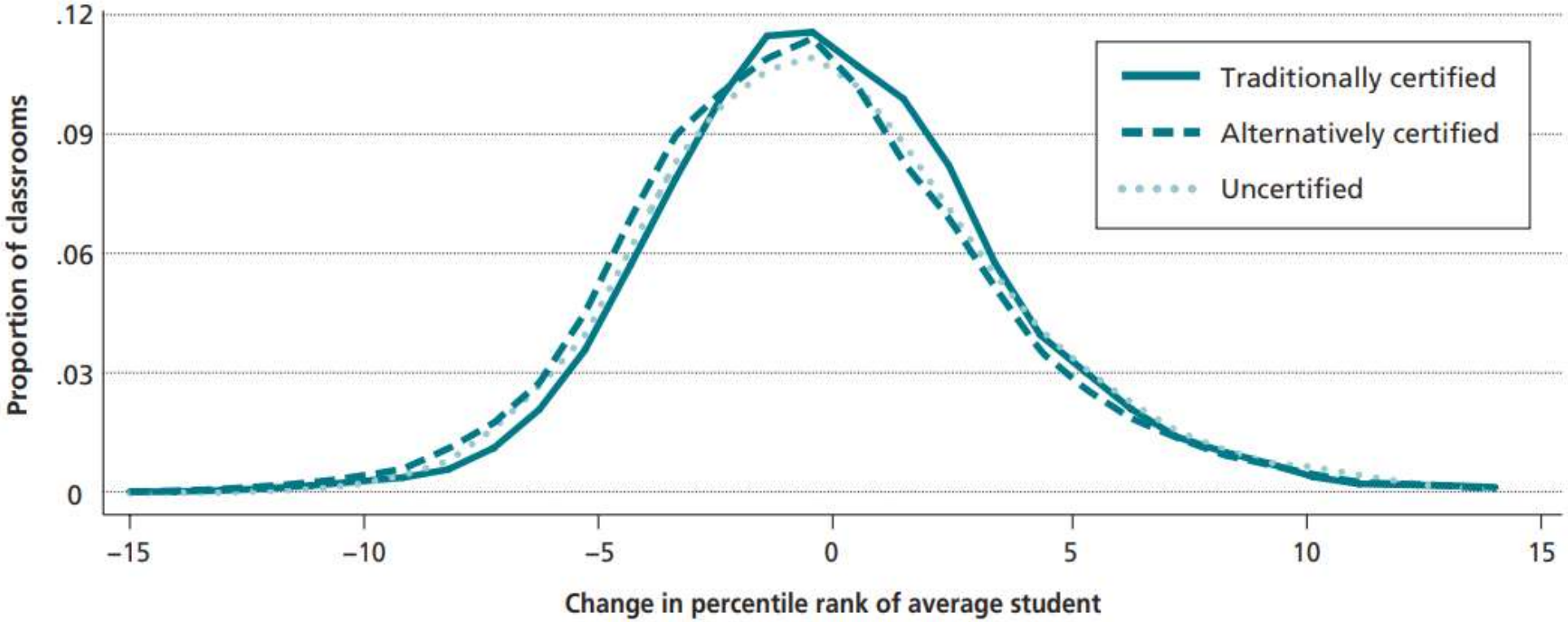
- "Recent evidence demonstrates that teacher certification is a poor predictor of teacher effectiveness…"
- "Controlling for baseline characteristics of students and comparing classrooms within schools, there is no statistically significant difference in achievement for students assigned to certified and uncertified teachers…In other words, there is not much difference between certified and uncertified teachers overall."
- "But effectiveness varies substantially among certified teachers and also among uncertified teachers. ….To put it simply, teachers vary considerably in the extent to which they promote student learning, but whether a teacher is certified or not is largely irrelevant to predicting his or her effectiveness."

--Brookings Institute

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/200604hamilton_1.pdf

Costly Bottlenecks & Artificial Barriers: Teacher Prep Programs (aka Teachers Colleges)

Figure 1. Teacher Impacts on Math Performance by Initial Certification



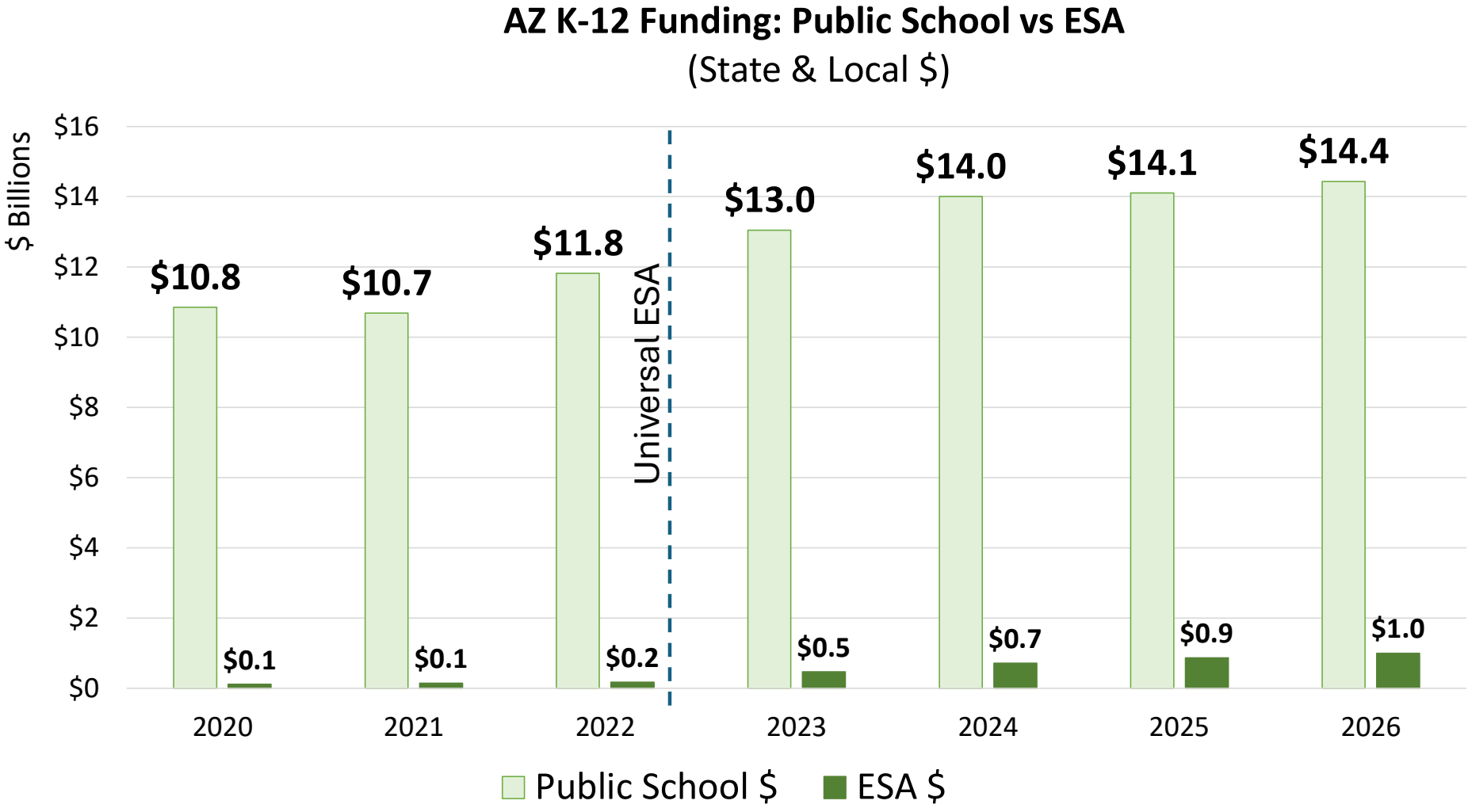
Note: Classroom-level impacts on average student performance, controlling for baseline scores, student demographics, and program participation. LAUSD elementary teachers, grade three through five. For details of how an ordinary least squares regression was used to adjust for student background, baseline performance, and other factors, see the appendix.

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/200604hamilton_1.pdf

Anti-ESA Messaging:

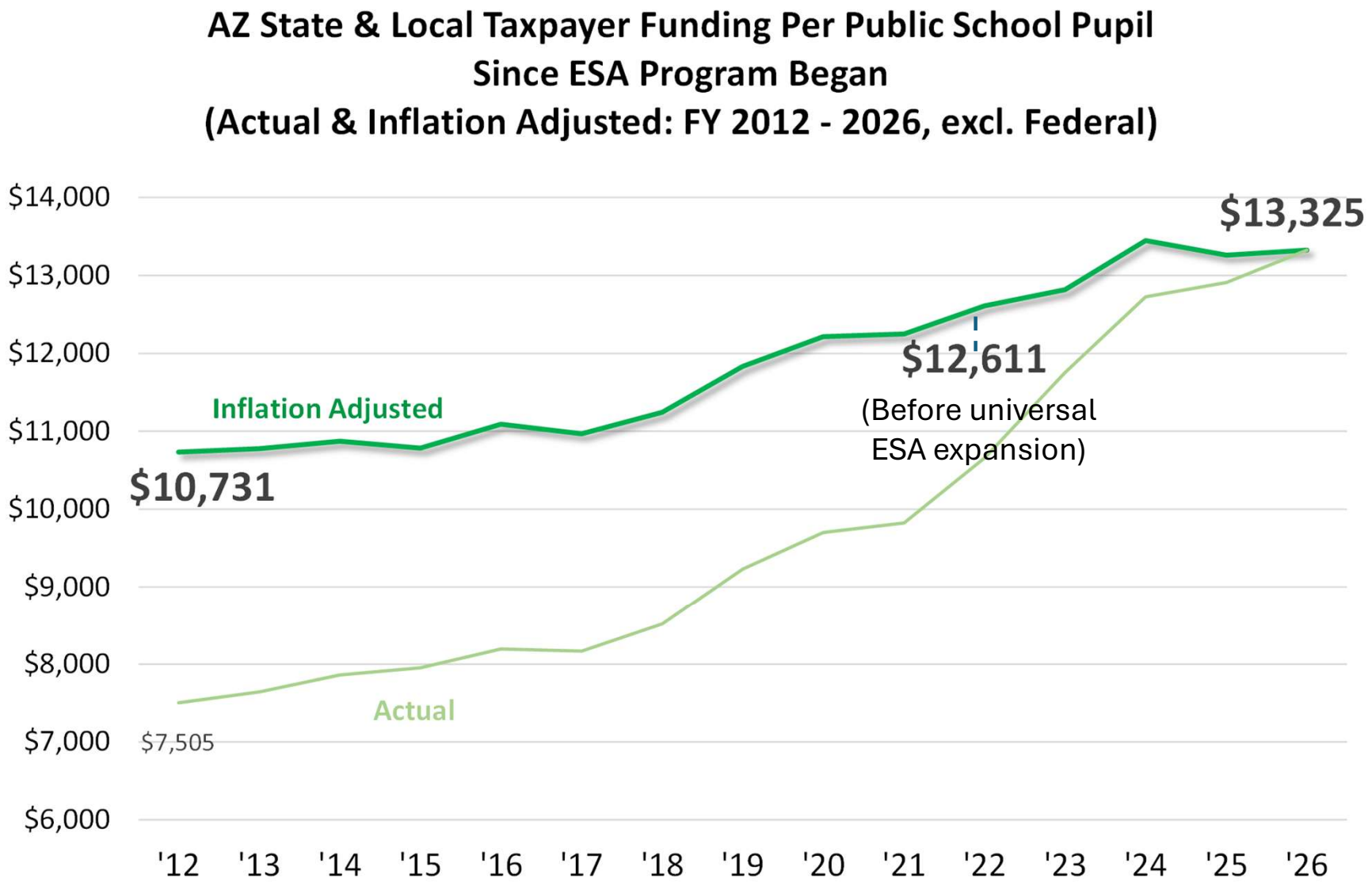
- “ESAs are defunding public schools”
- “ESAs are bankrupting the state”
- “ESAs are emptying schools & causing closures
- “ESAs help the rich go to expensive private schools”
- “ESAs discriminate / don’t serve disadvantaged students”
- “ESAs are unaccountable and full of fraud”

Total state & local funding for AZ public schools has increased over $2.5 billion since universal ESA expansion



Public K-12 State & Local Funding Data Source: https://www.azjlbc.gov/units/allfunding.pdf; ESA funding data as reported by JLBC and ADE

State/local funding for AZ public schools is more than $500 higher per student than it was before the universal ESA expansion, even adjusted for inflation



"State only" funding is also up $500 per pupil from FY 2022 – FY 2026, adjusted for inflation, per JLBC

Source: JLBC All Funding tables: "State and Local," funding totals. Adjusted for inflation by Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI

Are ESAs Bankrupting the State?



In 2022-2023 (the first year with full ESA expansion), the state of Arizona posted a $2 billion *surplus*—even *after* accounting for the enrollment surge that occurred in the ESA program

In 2023-2024, even as total ESA awards exceeded projections and reached over 75,000 students, corresponding public school enrollment declines led the total cost of Arizona's education funding formula to actually *decline* relative to the year's initial budget projections

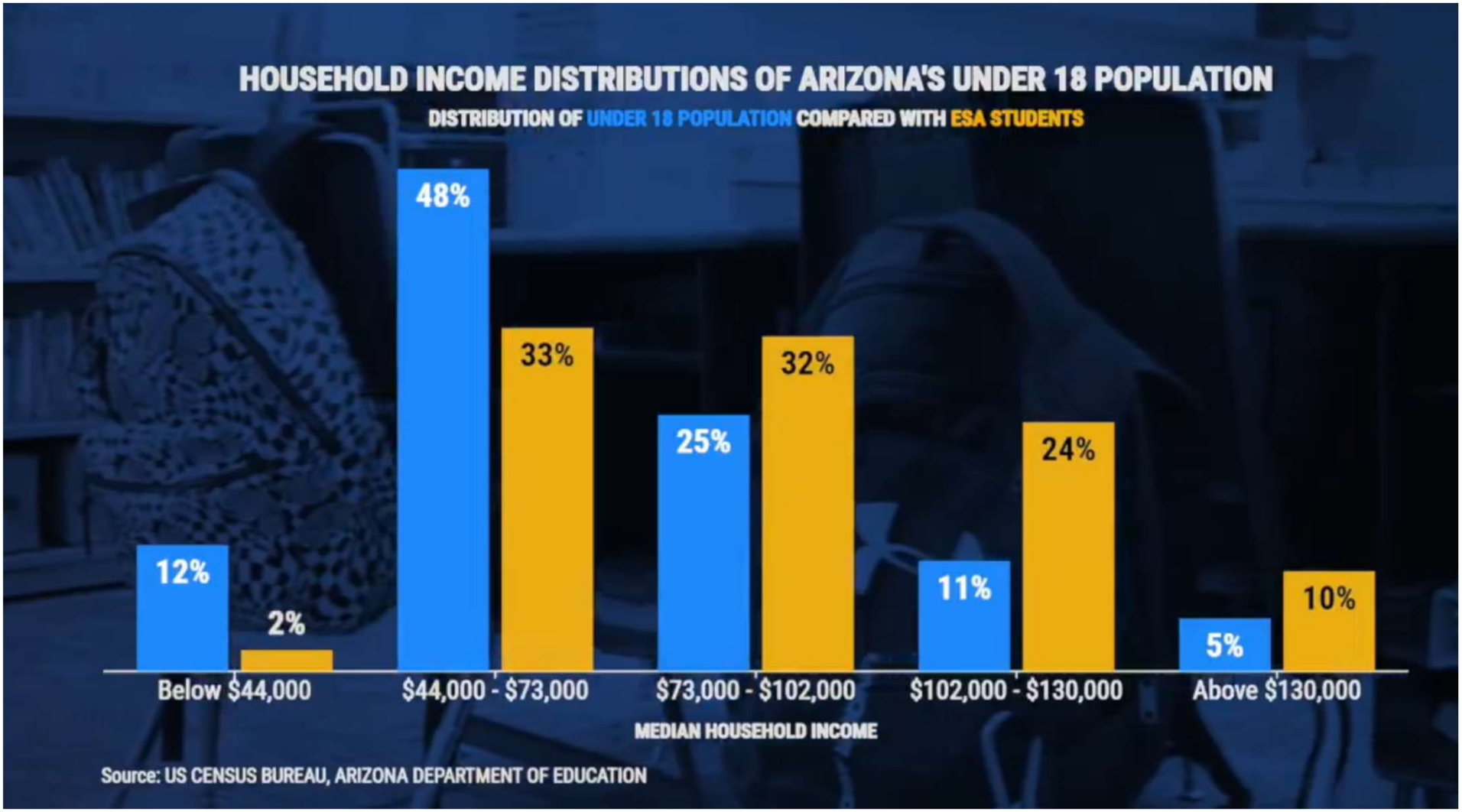
Arizona did experience an overall state budget deficit in 2023-2024, yet this was *in spite* of—not because of—the net savings generated by its education system (ESAs included). As the state's nonpartisan budget analysts concluded in August 2024, total ESA awards did end up $92 million above the forecasted budget levels, but at the same time, the costs associated with public charter and district school enrollment dropped by an even larger figure: $93 million.

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/arizonas-universal-esa-program-a-history-of-surplus-savings-media-misinformation/

ESAs Paying for Wealthy Families?

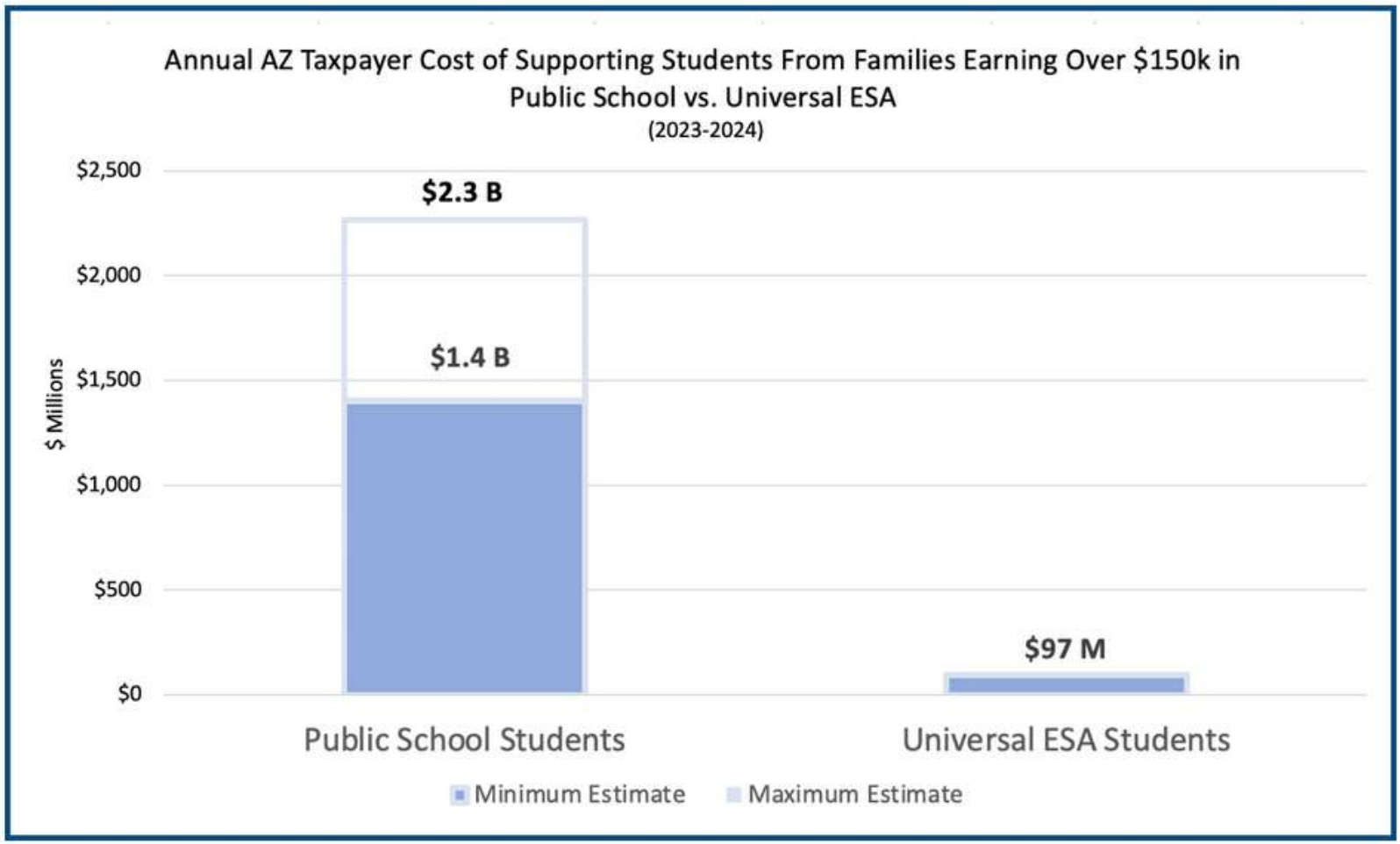
- “So when you average all of this together, Arizona’s kids live in zip codes making about $82,000.
- “ESA student households, meanwhile, average about $90,000. Definitely better off, but not really wealthy.”

--Garrett Archer, ABC15



https://x.com/Garrett_Archer/status/1974216420855554489

- Taxpayers spend $1-2 BILLION+ a year on AZ public school students whose families earn over $150k
- 10x more than on similar universal ESA students who were already in private / homeschool

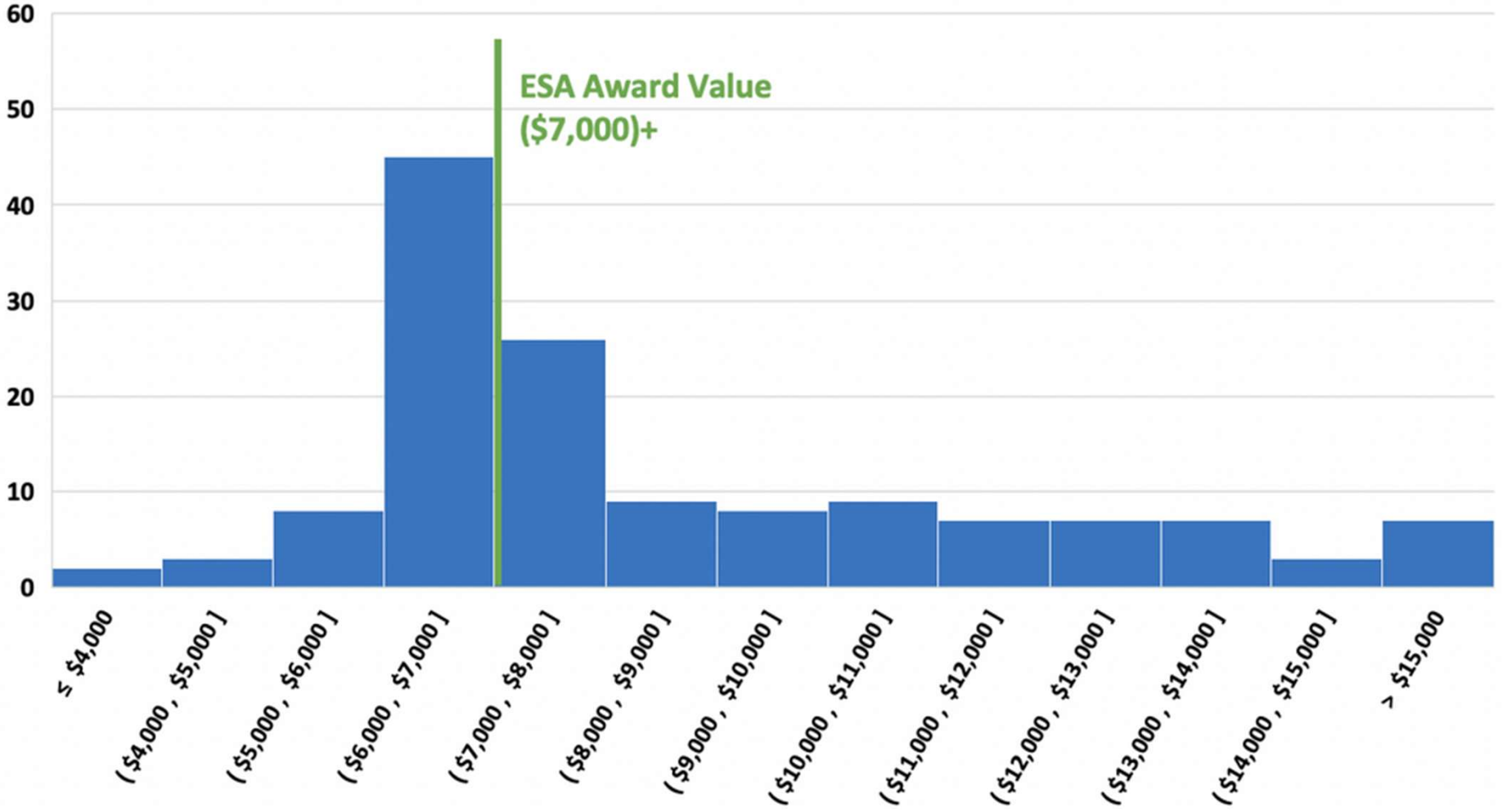


https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/the-anti-esa-double-standard/

Figure 2

Arizona Private Elementary School Tuition / Fees (2023-24)

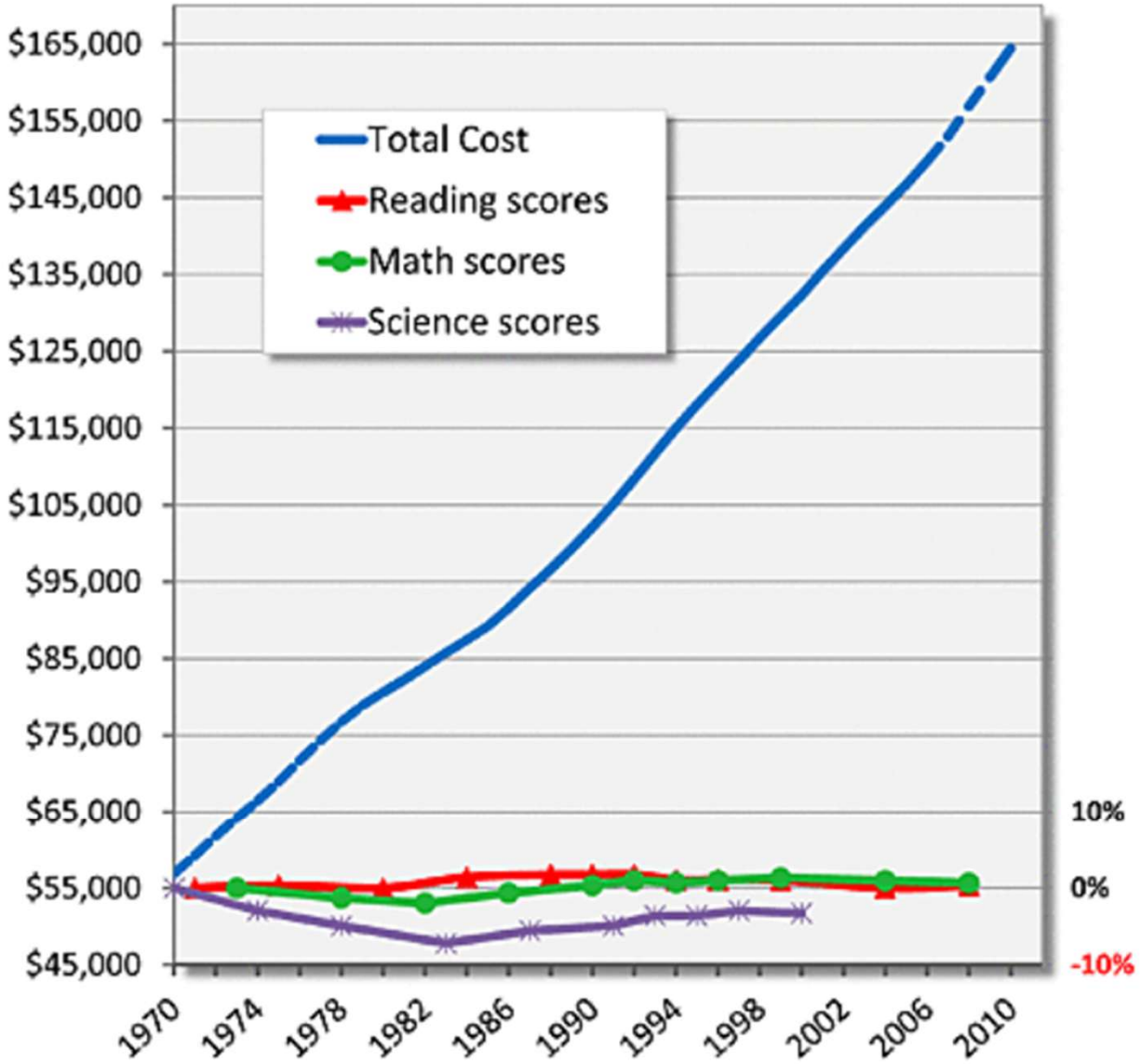
# of Schools in Each Tuition Price Range



https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/

Academic Accountability?

Trends in inflation-adjusted cost of a complete K-12 public education ($ scale), and achievement of 17-Year-Olds (% scale)



Cato Institute

"Total cost" is the whole amount spent on the K-12 education of a student graduating in the given year.

Data sources
(test scores): NAEP, *Long Term Trends* reports, U.S. Department of Education
(cost): *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*, Table 191, U.S. DOE, CPI adjusted to constant 2012 $. Missing values linearly interpolated or extrapolated.

Prepared Sept. 2012 by:
Andrew J. Coulson, Director, Cato Institute Center for Educational Freedom

https://www.cato.org/blog/public-school-spending-theres-chart

Progress in K-12?

"Average reading and mathematics achievement for 17-year-olds did not change significantly between the early 1970s and 2012 or between 2008 and 2012."

--U.S. Dept of Education

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cnj.pdf

The White – Black score gap narrowed 27 points since 1971.

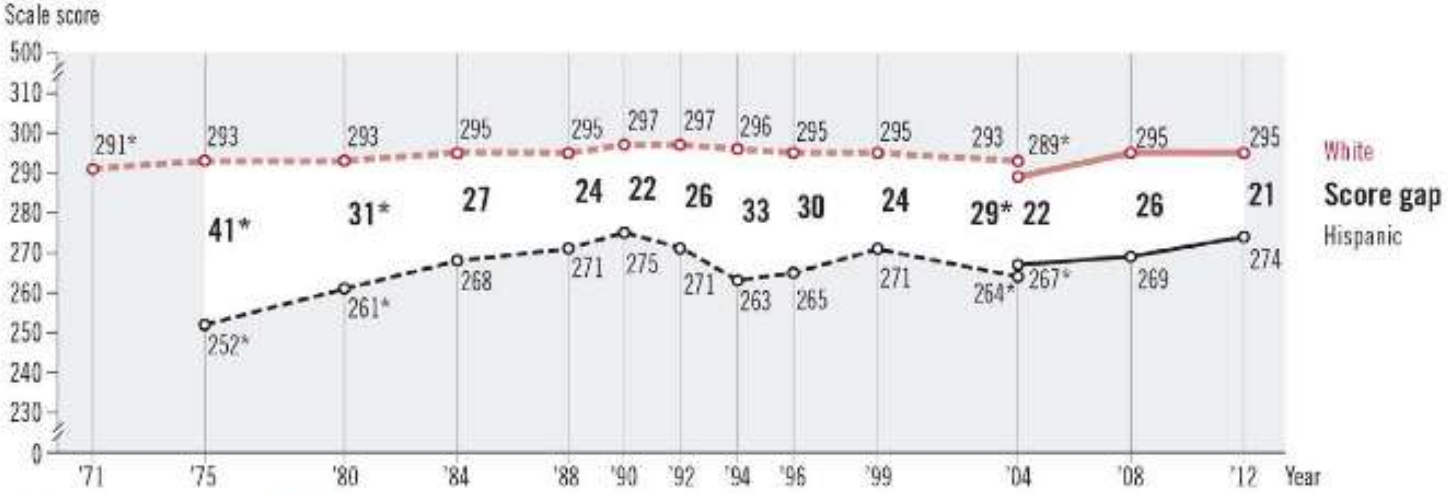
Figure 11. Trend in NAEP reading average scores and score gaps for White and Black 17-year-old students



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2012.
NOTE: Black includes African American. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Score gaps are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scores.

The White – Hispanic score gap narrowed about 20 points since 1975.

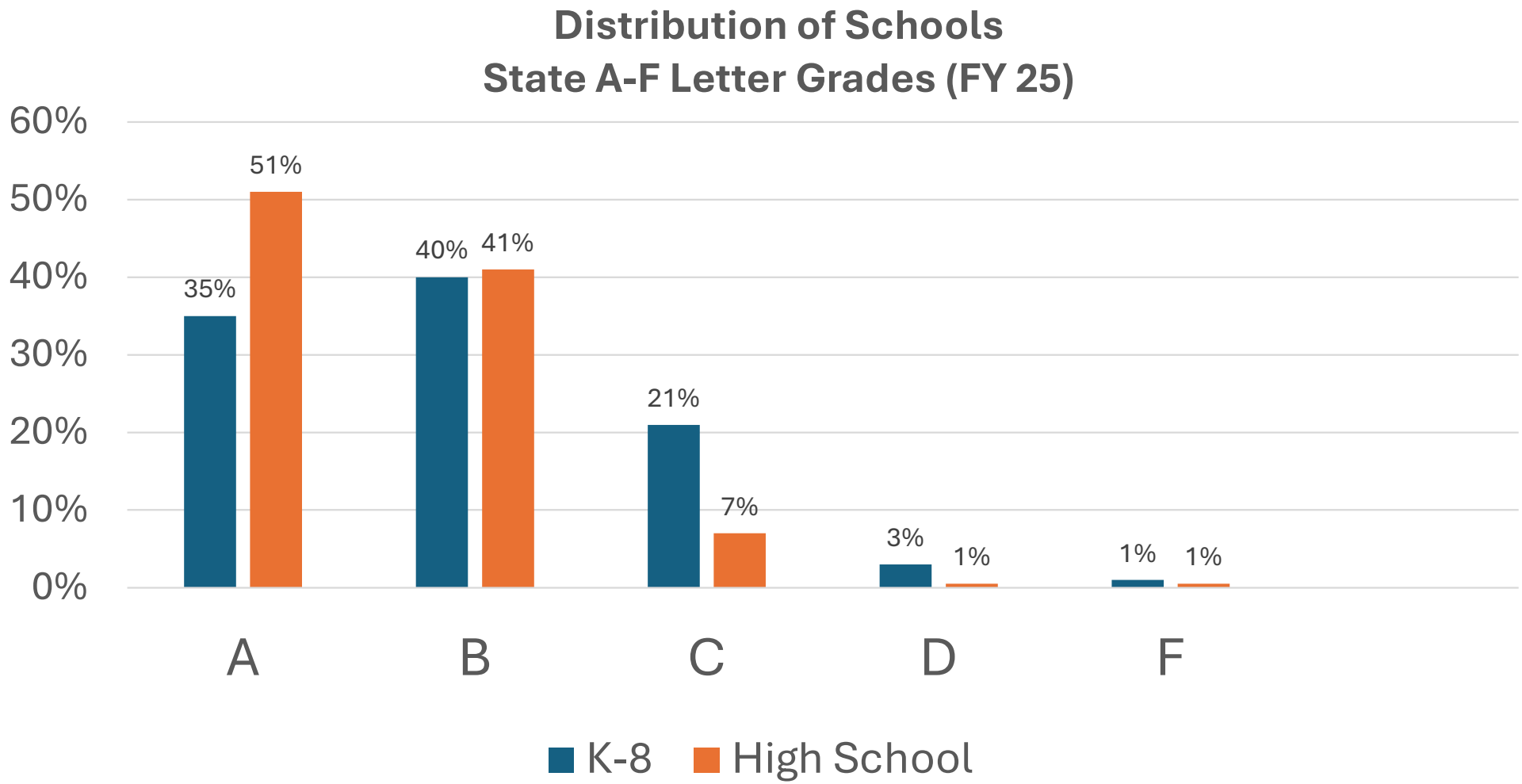
Figure 12. Trend in NAEP reading average scores and score gaps for White and Hispanic 17-year-old students



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2012.
NOTE: White excludes students of Hispanic origin. Hispanic includes Latino. Results are not available for Hispanic students in 1971 because Hispanic was not reported as a separate category at that time. Score gaps are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scores.

https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/main2012/pdf/2013456.pdf

Accountability in AZ Public Schools:

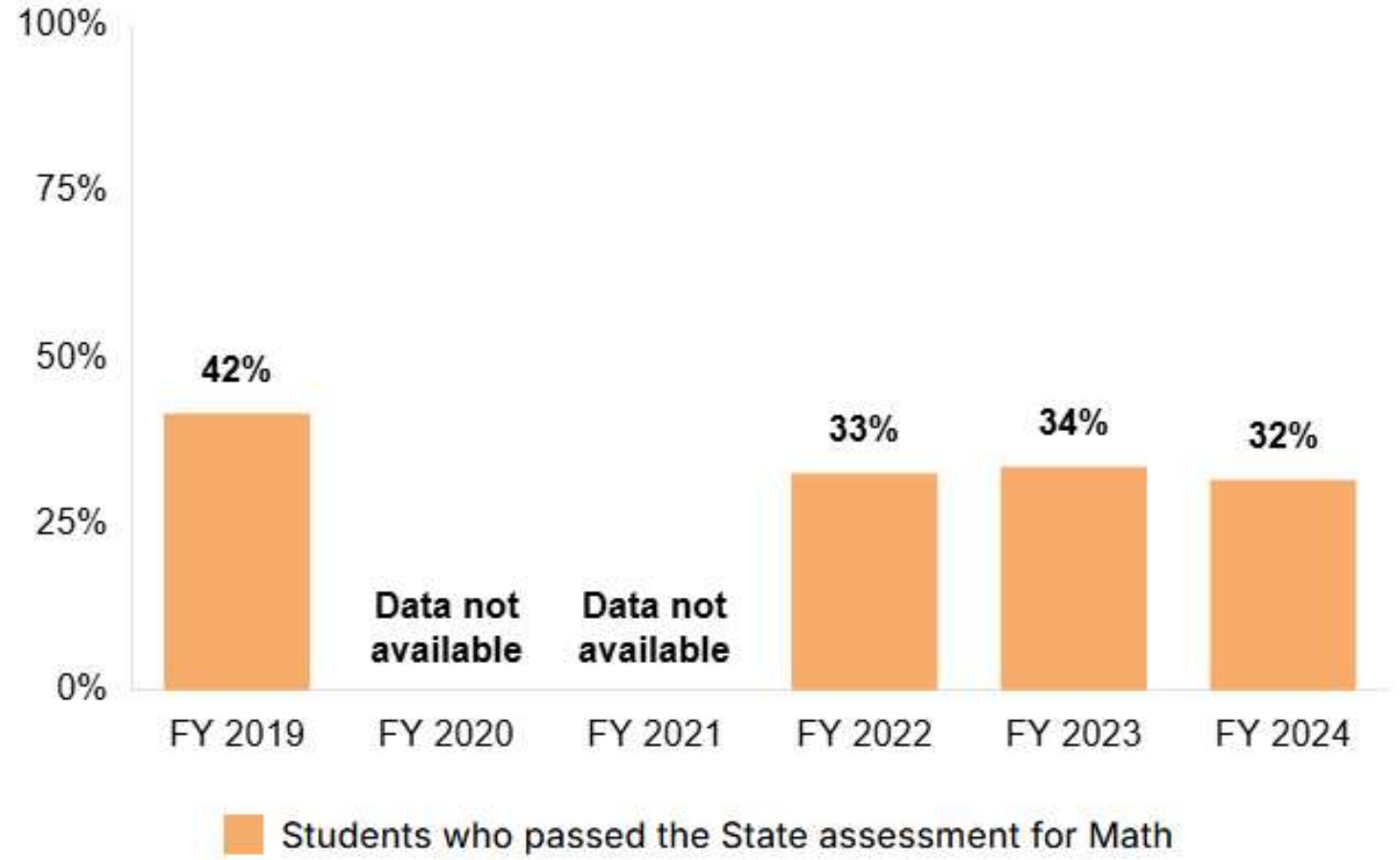


https://azsbe.az.gov/schools/a-f-school-letter-grades

State's student achievement since FY 2019

View the percentage of students who passed State assessments for:

Math



https://sdspending.azauditor.gov/State

ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS
ASU ◆ NAU ◆ UA

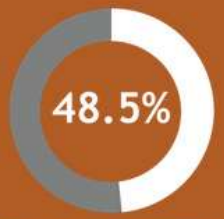
Arizona High School Report Card

This report card provides Arizona graduates' college performance statistics by public high school. The interactive report displays several key postsecondary performance indicators by high school.

Statewide



2023 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE



2- AND 4-YEAR ENROLLMENT RATE OF 2023 HS GRADS



2- AND 4-YEAR COMPLETION RATE OF 2018 HS GRADS



4-YEAR DEGREE COMPLETION RATE OF 2018 HS GRADS

School Name *(click name for more detail)*	High School Graduation Rate	College Enrollment Rate	2- and 4-Year College Completion	4-Year College Completion
Arcadia High School	93.9%	68.8%	45.9%	44.4%
Chaparral High School	95.7%	82.6%	59.3%	57.8%
Coronado High School	86.4%	42.0%	10.5%	8.0%
Desert Mountain High School	93.5%	79.7%	64.6%	62.0%
Saguaro High School	94.0%	70.4%	36.9%	34.0%
Scottsdale Online Learning	63.3%	47.5%	31.8%	31.8%

"Note: Data for this High School Report Card comes from the Arizona Department of Education and the National Student Clearinghouse"

“Common-Sense Guardrails?”

ESA program serves 95K+ students & processes millions of purchases a year. Like any program, there are some who try to break the law.



Craig Harris
@CraigHarrisNews

A @12News EXCLUSIVE:

ESA home/private school parents used education tax dollars on diamond rings, Kenmore appliances, and even lingerie.

They also bought 200 Apple iPhones, 50 smart TVs, and dozens of gift cards up to $500 each.

Watch our exclusive at 4 and 6 p.m. on @12news

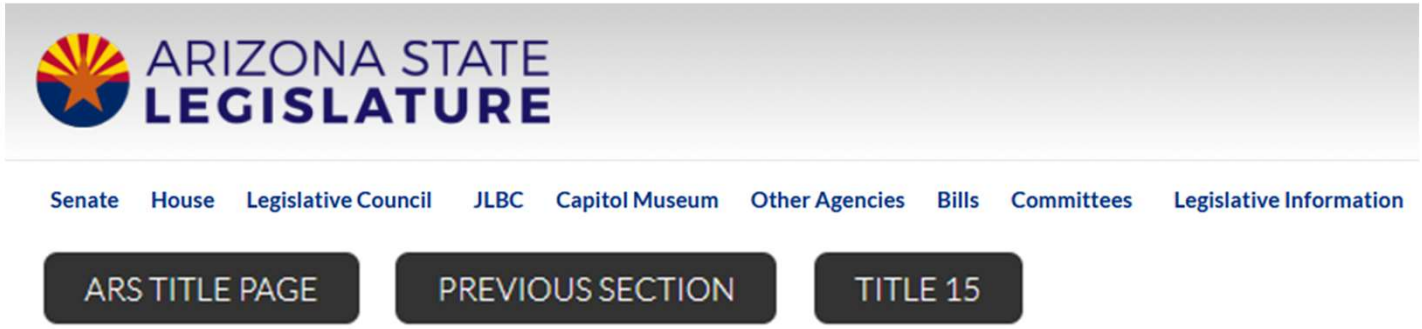
3:00 PM · Aug 18, 2025 · **50.2K** Views

68 318 561 50

Every one of these flagged purchases is already illegal under the Arizona ESA program

https://x.com/CraigHarrisNews/status/1957563349794803860

Arizona state law already limits ESA purchases to allowable educational expenses:



15-2402. Arizona empowerment scholarship accounts; funds

B. To enroll a qualified student for an Arizona empowerment scholarship account, the parent of the qualified student must sign an agreement to do all of the following:...

4. Use monies deposited in the qualified student's Arizona empowerment scholarship account **only for the following expenses** of the qualified student:...

(a) Tuition or fees at a qualified school...

(e) Curricula and supplementary materials.

(ii) **Does not include** entertainment and other primarily noneducational devices, including **televisions, telephones, video game consoles** and accessories, and home theatre and audio equipment

In accordance with A.R.S. §15-2402, the following categories are prohibited.

- Amazon Prime fees (or similar fees)
- Amusement park, theme park, and waterpark tickets
- Assembly or installation fees
- Backpacks, lunch boxes, and water bottles
- BBQ grills, smokers, and fixed fire pits
- Bedding
- Bounce houses or water slides
- Cancellation fees
- Children's car seats
- Clothing (separate from uniform requirements)
- Commercial/industrial/professional-grade items and appliances including freeze-dryers, espresso machines, dehydrators, etc.
- Consultation fees
- Day care fees
- Dining
- Dog training
- Food (including animal feed/food)
- Footwear
- Fuel, oil, and chemicals (except chemicals required by educational curricula, such as science curricula)
- Fundraising fees
- Gift cards of any kind
- Greenhouse with footprint larger than 100 sq. ft.
- Home furnishings and fixtures (i.e. wall art, floor lamps, garage storage, lockers, cabinets, nightstands, vanity desk, door mats, etc.)
- Home improvement items (wood, piping, irrigation, water filtration, concrete, water pumps, etc.)
- Hotel and lodging
- Household cleaning supplies

- Inappropriate explicit material
- Jewelry and precious metals
- Land/real property
- Large appliances (such as stoves, refrigerators, freezers, microwaves, ice machines, and similar appliances)
- Large chicken coops and runs (anything above 12 chickens would not be allowed)
- Late payment fees
- Lawn and landscaping equipment
- Live animals (except for life-cycle vouchers for educational purposes)
- Medical services, devices, and supplies (except those supplies required by educational curricula)
- Medications, vitamins, and supplements
- Motorized go-karts, motorized scooters, multi-person kayaks
- Motorized vehicles
- Non-educational fees charged by schools and service providers for parking passes, yearbooks, picture day packages, caps and gowns, spirit day participation, school fundraising requirements, parent teacher association participation, and other similar fees
- Outdoor shade structures
- Parent training courses (unless required for a student with special needs – must be a documented need by the training/course)
- Pizza ovens
- Primarily noneducational items, devices, materials, and supplies
- Ready-to-eat subscription boxes
- Returned payment fees
- Smartwatches with cellular service
- Solar panels or systems
- Swimming pools, saunas, and ponds
- Trailers (of any kind)
- Trampolines greater than 10 ft in diameter
- Travel costs for teacher or tutors
- Weapons and ammunition, including BB guns, airsoft guns, and paintball guns. (Archery bows with a draw weight less than 35 lbs. are allowable as part of archery instruction)

- Receipts / invoices required for every ESA purchase
- All purchases subject to risk-based auditing

Receipts must include

- Vendor name, address, and contact information (phone or email)
- Receipt date
- Receipt number (or transaction number, order number, reference number, authorization number, etc.)
- Itemized and total amount charged
- Itemized list and description of items or services purchased

Debit card and reimbursement receipt submission deadlines

Debit Card documentation, including purchase receipts, invoices marked paid, service provider's accreditation or credential, curriculum, etc., must be uploaded into the ClassWallet platform by the end of the month after the end of each quarter. Please refer

https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2025/06/ESA%202025-2026%20Handbook.pdf

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Parents | Educators & Administrators | Programs | About ADE | Data & Systems | ADEConnect

Home / Office of Communications / Office of Communications Blog / ADE Corrects False Claim regarding alleged 20% inap

ADE Corrects False Claim regarding alleged 20% inappropriate ESA expenditures

THU, MAR 12 2026

About 2% of purchases are unallowable expenses and only 0.3% represent fraud or egregious purchases

PHOENIX – Following some outrageous and reckless news reports of widespread purchasing fraud in Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account program, ADE is releasing results of a statistical analysis, recently conducted by a Stanford PhD, to set the record straight.

Superintendent Horne said:

About 2.0% of dollars spent by ESA account holders is for items that are unallowable under program rules, according to a precise study completed by a Stanford PhD.

In addition, **actual fraud or egregious purchases are at 0.3%, according to the same study.**

This is far below the rate of misuse at a variety of programs such as Medicaid (7.4%), food stamps (9.3%), and unemployment insurance (14.4%).

https://www.azed.gov/communications/ade-corrects-false-claim-regarding-alleged-20-inappropriate-esa-expenditures

Meanwhile, school districts resist disclosing transaction level data, even to state officials

NEWS RELEASE

Arizona House of Representatives
Representative Matt Gress (R-4)
1700 West Washington • Phoenix, Arizona • 85007

Thursday, September 25, 2025
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tolleson Union High School District Refuses Lawmakers' Request for Financial Transaction Records, Blocking Transparency

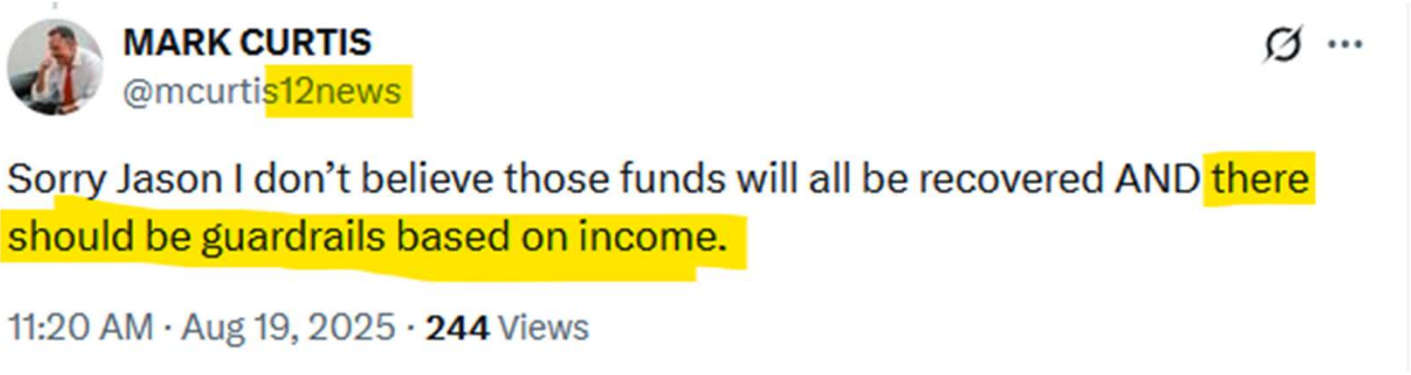
STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – For the first time, a public school district is refusing the Arizona Legislature's request for access to basic financial records.

After a July 21 Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) hearing on district finances, Co-Chairman Matt Gress requested two years of financial transaction records, including all purchase orders. That request was submitted on August 26.

Instead of complying, the district has refused to provide electronic records and is demanding more than $26,000 in fees—charges it admits are intended to discourage requests. State law allows fees only for the actual cost of copying or mailing records, not for producing electronic files—and certainly not to deter oversight. Representative Gress sent a follow-up letter to clarify his records request on September 17, but his requests have been met with hostility.

https://www.azleg.gov/press/house/57LEG/1R/250925Gress.pdf

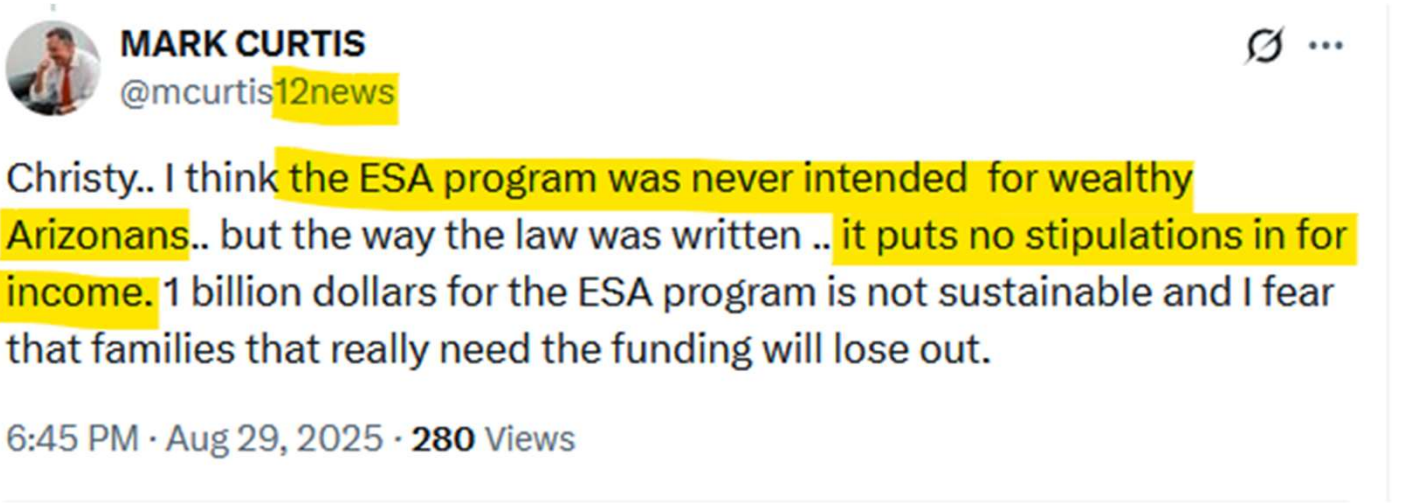
ESA opponents admit that by new “Guardrails,” they mean something completely different: blocking families from accessing ESAs entirely



MARK CURTIS
@mcurtis12news

Sorry Jason I don’t believe those funds will all be recovered AND there should be guardrails based on income.

11:20 AM · Aug 19, 2025 · **244** Views



MARK CURTIS
@mcurtis12news

Christy.. I think the ESA program was never intended for wealthy Arizonans.. but the way the law was written .. it puts no stipulations in for income. 1 billion dollars for the ESA program is not sustainable and I fear that families that really need the funding will lose out.

6:45 PM · Aug 29, 2025 · **280** Views

https://x.com/mcurtis12news/status/1961606106007933146; https://x.com/mcurtis12news/status/1957870255629619294

The Left's Proposals for more "Accountability" Simply Punish Parents with Unserious and Embarrassing Bureaucratic Red Tape



"AG Mayes conjured up an illegal new rule requiring that to qualify for reimbursement, each of those purchases must be explicitly called for in a curriculum.

For Velia and Rosemary, that meant no pencils, no erasers, no poster of the periodic table of elements, no flashcards, and no classic educational books like "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?"—unless they could sink hours into tracking down or coming up with various "curricula" that explicitly call for each and every book title or material's use."

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/blocking-pencils-and-books-homeschool-moms-sue-to-protect-esa-freedom/

The Left's Proposals for more "Accountability" Simply Punish Parents with Unserious and Embarrassing Bureaucratic Red Tape

KRIS MAYES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

OFFICE OF THE ARIZONA ATTORNEY GENERAL
SOLICITOR GENERAL'S OFFICE
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY UNIT

Kathryn Boughton
Assistant Attorney General
(602) 542-3333

"when an item is not listed on a curriculum, the parent must submit the underlying curriculum to ADE along with a reasonable explanation of how the item is connected to the curriculum

A simple explanation is likely sufficient for ADE to verify the curriculum connection in the first example (e.g., 'These pencils support my student's second-grade math curriculum because they will allow him to practice writing out fractions.')"

Office of the Arizona Attorney General, Correspondence related to Public Monies Investigation No. PM2024-0008, November 14, 2024

Fraud, Waste, and Misspending **IS** a big problem…

…in AZ Public Schools

Dysart Schools defends $500K Vegas trip as students lose bus service

By Derek Staahl

Published: Jul. 24, 2025

Researcher doubts effectiveness of Caesars Palace conference



Financial Investigation Report

Yuma Elementary School District—Criminal Indictment

ARIZONA Auditor General
Making a Positive Difference

Report 25-403
October 2025

Our investigation resulted in a former human resources specialist's criminal indictment on 9 felony counts related to misuse of public monies, theft, fraudulent schemes and practices, and forgery.

Summary of Ms. Brena's alleged embezzlement schemes totaling $86,388
November 2021 through October 2022

From November 2021 through May 2022, Ms. Brena allegedly used a District p-card and the District's Sam's Club and Walmart credit cards for her personal purchases totaling $12,319. Ms. Brena used these 3 cards to pay her personal Sam's Club membership renewal fee and to purchase 65 gift and prepaid debit cards in increments of $100, $200, and $500. Ms. Brena

Additionally, District officials failed to properly oversee Ms. Brena's use of a District p-card and 2 District credit cards. District officials failed to provide Ms. Brena with formal p-card and credit card training, did not ensure she signed card-user agreements, and allowed Ms. Brena to make p-card purchases even though she was not an authorized cardholder. District officials also failed to adequately review Ms. Brena's p-card and credit card receipts to ensure her purchases were for authorized District purposes. For example, although District management questioned Ms. Brena about her December 2021 $1,010 Walmart prepaid debit card purchase and her $49 personal Sam's Club membership renewal a few months later, the District failed to adequately follow up on the purchases and never restricted Ms. Brena's credit card use.

https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/2025-10/25-403_Report.pdf



No, it wasn't a timeshare presentation. It was a glitzy conference held earlier this month and focused on implementing the racially discriminatory tenets of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) in schools. Public records obtained by the Goldwater Institute reveal that one Phoenix public school district sent officials to attend, all on the taxpayers' dime—to the tune of $4,000 per person.

Indeed, members of the Creighton Elementary School District Governing Board and Administrative Team journeyed to Napa, Calif., for the three-day 4th Annual California Association of Black School Educators Institute, held between July 14 and July 17 at The Meritage Resort and Spa, where the current room rate—in the off season— is around $400 per night. Conference offerings, meanwhile, included a five-hour "Chairman's Soiree" at a local winery, where participants were bussed in to enjoy wine and haute cuisine.

https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/taxpayer-funded-wine-tastings-az-school-leaders-splurge-for-dei-conference-at-5-star-napa-resort/

Performance Audit

Western Maricopa Education Center

Report 2 of 2

ARIZONA Auditor General
Making a Positive Difference

Report 25-208
September 2025

- District spent $155,000 on Phoenix Raceway sponsorship, which has not yielded intended benefits for students, appears wasteful, and may have violated the State's gift clause.

- District wasted more than $18,500 of public monies by paying more than necessary for membership dues and for staff to attend golf tournaments and an awards dinner, reducing monies available for other District priorities.

https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/2025-09/25-208_Report.pdf

Baboquivari Unified School District

District failed to maintain transportation records, limiting the scope of our review; spent nearly $500,000 on travel, including a substantial amount of travel that was unnecessary and potentially wasteful; limited public access to some Board meetings; operated schools below capacity; and failed to comply with requirements to protect students and safeguard public monies and sensitive computerized data

ARIZONA
AUDITOR GENERAL

July 2024
Report 24-210

District spent approximately $342,000 sending staff to a 2-day out-of-State professional development conference and did not ensure expenditures were approved, supported, and in accordance with the State Constitution's gift clause

District did not comply with SAAM requirements and exceeded maximum amounts for lodging and meals, resulting in higher travel costs and overpayments to District staff and Board members

Extensive travel wastes District resources and may impact District administrators' effectiveness given the time they spent away from the District

https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/2024-07/24-210_Report.pdf



EDUCATION | FEATURED

The Hidden Costs of Arizona's School Superintendents

September 22, 2025

by CHRISTOPHER THOMAS

- While superintendent base salaries average approximately $215,000 a year, taxpayers are charged up to $490,000 per superintendent after accounting for other lucrative perks.
- Taxpayers pay up to $1,250 per month for some superintendents to receive monthly "car allowances," a price large enough to lease a Corvette or purchase a brand-new vehicle roughly every 2-3 years.
- Dozens of districts are double charging taxpayers for superintendents' retirement packages, funding private retirement accounts *on top of* their already generous state pension benefits. The Phoenix Union High School District, for example, spends over $45,000 per year on employer contributions to a personal retirement account for the superintendent, in addition to what taxpayers already spend for her public pension.

April 12, 2022

MARKETPLACE
Search For & Place Classifieds

EDUCATION

Arizona auditor general flags an extra $1.7 million paid to Buckeye Elementary district superintendent



That "may have been a gift of public monies in violation of Arizona's Constitution," the report said. The findings were submitted for review to the Arizona Attorney General's Office by the auditor general.

https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2022/04/12/buckeye-schools-chief-kristi-wilson-paid-extra-1-7-million-report-says/7300367001/

October 9, 2025

Tolleson school district moves forward with $80M stadium amid audit over finances



TOLLESON, Ariz. — A state committee has ordered an audit of the Tolleson Union High School District following serious claims of financial mismanagement. But the investigation hasn't stopped the district from moving forward with plans for a multi-million-dollar domed football stadium.

Just a day after the audit was ordered, Superintendent Jeremy Calles confirmed the district still plans to build an $80 million domed football stadium, with a target opening in 2028. The funding comes from last year's voter-approved $125 million school improvement bond, but nowhere on the bond explicitly stated the money would go toward those plans.

https://www.12news.com/article/news/education/tolleson-school-district-moves-forward-with-new-stadium-amid-audit-over-finance/75-945900dd-e480-4bbb-a472-4f6bba9d2e42

October 15, 2025

Superintendent Salary requests became a test of transparency

One school district asked for $3761, then agreed to waive fees for 8 pages of public records

Beginning in late April, the ABC15 investigators contacted school districts across Arizona, requesting three items: the most recent superintendent contract, a document breaking down the superintendent's total compensation, and names and salaries of all school employees earning more than $100,000 annually.

However, the ABC15's investigation uncovered numerous hurdles that slowed access to information. Many districts required requests to be resubmitted on specific paper forms, while others proposed charges far exceeding standard per-page fees.

https://www.abc15.com/news/local-news/investigations/superintendent-salary-requests-became-a-test-of-transparency

Overspending chaos plunges Isaac School District into state receivership, threatens school closures

Isaac Elementary School District was placed under a state receivership after it was revealed leaders overspent by millions of dollars.

January 16, 2025

https://www.12news.com/article/news/local/valley/the-state-has-never-seen-anything-like-it-superintendent-of-public-instruction-speaks-out-about-financial-crisis-at-phoenix-school-district/75-e5bdaba4-1aed-4b34-9e1b-9dd0653501d1

PHOENIX (AZFamily) — The Isaac Elementary School District is under fire and under the microscope after accusations of overspending nearly $30 million and falsifying financial records came to light.

"They lied to us," said Maricopa County Treasurer John Allen during an Arizona School Board of Education meeting on Jan. 14.

He is calling this one of the biggest school screw-ups in state history.

Isaac has been on the Arizona Auditor General's radar for the past five years, consistently identified as at-risk of financial trouble.

Feb. 4, 2025

https://www.azfamily.com/2025/02/04/what-went-wrong-phoenixs-troubled-isaac-elementary-school-district/

Food Stamp “error rate” to cost AZ taxpayers $200 million per year

“our estimate is based on Arizona maintaining its current error rate of 8.8%. At that level, we estimate that the state cost will be $185.0 million on an annual basis, but the cost would be $138.7 million in FY 2028 since the provision does not become effective until October 2027…

…This estimate assumes that SNAP benefits in Arizona will equal $1.85 billion by FFY 2028”

--Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee

https://www.azjlbc.gov/revenues/2025federalbudgetreconciliationbill-stateimpact0918.pdf

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Arizona students learning with Legos isn't a scandal. We can see their success

Opinion: It's absurd for so-called 'education advocates' to be against Lego. Arizona children need more play-based learning, not less.

Bethany Miller opinion contributor

Updated July 1, 2024, 6:45 a.m. MT

Opponents of education innovation attempted to manufacture a scandal recently, practically hyperventilating over parent-purchased Lego brick sets for Arizona children learning through Empowerment Scholarships Accounts (ESA).

But, as we have come to expect, activists opposed to educational freedom resorted to hyperbole and half-truths to make their case, which turns out to be not much of a case at all.

Both public schools and parents agree that Lego bricks work.

Public schools have purchased expensive Lego sets marketed directly to them for more than half a century.

The company, which raked in $9.65 billion in 2023 in revenue, sells classroom packs for prices ranging from $3,000 to $8,000 to thousands of public school districts across the country.