

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



# Arizona Education Guide

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A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



**Find Your Community**  
2026 EDITION

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

# Everything about school in Arizona.

This guide profiles **Arizona's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

## SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

# Education Overview

## EDUCATION IN ARIZONA

Arizona educates roughly 1.1 million public K–12 students across about 200 school districts — plus one of the largest charter-school sectors in the nation , where roughly one in five public-school students attend a charter. Public education is overseen by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) , the elected Superintendent of Public...

## WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 6 years old
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 16
- ✓ **Options** — District, charter, private, or homeschool
- ✓ **Delay option** — Homeschoolers may delay instruction to age 8

## PRE-K IN ARIZONA

Arizona does not offer a universal state prekindergarten program; publicly funded early education is targeted and varies by community. A key player is First Things First — a statewide early-childhood agency (funded largely by a tobacco tax) that supports quality early learning, preschool scholarships in some areas, and family programs....



## AT A GLANCE

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Compulsory | Ages 6–16      |
| Sector     | Big charters   |
| Testing    | AASA · ACT     |
| Diploma    | 22 cr + civics |
| Choice     | Universal ESA  |

## DISTRICTS, CHARTERS & OPEN ENROLLMENT

Arizona's public system combines about 200 school districts with a very large charter-school sector — Arizona has more charter students per capita than almost any state. The largest districts are concentrated in metro Phoenix and Tucson — Mesa , Chandler , Gilbert , Deer Valley , Tucson Unified , and others. Arizona also has broad open...

## PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN ARIZONA

- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Phoenix and Diocese of Tucson schools (such as Brophy College Preparatory, Xavier College Preparatory, and Salpointe Catholic)
- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Phoenix Country Day School , All Saints' Episcopal, and Green Fields
- ✓ **Other religious & Christian schools** — A wide range of Christian and faith-based options
- ✓ **Microschools & specialty schools** — Arizona has a booming microschool sector (many funded through ESAs), plus Montessori and Waldorf programs

**READ ARIZONA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE**  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# State Testing

## WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Arizona uses AASA (Arizona's Academic Standards Assessment) in grades 3–8 for ELA and math, the AzSCI science test, and the ACT in grade 11. Run by the Arizona Department of Education. Arizona also requires the Arizona Civics Test for graduation.

## WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **AASA (grades 3–8)** — English language arts and mathematics
- ✓ **AzSCI (Science)** — Science in grades 5, 8, and once in high school (grade 11)
- ✓ **ACT (grade 11)** — The statewide high-school test — a real, college-usable score
- ✓ **MSAA** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

## FORMAT & SUBJECTS

AASA and AzSCI are online ; the grade-11 ACT follows the national ACT format.

## IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate on AASA or the ACT. Arizona requires passing the Arizona Civics Test (based on the U.S. citizenship questions) to graduate, plus completing course and credit requirements set by the district.

## HOW IT'S SCORED

AASA reports performance levels (Minimally, Partially, Proficient, Highly Proficient); the grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.

## AT A GLANCE

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Grades 3–8        | AASA (ELA & Math)       |
| Science           | AzSCI gr 5, 8, 11       |
| High school       | ACT (grade 11)          |
| Civics            | AZ Civics Test required |
| Grad requirement? | No exit-exam gate       |
| Format            | Online                  |

## TESTING WINDOWS

AASA, AzSCI, and the ACT are given in a spring window set by each district.

## HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **ACT prep for grade 11** — Our ACT guide and free official ACT practice apply to the grade-11 test
- ✓ **AASA practice** — ADE provides practice tests matching the online format

## PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows and any questions.

## ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

**READ ARIZONA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE**  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# Graduation Requirements

## AT A GLANCE

Arizona requires a state minimum of 22 credits with no exit exam — but students must pass the civics test to graduate. Districts frequently require more than the state minimum.

## CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Arizona's 22-credit minimum includes 4 English, 4 math, 3 science, 3 social studies, 1 CTE/fine arts, and electives. Districts set the total and may require more.

## TESTING TO GRADUATE

No subject-matter exit exam. Arizona students take state assessments (like the AASA), but a passing academic score is not required to graduate. However, students must pass the civics test (see below).

## DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Arizona issues a standard diploma, with the State Seal of Arts and Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

## ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE offer accelerated paths; credit recovery helps students who fall behind.



## AT A GLANCE

|              |                      |
|--------------|----------------------|
| Credits      | 22 (state minimum)   |
| Exit exam?   | No                   |
| Required     | Civics test (60/100) |
| Districts    | Often require more   |
| Confirm with | Your district        |

## OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Arizona requires students to pass the civics test (answering at least 60 of 100 questions correctly, based on the U.S. citizenship civics test) to graduate.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Arizona require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Arizona require a test to graduate?** — No academic exit exam — but students must pass the civics test to graduate.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

**READ ARIZONA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE**  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# Accountability & Report Cards

## AT A GLANCE

Arizona gives each school an A-F letter grade , calculated from a points system across several measures and published by the Arizona Department of Education.

## HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

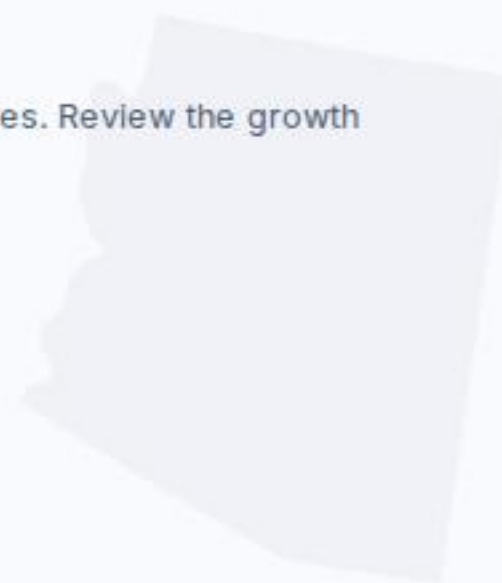
Arizona's A-F grade is built from points for proficiency, academic growth, English-learner progress, graduation rate (high schools), college/career readiness , and acceleration/subgroup improvement . The points total maps to a letter. Read the point breakdown (especially growth) alongside the grade.

## WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

## FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school's grade on the Arizona Department of Education A-F/report-card pages. Review the growth points and the trend, not just the letter.



## AT A GLANCE

|            |                                                                                                 |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Format     | A-F letter grades                                                                               |
| Based on   | A points system across measures                                                                 |
| Tool       | AZ School Report Cards / A-F                                                                    |
| Look up at | <a href="https://azed.gov / azreportcards.azed.gov...">azed.gov / azreportcards.azed.gov...</a> |

## HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Arizona rate schools?** — Arizona assigns an A-F letter grade from a points system across several measures.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

**READ ARIZONA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE**  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# School Choice

## AT A GLANCE

Arizona is a school-choice pioneer : it created the nation's first universal Education Savings Account (ESA) in 2022, and also has tax-credit scholarship programs and one of the largest public charter sectors in the country.

## THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

The Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA) program gives eligible families a state-funded account to spend on approved education expenses — private-school tuition, curriculum, tutoring, therapies , and more. Arizona also runs four tax-credit scholarship programs (funded by donations for which donors receive tax credits). These are among...

## ELIGIBILITY

The ESA is universal — essentially all Arizona K-12 students are eligible to apply. Tax-credit scholarships have their own (often income-related) rules. Confirm current eligibility.

## APPLYING

Apply for the ESA through the Arizona Department of Education's program; apply for tax-credit scholarships through school-tuition organizations. Confirm windows and requirements on the official sites.



## AT A GLANCE

|              |                                     |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Flagship     | Empowerment Scholarship Accounts... |
| Type         | Universal ESA (first in U.S., 20... |
| Also         | 4 tax-credit scholarship program... |
| Plus         | Large public charter sector         |
| Confirm with | The ESA program                     |

## PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Arizona have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes — Arizona has a universal ESA (the first in the U.S.) plus tax-credit scholarships.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ ARIZONA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# Teacher Certification

## HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Arizona certifies teachers through the Arizona Department of Education . You complete an approved program (or an alternative pathway), pass the required exams, and earn a Standard Professional Certificate .

## WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **NES/AEPA subject test(s)** — Content test(s) for your certification area
- ✓ **Professional knowledge** — A pedagogy exam (where required for your area)
- ✓ **Constitution requirement** — Arizona requires coursework or an exam on the U.S. and Arizona Constitutions
- ✓ **Note** — Requirements vary by certificate — confirm your specific tests

## WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



## AT A GLANCE

|                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Agency                  | Arizona Department of Education     |
| Subject & pro knowledge | NES / AEPA                          |
| Also                    | U.S. & Arizona Constitution requ... |
| Certificate             | Standard Professional               |

## OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Arizona, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

## RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Arizonas agency and your current state

READ ARIZONA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



# Financial Aid

## THE STATE AID PICTURE

Arizona's state aid is administered by the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE), and its public universities run a Promise program that can make tuition free for Pell-eligible Arizona residents.

## NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP)** — A need-based grant for Arizona residents at eligible in-state colleges (limited funds).
- ✓ **Arizona Teachers Academy** — Covers tuition for students committing to teach in Arizona.

## PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

The Arizona Promise Program covers tuition and fees for Pell-eligible Arizona resident students at the state's three public universities (ASU, University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University), as a last-dollar award.

## COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Arizona's AZ529 Education Savings Plan is the state's tax-advantaged plan (with a state tax deduction).

## DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline, and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

## AT A GLANCE

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Free university tuition | Arizona Promise Program  |
| Future teachers         | Arizona Teachers Academy |
| Need-based              | AzLEAP                   |
| 529 plan                | AZ529                    |
| Agency                  | ACPE                     |
| Apply by                | FAFSA                    |

## APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with the ACPE** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Arizona state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; the ACPE administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Arizona offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Arizona aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

**READ ARIZONA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE**  
[tools.k12academics.com](https://tools.k12academics.com)



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