

Policy Brief

August 2010



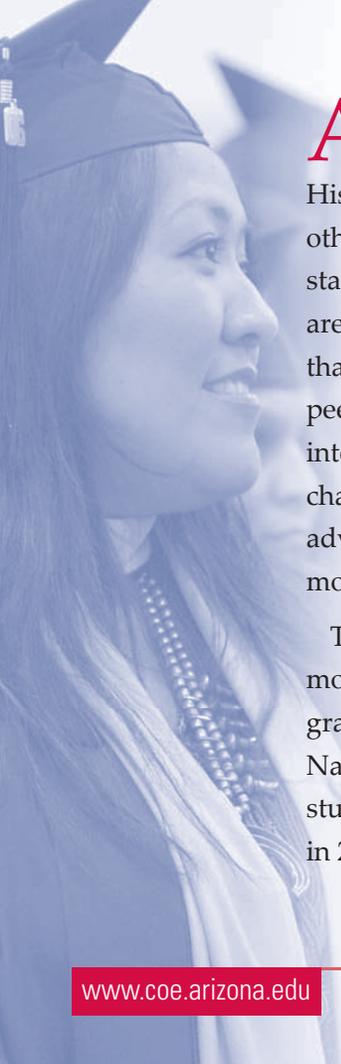
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Seeking Educational Equality and Equity in Arizona:

A Critical Imperative Affecting the Future of All Arizonans



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Arizona's demographics are changing, and have been for years. These changes create a new setting for education in our state that we must consider if we are to move forward together. Hispanics constitute about 30 percent of the total state population, but their children, along with other "minority" students, are now the majority in all the major urban school districts in the state, a reality that is also true for the nation. Hispanic children in Arizona, 89 percent of whom are U.S.-born citizens, are mostly from low-income or working-class households, a social status that influences the schooling they receive. In comparison to the schooling their higher-income peers receive, instruction for working-class students is more likely rote, drill, and practice, and intellectually reduced or narrow. This narrowed schooling is not only true regarding content, it also characterizes their literacy and mathematics classes, which are essential tools for learning and for advancement into higher education. Clearly, class and race (or ethnicity, in this instance) remain the most potent sources of persisting educational inequality and inequity.

The impact of inequality and inequity is evident across the educational pipeline. In the U.S., just more than one half (52) of every 100 Hispanic (or Latino) students who start elementary school will graduate from high school compared to 84 of 100 white students. This number is even lower for Native American students (47). Only seven of 100 Native and 10 of 100 Hispanic elementary-school students will earn a bachelor's degree compared to 26 of 100 white students. Astonishingly, only one in 250 Hispanic students who starts elementary school will earn a doctorate (*see Figure 1*).

The percentage of Hispanic (41 percent) and white (45 percent) children and youth in our K-12 schools across the state is nearly equal. The University of Arizona, Arizona State University, and Northern Arizona University combined confer more than 70 percent of their bachelor's degrees to whites, but only about 12 percent to Hispanics. Between 2010 and 2020, Arizona's population will grow from 6.7 million to 8.4 million, and most of this growth will be among the younger population. As a result, more than half of Arizona's high-school students (nearly 60 percent) will be from racial and ethnic groups with historically lower educational attainment rates. The relative exclusion of Hispanics from higher education across the nation, and in Arizona in particular, is both unacceptable and impractical. Exclusionary practices violate the deepest values of our democratic society and threaten the long-term economic viability of our state and our nation.

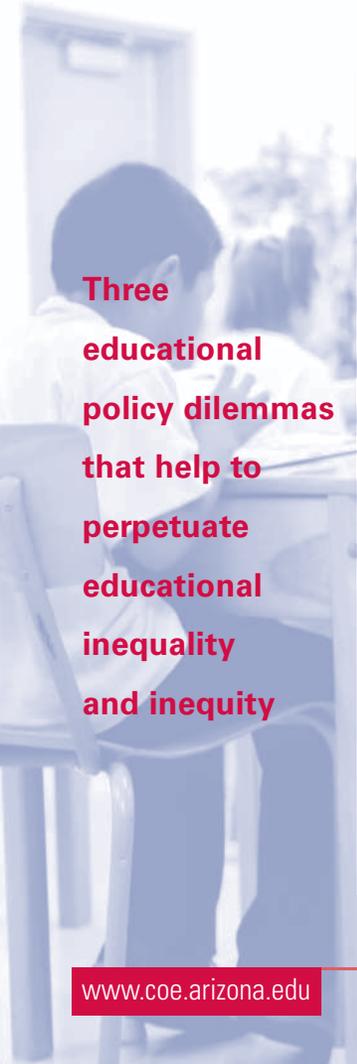
If the disparity in educating Hispanic and Native citizens continues, the economy of Arizona will suffer and the overall quality of life will drop for all citizens. To be nationally competitive by the end of this decade, the Arizona Board

of Regents has said that we need to increase the number of bachelor's degrees produced annually in the state from 19,100 in 2008 to 36,000 in 2020. Moreover, our population must be educated and prepared to work in industries that will move the economy of Arizona forward — new knowledge-based industries such as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, health care, utilities, and transportation research and infrastructure development. However, in order to attract these industries to our state, we must be able to provide them with a highly educated workforce.

The Educational Pipeline Challenge



Figure 1: Educational Attainment Patterns by Racial/Ethnic Background



**Three
educational
policy dilemmas
that help to
perpetuate
educational
inequality
and inequity**

POLICY DILEMMA 1: State mandates regarding the instruction of English language learners (ELLs)

In September 2007, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted the structured English immersion (SEI) model for all ELL students and required all school districts to implement the model one year later. The SEI program is designed to accelerate the learning of the English language with a goal of having ELLs become fluent or proficient in English in one year. Arizona law requires four hours of daily English language development (ELD) instruction for all ELL students. These four daily hours are known by most educators as the four-hour ELD block. A recent survey of ELL teachers in Arizona revealed several shortcomings with this four-hour ELD block, including the following:

- (1) It does not produce English fluency in one year**
- (2) It segregates ELL children from the rest of the (English-speaking) student body for prolonged amounts of time**
- (3) It significantly reduces the amount of time devoted to academic learning**

This legally mandated four-hour arrangement has become a major impediment to students' academic development.

www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

POLICY DILEMMA 2: Efforts of the legislature to dismantle programs for young children, including First Things First, the state’s comprehensive early childhood education initiative

Research indicates that high-quality early childhood classrooms and programs are key to closing the achievement gap. In 2006, Arizona voters passed Proposition 203, resulting in an 80-cent tax on tobacco products and the creation of First Things First. The tobacco-tax money funds high-quality early childhood health and education programs for all of Arizona’s children from birth through 5 years of age. For the first time in some children’s lives, they have access to ongoing health care, early childhood education programs, and other opportunities and experiences that foster development and learning. Efforts of Arizona’s elected officials to close down programs for young children clearly are misguided.

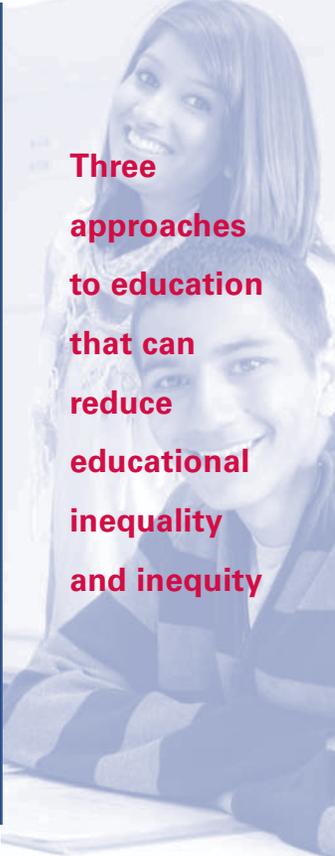
www.aztf.gov

POLICY DILEMMA 3: The manner in which the legislature has inserted itself into decisions about the curriculum in local schools

The law passed by the legislature, advocated by Arizona’s superintendent of public instruction, to ban all ethnic studies programs from public schools in Arizona violates the important tenet of local control of schools. These programs focus on the experiences and contributions of particular ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanic, African American, or Native American) and are not typically represented in the curriculum of other courses. The criticisms levied against these programs are unfounded and ignore findings from empirical data that document the value of these courses and programs for the students who enroll in them.

www.coe.arizona.edu/communications/in_the_news

To provide equity in education in the face of mounting diversity, schools must create a fundamentally new educational experience for low-income students and students of color. Their class status and race matter because they continue to be strong predictors of school success. They also should matter in the future, but for different reasons. We could ignore the fact that the class and racial background of our children predict poor academic outcomes, but education in our democracy must address class and race as they are experienced in our schools, colleges, and universities. We can build on students' interests, resources, and relationships to establish engaging educational experiences, all in the service of promoting their development as learners and as citizens of our state and country.



**Three
approaches
to education
that can
reduce
educational
inequality
and inequity**

APPROACH 1: The Arizona Assurance Program

Arizona Assurance is an investment in the future of our state. The access to the University of Arizona provided by this program dramatically affects Arizona Assurance Scholars' future earning power and quality of life. The program expands access to higher education by allowing students who come from low-income backgrounds (family income equal to or less than \$42,400) to earn a bachelor's degree in four years with little or no debt.

www.assurance.arizona.edu

APPROACH 2: Project SOAR

Project SOAR (Student Outreach, Access, and Resiliency) is an innovative service-learning program that offers UA undergraduate students the opportunity to mentor middle-school youth within the Tucson Unified and Sunnyside Unified School Districts while earning academic credit through the College of Education. It provides undergraduate students with an opportunity to have meaningful impact in the lives of Tucson youth. This mentorship experience allows students to be role models for middle-school students and give a younger generation an encouraging view of college life.

www.soar.web.arizona.edu

APPROACH 3: The Social Justice Education Project (SJEP)

A primary characteristic of this program is its embrace of students' home cultures and their intellectual capacities to bring social change to schools and communities. SJEP teaches students ethnographic (anthropological) research methods that include participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, photo documentary, and videography, which become tools for thinking about issues that matter to the students. The ultimate goal of SJEP is for students to use their research results as vehicles for action addressing the inequalities that Latina/o students experience in public schooling. The students' social milieus, including neighborhoods, schools, peers, and workplaces, become settings for study and critical analysis, as the students engage in research, especially in ethnographic-like inquiry on issues of equity in their communities and schools. The students then present their findings to their families and to school administrators.

www.socialjustice.bara.arizona.edu

We could ignore the fact that the class and racial background of our children predict poor academic outcomes, but education in our democracy must address class and race as they are experienced in our schools, colleges, and universities.

Our population must be educated and prepared to work in industries that will move the economy of Arizona forward — new knowledge-based industries such as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, health care, utilities, and transportation research and infrastructure development. However, in order to attract these industries to our state, we must be able to provide them with a highly educated workforce.



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