

# ARIZONA COMMISSION FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

*...expanding access and increasing success  
in postsecondary education for Arizonans*

## ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2021

December 27, 2021



## Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education

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December 27, 2021

The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor

The Honorable Katie Hobbs, Secretary of State

The Honorable Karen Fann, President of the Senate

The Honorable Russell Bowers, Speaker of the House of Representatives

I respectfully submit the enclosed FY 2021 annual report on behalf of the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE). A planning process was undertaken by the 16 Commissioners and they identified an agency mission of *expanding access and increasing success in postsecondary education for Arizonans*. Therefore, the work of the ACPE is directed toward and measured against this mission each year.

FY 2021 brought continuing financial challenges to the ACPE. Challenges faced by the ACPE include a sustained reduction in the ACPE funding for financial aid and the transfer of the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program from the ACPE to the Office of the State Treasurer. Because the core responsibilities of the ACPE focus upon student financial assistance, this loss of financial aid affects the education potential of nearly 20,000 students who in years past would have received financial assistance through the ACPE administered grants or scholarships.

Additionally, FY 2021 saw the signing of Senate Bill 1825 in the Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session, which transitions all duties, powers, and responsibilities of the ACPE to the Arizona Board of Regents effective January 1, 2022.

The report also describes the ACPE's leadership in establishing a statewide network of high schools committed to building a college-going culture through College and Career Goal Arizona (C2GA) programs. This work is taking place through the ACPE's coordination and integration of three programs: 1) the Arizona College Application Campaign, 2) the College Goal FAFSA Completion Initiative, and 3) the FAFSA Finish Line Project. Additionally, the Arizona FAFSA Challenge is funded through the Governor's set aside Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act funds and was launched in September of 2018. It is attracting energy and participants. The goals are to help Arizona students complete a FAFSA, to raise public awareness regarding the value of federal dollars that completed FAFSAs bring into the economy, and showcase how low income families seeking to better their lives can succeed with appropriate student financial aid resources.

Another important objective of the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education is communication of vital financial aid and college-going information to the public in a variety of ways. In FY 2021, 195,906 unique visits were made to ACPE websites. The ACPE also distributes to families and students free online publications that assist in college planning, understanding financial aid processes, and important deadlines.

Each of these ACPE programs, initiatives, and publications represent collaborative efforts. They are examples of leveraging the funding and impact of this small agency in order to provide additional tools to assist Arizona's students and families succeed in postsecondary education.

This final annual report from the ACPE describes the details of the challenges and opportunities within the ACPE's statutory authority and the ACPE's strategic plan. With the transition of the ACPE to the Arizona Board of Regents, the Commissioners and staff know the future of the ACPE's programs are in good hands and are honored to have provided assistance to students and families over the years.

Questions regarding this report and detailed information regarding ACPE programs and publications are available on [www.highered.az.gov](http://www.highered.az.gov) or by contacting our office at 602-542-7230.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel Helm".

Daniel Helm, Interim Executive Director

cc: Brook White, Senate Senior Policy Advisor  
Brenden Foland, House Education Policy Advisor  
Kelsey Jahntz, House Majority Policy Advisor  
Alexis Pagel, JLBC Fiscal Analyst  
Trey Nilles, OSPB Budget Analyst

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Goal 1: Maximize student financial assistance available to students and families</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP)	12
1.2 Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) Formerly the Arizona Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE)	14
1.3 Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP), A Forgivable Loan – Ceased	21
1.4 Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG), – Ceased	21
1.4A Special Postsecondary Education Grant (SPEG), A Forgivable Loan – Ceased	22
1.4B Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG) – Ceased	22
1.5 Early Graduation Scholarship Grant – Ceased	23
1.6 College Access Challenge Grant Last Stretch Scholarship – Ceased	23
1.7 Forgivable Student Loan Repayment Programs	24
1.8 A Single Web Portal with Information for Families and Students Regarding Arizona Grants, Scholarships, Forgivable Loans, Student Loan Repayments, and Links to Financial Aid Resources	25
1.9 Arizona Family College Savings Program (AFCSP)	26
<b>Goal 2: Provide support from knowledgeable professionals and accurate and timely information to help students and families take steps to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education</b>	<b>27</b>
2.1 College and Career Goal Arizona supports and develops a culture where every high school senior is encouraged and expected to apply for and participate in a postsecondary education experience	28
2.1A The Arizona College Application Campaign (AzCAC)	28
2.1B College Goal FAF\$A Completion Initiative	30
2.1.B1. Develop Material and Provide Assistance on Financial Aid Processes and Applications	30
2.1.B2. College Goal FAF\$A (CG FAF\$A) Community Workshops	31
2.1.B3. College Goal FAF\$A (CG FAF\$A) High School Workshops	31
2.1.B4. FAF\$A Finish Line Project	32
2.1.B5. Arizona FAF\$A Challenge	32
2.1.B6. GEAR UP: Five E’s of Equity Project	33
2.2 Provide Current and Relevant Web- and Print-Based Information on College-Going and Financial Assistance for Families and Students	33
2.2A The Arizona College and Career Guide (ACCG)	33

<b>2.2B</b>	HigherEd.AZ.gov: Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education	<b>34</b>
<b>2.2C</b>	AZgrants.AZ.gov: One Secure Portal to Access Arizona Student Grants, Scholarships, Forgivable Loans, and Financial Aid Resources	<b>34</b>
<b>2.2D</b>	Pay4CollegeArizona	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2E</b>	College Goal FAFSA	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2F</b>	AZ529.gov: Help for Families Saving for College	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2G</b>	FAFSACHallenge.AZ.gov	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2H</b>	Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center: Research and Policy Analysis Reports	<b>36</b>
<b>Goal 3: Provide a forum where all sectors of postsecondary education dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest</b>		<b>36</b>
<b>3.1</b>	Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center	<b>36</b>
<b>3.2</b>	Collaboration and Partnerships which Address Common Opportunities and Problems Across Postsecondary Education	<b>37</b>
<b>Progress of ACPE 2017 Performance and Sunset Review</b>		<b>38</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>		<b>38</b>

**The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE)  
FY 2021 Annual Report**

***...expanding access and increasing success in postsecondary education for  
Arizonans***

Submitted December 27, 2021  
Daniel Helm, Interim Executive Director

**Introduction**

The work of the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE) is guided by a strategic plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide focus for the activity of this small agency and its staff members in order to increase productivity and impact in the areas of its statutory authority. The mission and goals were reviewed and accepted by Commissioners and this report reflects a review of goals, performance, and outcomes as outlined in the plan.

Through a planning process, the 16 Commissioners identified an agency mission of *expanding access and increasing success in postsecondary education for Arizonans*. Three goals were named to achieve this mission: (1) maximize available student financial assistance to students and families, (2) provide accurate and timely information and assistance from knowledgeable professionals to help students and their families enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education, and (3) provide a forum for all sectors of postsecondary education to dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest. A roster of the ACPE Commissioners follows this introduction.

The work of the ACPE has been highly impacted over the years by the reduction of state appropriated student financial assistance dollars and the loss of federal student aid. These changes include:

- suspension of the Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG) in 2011 and repeal in 2017;
- repeal of the Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG) in 2021;
- suspension of the Private Postsecondary Education Assistance Program (PFAP) in 2011 and repeal in 2021;
- establishment of the Early Graduation Scholarship Grant in 2008, ceased in 2013;
- transfer of the Arizona Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness program (now the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program) to the ACPE and reduction of funding to \$176,000 annually in FY 2012 with an increase to \$426,000 in 2017;

- establishment of several College Access Challenge Grant initiatives at the request of the Governor’s Office within the ACPE including the Arizona College Access Aid Program (ACAAP) in 2009, later transformed into the Last Stretch Scholarship in 2011, as well as infrastructure funding to establish the Arizona College Access Network. This funding ceased in 2014.
- transfer of the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program from the Commission to the Office of the State Treasurer in 2020.

The following “Historical Review of ACPE Student Aid Programs” table shows that almost \$2.6M of the Commission budget in FY 2021 represented flow-through funds dedicated to student grants and scholarships. In contrast, in FY 2008 the student financial assistance dollars were \$7.5M. This table reflects additional ACPE budget reductions in student grant/scholarship programs over the past eight years.

### Historical Review of ACPE Student Aid Programs

Fiscal Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Aid Disbursed	\$ 3,521,142	\$ 2,484,619	\$ 2,483,125	\$ 2,488,151	\$ 2,612,217	\$ 2,731,125	\$ 2,536,864	\$ 2,569,765
% Decrease compared to FY 2008	-53%	-67%	-67%	-67%	-65%	-64%	-66%	-66%

The loss of these grant dollars affects the lives of nearly 20,000 students who in previous years would have applied to the ACPE for grants/scholarships and received funds. It is important to note that at the close of FY 2010 the ACPE had a waiting list of an additional 8,799 students who were seeking financial aid, even when these grants were available.

Moreover, student financial aid is critical if the Governor’s priorities of equal access to education, growing the economy, and opportunity for all are to be realized. Today’s Arizona postsecondary students have lost significant financial assistance due to budget reductions. Policymakers will find data on the impact of financial aid dollars administered by the ACPE reported in the Goal 1 section of this report. The data is reflective of all sectors of higher education, i.e. community colleges, public universities, Arizona’s private degree granting colleges/universities, and vocational training schools. Likewise, the ACPE report includes student demographic data such as age, average family income, program of study, and institution attended.

Additionally, Goal 2 which calls for the ACPE to provide support from knowledgeable professionals as well as accurate and timely information to help students and families take steps to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education was impacted by the global pandemic and high schools transitioning to online instruction. Four initiatives under Goal 2 which stem from the success of the ACPE’s long-standing College Goal Sunday Statewide Financial Literacy Initiative have been established within the ACPE in

support of building a college-going culture statewide. These include:

- leadership of the Arizona College Application Campaign conducted in high schools in partnership with the public universities, community colleges, and private institutions and supported by a Statewide Advisory Committee,
- a renewed focus on workshops at the high schools for the College Goal FAF\$A Financial Literacy Initiative, in partnership with AASFAA (Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators), thus supporting both community and high school FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Completion Workshops statewide,
- assisting high schools in promoting the FAFSA application which opens on October 1, FAFSA completion training, and providing FAF\$A Finish Line reports to high school counselors, allowing increased completion of the FAFSA for seniors through individualized targeted interventions, and
- continuing to promote the Arizona FAF\$A Challenge program a statewide initiative which is to encourage Arizona high school seniors to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Because of the global pandemic and high school's transitioning to online instruction, the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education created the following website <https://collegegoal.az.gov/resources> that served as a centralized location to access the links and sites to colleges and universities throughout Arizona offering assistance to students and families. High schools also shifted to virtual workshops for students and families to participate.

The third and final goal, providing a forum for all sectors of higher education to dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest remains important to Commissioners and staff members. This goal is forwarded through policy analysis and research, by AMEPAC, executed by collaborative action led by ACPE Commissioners and staff members, and the ACPE participation in college related initiatives led by foundations, government, or non-profit entities with similar missions.

This report is organized in three sections; each section describes the activities and services related to each of the three goals. The conclusion summarizes how the parts of this report relate to the plan of the ACPE.

Critical to the success of the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education is the expertise and advice from the appointed Commissioners. The roster of the Commissioners and ACPE staff follows.



## Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education as of June 30, 2021

### **John Arnold**

Executive Director  
Arizona Board of Regents

### **Dr. Tacy Ashby**

Senior VP, Strategic Educational Alliances  
Grand Canyon University

### **Brian Capistran**

Superintendent  
Glendale Union High School District

### **Susan Ciardullo**

*Commission Chair*  
Corporate Director, Community Outreach  
West Coast Ultrasound Institute

### **Dr. Steven Gonzales**

Interim Chancellor  
Maricopa County Community College District

### **Dr. Joel Kostman**

Campus Director - Mesa  
Pima Medical Institute

### **Vacant**

One member who holds a senior executive or managerial position in a private cosmetology school offering programs approved by the Barbering and Cosmetology Board and accredited by a national accreditation agency approved by U.S. Department of Education

### **Vacant**

One member who has held a senior executive or managerial position in commerce or industry in AZ for at least three years and is not qualified to serve under any other category

### **Kevin LaMountain**

Executive Director  
Arizona Board for Private Postsecondary Education

### **Dr. James Rund**

Senior VP, Educational Outreach & Student Affairs  
Arizona State University

### **Dr. Colleen Smith**

President  
Coconino Community Colleges

### **Dr. Kasey Urquidez**

VP, Enrollment Management, Student Affairs  
Advancement & Dean of Undergraduate  
Admissions  
University of Arizona

### **Dr. Jody Williamson**

Superintendent  
Pointe Schools

### **Dr. Michael Wright**

Superintendent  
Blue Ridge Unified School District

### **Vacant**

One member who holds a senior executive or managerial position in an institution offering postsecondary vocational education programs that is not qualified under any other category

### **Vacant**

One member who holds senior executive or managerial position in private postsecondary institutions that offer bachelor or higher degrees and are accredited by a regional accreditation agency approved by U.S. Department of Education

## Commission Staff as of June 30, 2021

### **Daniel Helm**

Interim Executive Director

### **Julie Sainz**

Arizona FAFSA Challenge Project Director

## **Goal 1: Maximize student financial assistance available to students and families**

Core responsibilities of the ACPE are related to postsecondary student financial assistance programs. The ACPE has been administering student financial aid programs for Arizona since 1972. Named the entity representing Arizona in the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP), the ACPE has disbursed funds to students attending more than 100 public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and vocational schools over the last five decades.

Over the past fifteen years, the ACPE has been responsible for eleven financial assistance programs including:

- Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP), currently \$2.3M/year;
  - Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP), federal matching funds of approximately \$500,000/year, ceased in 2012;
  - Special Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (SLEAP), federal funding ceased in 2012, amounts varied generally over \$600,000/year;
- Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP), suspended in 2010 and ceased in 2021, amounts varied up to \$800,000/year;
- Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG), suspended in 2010, ceased in 2017, amounts varied up to \$5M/year;
  - Special Postsecondary Education Grant, \$540,000 designed to meet federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements, ceased in 2014;
  - Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG), created in 2017 amendment and ceased in 2021, never funded;
- Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) formerly known as the Arizona Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE), amended in 2017, amended in 2021, and currently funded at \$426,000/year;
- Early Graduation Scholarship Grant, amounts varied up to \$4.8M, ceased in 2013;
- College Access Challenge Grant financial assistance programs titled (a) Arizona College Access Aid Program and (b) the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship, funded at \$1.1M/year, ceased in 2014;
- PFAP, PEG, and ATSLP (MSSE) forgivable student loan repayment programs;

- The Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program, transferred October 2020 to the Arizona State Treasurer Office; and
- AZGrants Student Financial Assistance Web Portal.

Dramatic changes have occurred in many of the student financial aid programs listed above, at both the state and federal levels. Most notable are the suspension or termination of several successful financial aid programs administered by the ACPE as well as the restructuring of several programs.

Funding for the Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP) was placed on suspension in 2010 and was repealed through the 2021 Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session. The Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG) was also repealed in the 2021 Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session. The Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG) was also suspended in 2010 and then ceased in 2017. The Early Graduation Scholarship Grant (EGSG) ceased in 2013. Additionally, the Special Postsecondary Education Grant (Special PEG) and the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship (CAC Last Stretch) ceased in 2014. PFAP, PEG and Special PEG programs successfully achieved their intended outcomes including:

1. strengthening the private sector of postsecondary education in Arizona,
2. reducing the tax burden of Arizona higher education by incentivizing students to attend private institutions, and
3. providing financial aid to adult students to increase motivation and persistence to complete a baccalaureate degree.

The College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship (CAC Last Stretch) was designed to foster partnerships among federal, state and local government entities, and philanthropic organizations to significantly increase the number of underrepresented students in postsecondary education. The Governor's Office partnered with the ACPE to provide student scholarships through the second cycle of the federal formula-based College Access Challenge Grant (CACG). The ACPE administered more than \$1M in student scholarships to low-income students with 60 or more credit hours to sustain their attendance for the final years of degree completion. Unfortunately, FY 2014 was the last year of funding for the Last Stretch Scholarship.

Federal matching funds for the three-part (federal, state, institutional) Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program were eliminated in FY 2012. The program was re-structured and re-titled the Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP) and continues to serve low-income students with matching dollars from the state and postsecondary institutions. Sadly, no solution was found to offset the loss of federal funding for the Special Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership, which was eliminated in FY 2012, and the program was terminated.

The ACPE has just completed its ninth full year of administration of the renamed Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) formerly the Arizona Math, Science, and Special

Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE). Established in FY 2007, this program was transferred to the Commission in FY 2012. In addition to verification of eligibility and fund disbursement, responsibilities also include loan administration, borrower service tracking, and loan repayment servicing. Unfortunately, funding for the program was reduced from \$2M to \$176,000, drastically limiting the number of students served by this popular forgivable loan for teachers-in-training. In 2017, funding was modestly increased to \$426,000.

A detailed description of the implementation and outcomes of all active and inactive student aid programs under the administration of the ACPE are outlined in the following section. A description of the student loan repayment programs, the secure web portal which provides both information and a single application for all grants, as well as the Arizona Family College Savings Program are covered in the last pages of the Goal 1 section.

### ***Active Student Aid Programs***

#### **1.1 Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP)**

The Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) has been in existence in Arizona since 1972 and has served as Arizona's "primary" low-income student grant program. LEAP was first offered in the 1970's to encourage states to establish their own primary low-income student grant and was always considered a temporary incentive program offered by the federal government. Arizona and approximately four other states never progressed beyond the initial contribution and therefore LEAP remained Arizona's "primary grant" because it served low-income students across all sectors of public and private education. A unique aspect of the Arizona LEAP program was that it leveraged the federal dollars twice. This occurred by requiring each institution to match the state funds in order to participate in the Arizona LEAP program. The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education has administered the program, ensuring adherence to federal regulations and the Arizona Administrative Code.

The ACPE was notified in the spring of 2011 that the federal grant funding for LEAP and the companion grant SLEAP would be eliminated beginning in FY 2012 and thereafter. This represented a \$1.3M reduction in available grant aid for low-income Arizona students. An ACPE survey of participating institutions indicated that they had a strong desire to continue the program and were willing to continue to provide institutional matching funds. Institutions also agreed to allow the administrative fees for this program to be removed from the institutional match. Therefore, the program continued using the \$1.2M state funding for LEAP and the institutional match of the same amount. The restructured Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP) program originated from the former Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program.

FY 2021 was the twentieth year the ACPE administered the program. Private and public higher education institutions apply to the ACPE and the ACPE certifies institutional eligibility and determines a proportional distribution of funds to institutions (based on the

number of Arizona resident students). AzLEAP recipients are selected by the institutions on the basis of financial need established through federal methodology and state administrative rules. Near the end of the fiscal year the institutions provide reports to the ACPE regarding the students awarded. The ACPE reviews the students awarded to assure program compliance.

In FY 2021, two thousand nine hundred thirty (2,930) Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP) awards were provided through 36 postsecondary institutions totaling over \$2.3 million in leveraged financial aid (state and institutional) to low-income students.

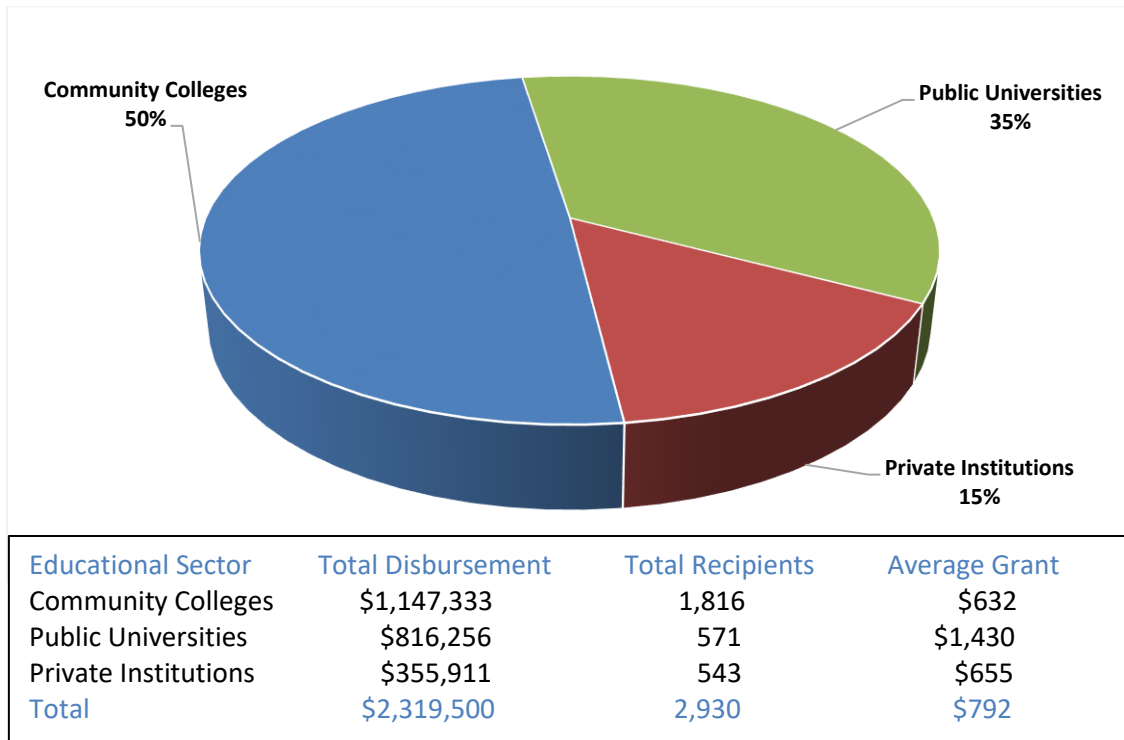
The table below provides a description of those who received awards in FY 2021.

**Description of AzLEAP Recipients in FY 2021**

<b>Total Recipients</b>	<b>Total Disbursement</b>	<b>Dependent Recipients</b>	<b>Independent Recipients</b>	<b>Recipients w/Income Less than \$19,999</b>	<b>Recipients w/Income Between \$20,000 and 39,999</b>	<b>Recipients w/Income Over \$40,000</b>
<b>2,930</b>	<b>\$2,319,500</b>	<b>1,332</b>	<b>1,598</b>	<b>1,642</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>396</b>

It is important to note that 87% of the recipients had incomes below \$40,000 with over 56% of the total recipients reporting incomes under \$20,000. The percentage of students whose incomes reported was less than \$19,999 illustrates the need is still present for this financial aid program. Institutional distribution of AzLEAP dollars in FY 2021 resulted in the following distribution percentages: 35% to public universities, 50% to community colleges, and 15% to private institutions as illustrated in the pie chart on the following page.

## Distribution of AzLEAP Recipients by Institution in FY 2021



Annual AzLEAP administration performance measures are collected through surveys of institutional financial aid administrators and reviewed by ACPE staff. Based on the 2020-2021 surveys, 95% of financial aid administrators indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with administration of this program by the ACPE. The Commissioners are pleased that the State recognizes the need to continue this important financial aid program. With the tuition costs and limited or reduced financial aid available, the ACPE is gratified to be able to partner with the participating institutions to offer this much needed aid to low-income students.

### **1.2 Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) Formerly the Arizona Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE)**

The Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE) was created in 2007. During the 2017 Fifty-Third Legislature, First Regular Session, Senate Bill 1040 made significant changes along with renaming the program to the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP). Effective FY 2018, the changes were:

1. Elimination of the service area of teaching in elementary schools that are located in geographic areas that are experiencing a shortage of teachers,
2. Inclusion of three additional service areas: low-income schools, rural schools, or schools located on an Indian reservation,

3. Inclusion of students who are pursuing a teaching certificate through an alternative teacher certificate program as eligible students for the forgivable loan,
4. Inclusion of students who have a bachelor's degree and are in an alternative teacher certification program as eligible students for the forgivable loan, and
5. The allocation of forty percent of the annual amount appropriated to students who agree to provide instruction in a low-income school, rural school, or a school located on an Indian reservation.

Additionally, in the 2021 Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session, Senate Bill 1825 redefined a qualifying postsecondary institution to be inclusive of only private postsecondary educational institutions in this state. This change became effective in fiscal year 2022. In addition, this bill transitions all duties, powers, and responsibilities of the ACPE including the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program to the Arizona Board of Regents effective January 1, 2022.

During FY 2021, this student-centered, need-based forgivable loan was designed to increase the number of teachers in Arizona's public K-12 system in the following areas: math, science, special education, low-income schools, rural schools, or schools located on an Indian reservation. The forgivable loan supports and encourages Arizona resident college students to take on a mission of service in order to repay their obligation by pursuing a teaching career in identified high need areas and to remain in the State after graduation. Forgivable loans to help defray the cost of tuition, fees, and instructional materials were granted to eligible junior or senior undergraduate education majors and students enrolled in an alternative teacher certificate program offered at qualifying postsecondary education institutions in the State. Additionally, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The maximum forgivable loan is \$7,000 per academic year for up to three years. To have the loan forgiven, students must sign a promissory note each year agreeing to teach in select service areas in a public K-12 school in Arizona for the number of years they received the loan funding plus one year. The selected service areas in FY 2021 are math, science, special education, or a low-income school, rural school, or a school located on an Indian reservation. Students who do not meet the forgiveness criteria must repay the amount borrowed plus any interest.

In FY 2021 ATSLP loans were disbursed to 48 students, 34 loans to initial recipients (1<sup>st</sup> time recipients) and 14 loans to continuing recipients (prior recipients). The loan recipients attended both public and private postsecondary institutions for a total disbursement of \$250,265.19.

The table below provides a student profile for those who received loans in FY 2021.

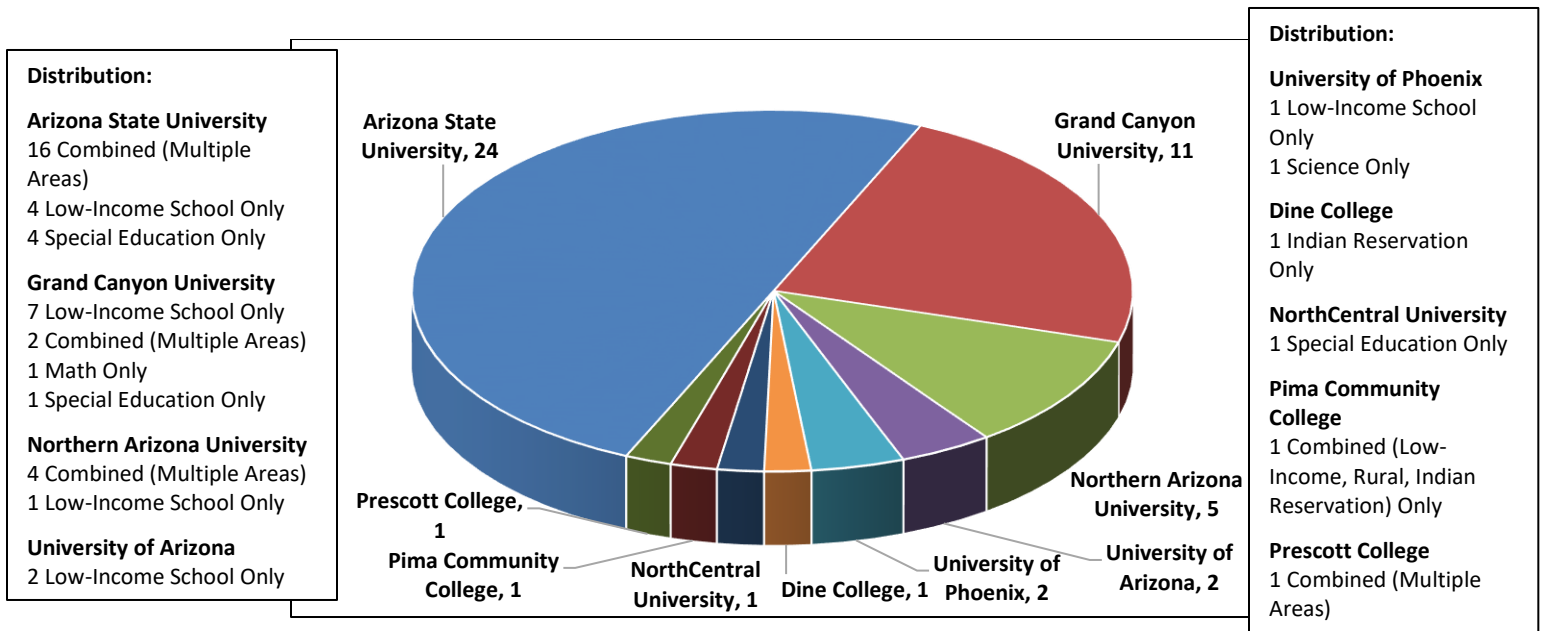
### ATSLP FY 2021 Student Profile

Total Applicants	Total Recipients	Total Disbursement	Average Loan Amount	Average Age of Recipients	Initial Recipients	Continuing Recipients	Good Cause Exceptions
63	48	\$250,265.19	\$5,214	32	34	14	0

The difference between the total applicants and the total recipients is comprised of fifteen applicants who did not meet program requirements.

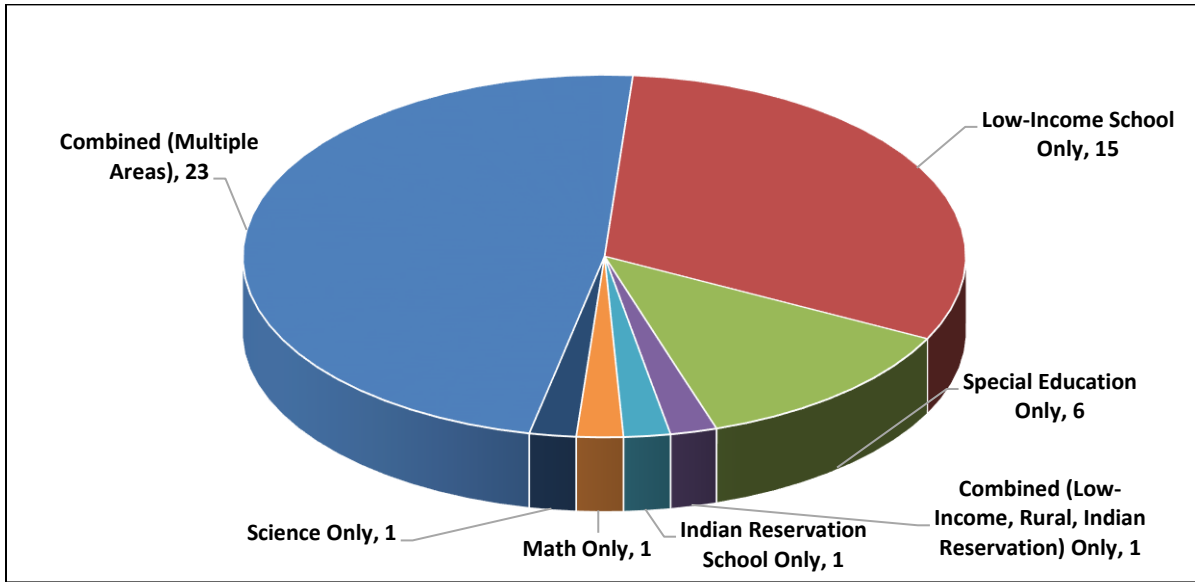
The following pie charts represent a breakout of the institutions the 48 loan recipients attended and the areas recipients indicated that they would be teaching.

### Recipients by Institution in FY 2021





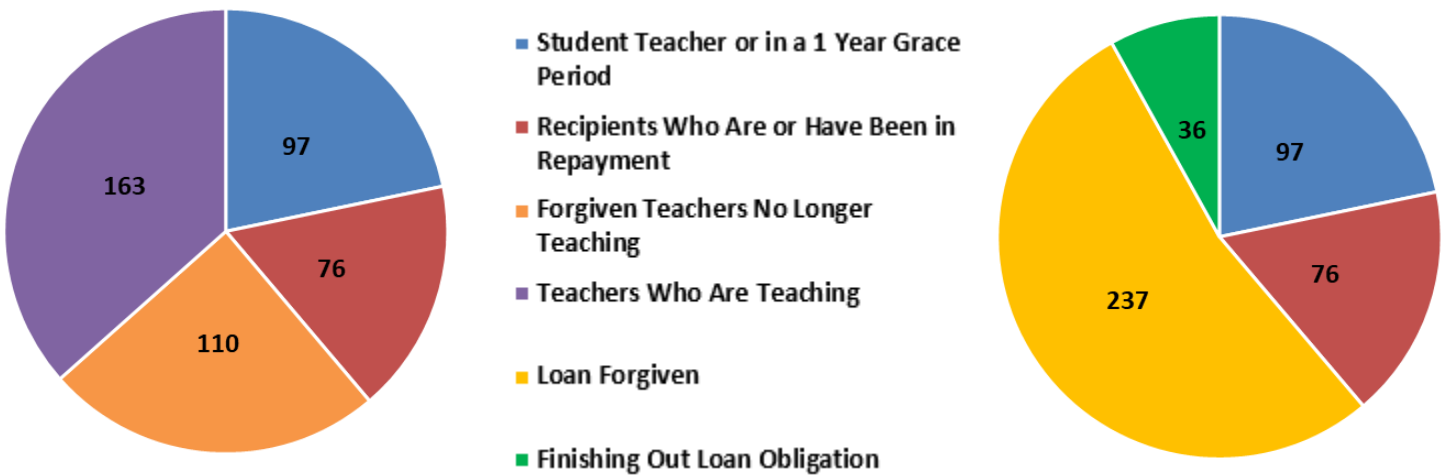
### Recipients by Subject/Location in FY 2021



### Status of Recipients in ATSLP from Inception through FY 2021

Tracking responsibilities are significant for ATSLP as each loan recipient is required to be tracked between seven to eleven years, depending on the number of years each student received funding. For students who enter into repayment, the relationship can increase up to 15 years. With the conclusion of FY 2021, 446 students have participated in ATSLP since its inception in 2007.

### History of ATSLP Loan Recipients



### Teaching Status

### Loan Status

In the graphs above 273 (61.2%) loan recipients are or have been teachers. Of those 273 teachers 237 (53.1%) have had their loan forgiven, while 36 (8.1%) are still working on

loan forgiveness, with the prospect of an additional 97 (21.7%) loan recipients becoming teachers.

In FY 2022 the collecting of the five-year teacher retention data for the 84 individuals whose loans have been forgiven through teaching will continue.

The following is a list of the public K-12 schools in Arizona at which the 36 currently teaching loan recipients are employed.

**K-12 Schools where ATSLP (MSSE) Graduates Served  
their Teaching Obligation in FY 2021**

School	School City	Subject Taught
La Joya Community High School	Avondale	Low Income School
West Point High School	Avondale	Science
Buckeye Elementary School	Buckeye	Special Education
Liberty Elementary School	Buckeye	Special Education
Rainbow Valley Elementary School	Buckeye	Special Education
Pomeroy Elementary School	Chandler	Special Education
Liberty Traditional Saddleback School	Douglas	Low Income School
Elfrida Elementary School	Elfrida	Rural School
Eva Marshall Magnet Elementary School	Flagstaff	Special Education
STAR School	Flagstaff	Low Income School
American Leadership Academy	Gilbert	Science
Perry High School	Gilbert	Science
Deer Valley High School	Glendale	Science
Desert Sky Middle School	Glendale	Special Education
Continental Elementary School	Green Valley	Science
Desert Meadows Elementary School	Laveen	Special Education
Holmes Elementary School	Mesa	Low Income School
Peoria High School	Peoria	Special Education
Chaparral Elementary School	Phoenix	Special Education

School	School City	Subject Taught
Esperanza Elementary School	Phoenix	Special Education
John F Kennedy Elementary School	Phoenix	Low Income School
Manzanita Elementary School	Phoenix	Low Income School
Mirage Elementary School	Phoenix	Special Education
Paradise Valley High School	Phoenix	Special Education
Pendergast Elementary School	Phoenix	Math
William Sullivan Elementary School	Phoenix	Low Income School
Coyote Springs Elementary School	Prescott Valley	Low Income School
Combs High School	San Tan Valley	Math
Second Mesa Day School	Second Mesa	Tribal School
Sonoran Heights Elementary School	Surprise	Special Education
Curry Elementary School	Tempe	Special Education
Booth-Fickett Magnet School	Tucson	Low Income School
Keeling Elementary School	Tucson	General
LM Prince Elementary School	Tucson	Low Income School
Bonnie Brennan Elementary School	Winslow	Low Income/Rural School
G W Carver Elementary School	Yuma	Low Income School

ATSLP provides an important vehicle to shape student choices and bring new teachers to the profession in order to meet Arizona's teacher shortage needs. The program is designed to contribute to the teacher pipeline by financially assisting quality students already in teaching preparation programs. Service can be accomplished in one of four ways:

- Teach in a low-income public school (sixty percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches),
- Teach in a rural county public school (a public school in this state that is located in a county with a population of less than three hundred thousand persons),
- Teach in an Arizona public school on an Indian reservation, or
- Teach in the fields of Math, Science, or Special Education in a public school in Arizona.

Teacher recruitment and retention contributes significantly to school success and Arizona is struggling in this area. For example, the September 10, 2021 Human Resources Professionals in Arizona Schools Survey<sup>1</sup> data clearly defined critical issues related to teacher shortages and retention. First, 25.9% or 1,699 teacher positions remained vacant a few weeks into the 2021-2022 school year. Even more astonishing, the survey reported that 55.4%, or 3,634 teacher positions were filled by individuals who did not meet standard teaching requirements. Furthermore, the survey indicates that 730 teachers severed their employment as of September 10th.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education’s nationwide Teacher Shortage Areas<sup>2</sup> report indicates that for the 2021-2022 school year Arizona is experiencing a shortage of teachers in the following areas.

Subject Matter	Discipline	Grades
English as a Second Language	Bilingual Education	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
English as a Second Language	English as a Second Language	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Language Arts	English	6, 7, 8
Mathematics	Basic and Advanced Mathematics	6, 7, 8
Science	Physics	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Science	Biological Sciences	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Science	Physical Science	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Social Studies	History	6, 7, 8
Special Education	Cross Categorical	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Special Education	Early Childhood	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3
Special Education	Emotional Disabilities	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Special Education	Severely and Profoundly Handicapped	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Special Education	Hearing Impairment	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Special Education	Intense Intervention	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Special Education	Cognitive Disabilities	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

The severity of the teacher shortage is clearly illustrated in this data. The shortage of qualified teachers in Arizona’s workforce pipeline negatively affects Arizona’s K-12 students every day. This program aids the State in meeting the Governor’s education

<sup>1</sup> September 2021. “Human Resources Professionals in Arizona Schools Survey.” Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association.

<sup>2</sup> “Teacher Shortage Areas.” U.S. Department of Education. <https://tsa.ed.gov/#/home/>

goals and contributes to the overall goal of 60% of Arizona working adults holding a degree or certificate. With the transition of the program to the Arizona Board of Regents, the Commissioners and staff know the future of the program is in good hands and are honored to have provided financial aid to this cadre of teachers who are critical to the success of the Governor's goal of addressing the teacher shortage in our State.

### ***Inactive Student Aid Programs***

#### **1.3 Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP), A Forgivable Loan – Ceased**

The Arizona Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance (PFAP) program was initiated in the spring of 1996. This student-centered program was designed to encourage Arizona community college graduates with financial need to enroll as a full-time student and complete a baccalaureate degree from a private postsecondary institution; thereby realizing a savings to the State of Arizona. Students who failed to achieve a baccalaureate degree within three years from the first disbursement of funds, or those who did not enroll for a period of time greater than twelve months, entered into a repayment program.

More than 1,600 students have benefited from the PFAP program since its inception representing a 90% graduation rate. With the average PFAP recipient being 31 years of age, this program was successful at providing financial aid to adult students. However, after several years of repeated reductions, the PFAP awarded the last 161 recipients a total of \$275,000 during FY 2010. The ACPE continues to focus on the remaining 4 promissory note holders who are in repayment. Information on PFAP repayments can be found in section 1.7 titled *Forgivable Student Loan Repayment Programs*.

The program was placed on suspension in FY 2011 and in the 2021 Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session, Senate Bill 1825 ceased the program.

#### **1.4 Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG) – Ceased**

The Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG) program, created in the 2006 legislative session, was a student-centered, non-need based forgivable loan designed to financially support and encourage Arizona resident students to attend a private postsecondary baccalaureate degree granting institution in Arizona. The maximum grant was \$2,000 per year for up to four academic years (eight semesters/terms). These funds could only be used for tuition, books, and fee expenses. Students were required to obtain a bachelor's degree within five years after the first PEG disbursement. If a student did not obtain a bachelor's degree within five years or did not enroll for a period of time greater than twelve months, the grant became a loan that the borrower must repay, and the student entered into a repayment program.

The PEG program was patterned after the successful student-centered Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance (PFAP) program. Goals for the PEG program included (1) strengthening the private higher education sector, (2) providing

cost savings to the State by encouraging residents to attend private colleges and universities over publically funded universities, and (3) increasing the number of baccalaureate degrees in the State of Arizona, thus increasing the tax revenues from a more readily available educated and higher wage-earning workforce.

In addition to strengthening the private sector of postsecondary education in Arizona, PEG successfully achieved its intended outcome of providing financial aid to adult students, increasing motivation and persistence to complete a baccalaureate degree. The average age of PEG recipients was 28 years.

More than 4,000 recipients benefited from the PEG program during its short existence (FY 2006 – FY 2010). The ACPE has confirmed that over 3,300 recipients have already graduated from a private college or university and had their loans forgiven. This represents a remarkable 75% graduation rate for this program. FY 2010 was the last year forgivable loans were awarded in this program. The ACPE awarded 1,400 students for a total of \$2,242,678.

The ACPE continues to focus on the remaining 38 promissory note holders who are in repayment. Information on PEG repayments can be found in section 1.7 titled *Forgivable Student Loan Repayment Programs*.

During the 2017 Fifty-third Legislature, First Regular Session, House Bill 2388 ceased the program.

#### **1.4A. Special Postsecondary Education Grant (SPEG), A Forgivable Loan – Ceased**

The Special Postsecondary Education Grant (Special PEG) program was created in FY 2013, to financially support and to encourage college students to graduate from a private postsecondary baccalaureate degree-granting institution in Arizona while strengthening the private higher education sector. The maximum grant (forgivable loan) was \$2,000 per year for up to two academic years. Funds could only be used for tuition, books and fee expenses. If a student did not obtain a bachelor's degree within three years or did not enroll, at least half-time, for a period of time greater than twelve months, the grant became a loan that the student must repay.

More than 300 students benefited from the Special PEG program since its inception. Special PEG successfully achieved its intended outcome of providing financial aid to adult students and increasing baccalaureate degree completion, as the average recipient age was 32 years. In FY 2014, the Special Postsecondary Education Grant Program (Special PEG) ceased.

#### **1.4B. Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG) – Ceased**

During the 2017 Fifty-third Legislature, First Regular Session, House Bill 2388 repealed the Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG) program and created the Private Postsecondary Education Grant (PPEG). PPEG is a student-centered forgivable loan

designed to financially support and encourage Arizona resident students to attend a private postsecondary baccalaureate, certificate, or associate degree granting institution in Arizona.

The PPEG program was patterned after the successful student-centered PEG program. Funds must be used for tuition, books, and fee expenses. Grant recipients must graduate in seven years if completing a baccalaureate degree or four if completing an associate degree; otherwise, the grant recipients must reimburse the ACPE the granted funds.

In the 2021 Fifty-Fifth Legislature, First Regular Session, Senate Bill 1825 ceased the program.

### **1.5 Early Graduation Scholarship Grant – Ceased**

The Early Graduation Scholarship Grant (EGSG) was created in 2007. This non-need based college access scholarship was designed to provide an incentive for high school students to graduate early and promptly transition into a postsecondary experience. Students who graduated from a public high school district or charter school at least one year early and enrolled full-time at an eligible Arizona postsecondary institution could receive up to \$2,000 (over two academic years) to be used to defray the cost of tuition, fees and book expenses. The Early Graduation Scholarship was available for three years after graduation. This grant program which rewarded high school students who graduated early was funded through shared revenue with high schools and collaboration with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).

All students who graduated at least six months early, from public high schools or charter schools, and then immediately enrolled full time at an eligible postsecondary institution in Arizona were eligible to apply for this grant. EGSG funds were available to early graduates to attend over 100 regionally or nationally accredited public/private colleges, universities, community colleges or vocational postsecondary institutions in the State of Arizona. The funds were disbursed over two years and were eligible to be combined with most other merit scholarship awards.

Since the program inception a total of 464 early graduates received awards totaling \$543,212. The program was suspended in FY 2011 and in FY 2013, the Early Graduation Scholarship Grant (EGSG) ceased.

### **1.6 College Access Challenge Grant Last Stretch Scholarship – Ceased**

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program was a formula grant designed to foster partnerships among federal, state and local government entities, and philanthropic organizations to significantly increase the number of underrepresented students in postsecondary education. Through the grant the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship was created.

As a need-based scholarship, the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship program was designed to assist low-income college students who have completed over

60 college credit hours to achieve their baccalaureate degree at any regionally or nationally accredited institution. Eligible students were required to have substantial financial need as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students could receive the scholarship for a maximum of three academic years or until they received their first baccalaureate degree. Funds were limited and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis at the time of application completion. The maximum grant awarded for the academic year was \$2,000 based on full-time enrollment. Scholarship funds could be applied toward any educational expenses documented in the student's Cost of Attendance (COA) at their institution.

More than 1,300 students for a total of \$3,102,000 benefited from the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship since its inception. In FY 2014, the College Access Challenge Last Stretch Scholarship ceased.

### **1.7 Forgivable Student Loan Repayment Programs**

Currently the ACPE administers three repayment programs: (1) the Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP); (2) the Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG); and (3) the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP), formerly the Math, Science and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE).

The Office of the Attorney General is used by the ACPE for collections when normal investigative means to locate the former student are unsuccessful or when grantees have been contacted multiple times and refuse to enter the repayment program. The Attorney General's office performs this service for a variable fee on every dollar collected.

A brief summary of the status of each of the repayment programs administered by the ACPE follows.

The Private Postsecondary Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PFAP), a forgivable loan program, is a need-based program designed to financially support Arizona community college graduates to continue their education at a private postsecondary baccalaureate degree granting institution in Arizona. The program requires that the student achieve a bachelor's degree within three years or they must repay the loan. There have been 1,651 students awarded PFAP forgivable loans since its inception in 1996. Four borrowers are currently being tracked in the repayment program by the ACPE, but 44 have been referred to the Attorney General and are active.

The Postsecondary Education Grant (PEG), a forgivable loan program created in the 2006 legislative session, is a non-need-based program designed to financially support and encourage students to attend a private postsecondary baccalaureate degree granting institution in Arizona. The program requires that the student achieve a bachelor's degree within five years from the initial disbursement date or they must repay the loan. Since the program's FY 2007 inception, 4,467 students received the forgivable loan. Of those recipients, 3,356 have graduated with a baccalaureate degree within the required five-year time frame. Of the remaining 1,111 promissory note holders, 38 are in repayment,



639 have been referred to the Attorney General, 37 have been closed by the Attorney General, 38 have been deemed uncollectable by the Attorney General, 1 is enrolled, 13 are deceased, 17 have been forgiven, 322 have paid their grant in full, and 6 are in deferment. Promissory note holders who fail to meet the requirements of the forgivable loan must enter into the repayment program.

The Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) formerly the Arizona Math, Science, and Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program (MSSE), a forgivable loan program, is a need-based program designed to increase the number of teachers in Arizona's public K-12 system in the following areas: math, science, special education, low-income schools, rural schools, or schools located on an Indian reservation. The program requires that the student agree to teach in select service areas in a public K-12 school in Arizona for the number of years they received the loan plus one year. Since inception in FY 2007, 446 students have been granted ATSLP/MSSE forgivable loans. Of those students, 23 have paid their loan balance in full, 23 are currently in repayment, 30 have been referred to the Attorney General's Office, 153 have completed the 5 year retention tracking and the remaining 217 may be tracked for up to 15 years. The tracking requirements of ATSLP/MSSE students are two-fold: (1) tracking for compliance to meet the promissory note obligation (1.5 to 15 years) and (2) tracking for an additional five years to determine retention rates. The ATSLP/MSSE program is described in its entirety in section 1.2 of this report.

### **1.8 A Single Web Portal with Information for Families and Students Regarding Arizona Grants, Scholarships, Forgivable Loans, Student Loan Repayments, and Links to Financial Aid Resources**

The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE) is the designated State entity representing Arizona in the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs. As the designated State entity for student financial assistance the ACPE receives all Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data for Arizona residents and houses it in a database within a fully-automated and secure AZGrants student grant portal. Fulfilling several critical needs for the state, the portal:

1. accepts and stores FAFSA data for all Arizona resident filings awaiting use in financial aid administration;
2. provides students and families a user-friendly single approach application for grants, scholarships, and forgivable loans administered by the ACPE;
3. ensures security compliance with FERPA and Title IV regulations related to student personal information by allowing for secure transmission and storage of data;
4. provides interface and communication with financial aid staff and academic personnel in more than 100 postsecondary institutions who are required to certify student eligibility factors such as verification of attendance, certification of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), program of study, and other eligibility requirements;

5. performs back office tasks such as awarding of funds, disbursement of funds, and has the capability of monitoring students through repayment thereby reducing the manual labor necessary for the ACPE to administer student aid programs;
6. provides high schools and counselors with a FERPA secure portal to receive FAFSA Finish Line Reports on individual students' applications;
7. can provide Arizona's educational leaders and policy decision makers "real time" data regarding student demographics, performance, success, and behavioral barriers to continuing their education.

The ACPE is using this secure portal for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Initiative and FAFSA Finish Line reports. The portal can provide automation of the following: 1) a search and match for the specific high school senior's application among the Institutional Student Information Records (ISIR) in the ACPE's database; 2) extraction of the allowable ISIR information; 3) compilation of specific data elements into reports and unique records; 4) preparation of summary reports for authorized entities; and 5) secure dissemination of these reports. Moreover, a secure web portal is necessary for the high school counselors to submit lists of student information to the ACPE for the data match process which results in an output report describing the progress of each student's application and if something is preventing it from moving forward to completion. Participating high schools and districts have signed data sharing agreements with the ACPE and have identified authorized staff members with valid user credentials to access these data reports via the ACPE's secure web portal.

The public information pages of the web portal provide important information about additional sources of financial aid beyond state aid; thereby linking students and families to important funding resources. More information about the portal and its use is included in Section 2.2.C of this report.

### **1.9 Arizona Family College Savings Program (AFCSP)**

The ACPE administered the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program (AFCSP) during the first quarter of FY 2021. In 1997, the AFCSP was established as Arizona's qualified tuition program under section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code (also referred to as a QTP or Qualified Tuition Program) and began accepting accounts in 1999. In 2004, State legislation established the Family College Savings Program Trust Fund as a public instrumentality of the State of Arizona, of which the ACPE acted as its sole Trustee. All AFCSP accounts are held in trust for its participants and beneficiaries.

In August 2006, the Pension Protection Act passed and made permanent the 529 plan provisions allowing federal income tax-free withdrawals from 529 College Savings Plans for qualified higher education expenses. An additional tax benefit was added January 1, 2008, when a state income tax deduction was extended to Arizona residents for up to \$750 per individual or \$1,500 per married couple for annual contributions made to a 529 plan. This incentive was set to expire on December 30, 2012. Fortunately, State

legislative action initially extended the tax incentive into perpetuity and subsequent action more than doubled the benefit when the State Legislature increased the state tax deduction to \$2,000 for individuals and up to \$4,000 for married filers, effective January 1, 2013.

In June 2020, Senate Bill 1528 in the Fifty-fourth Legislature Second Regular Session was signed. Senate Bill 1528, titled family college savings program; treasurer, transferred the administration of the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program from the ACPE to the Office of the State Treasurer. The bill transferred the program October 1, 2020.

**Goal 2: Provide support from knowledgeable professionals and accurate and timely information to help students and families take steps to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education**

The ACPE is committed to aiding the Governor and the state in achieving the important priorities of equal access to education, growing the economy, and eliminating the achievement gap experienced by low-income and minority students.

We join our education and business colleagues in seeking to increase to 60% the percentage of working-age adults who hold a degree or professional certificate. The state has several pools of residents who could bring us closer to this number. For example, research indicates that almost every parent holds the dream of college attendance for their child. Yet, only 46.3% of Arizona's 2020 high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education. Moreover, only 27.4% of the 2015 class of high school graduates completed a two or four-year degree program or received a postsecondary certificate<sup>3</sup>. It is the potential within these statistics that propels the ACPE to engage in leading, strengthening, and supporting college access and success initiatives for both high school students and adults.

Realistic planning with appropriate and accurate information will ensure a potential student is academically ready, the family is financially prepared, and that student and family expectations are in line with the realities of postsecondary education. Two specific strategies are employed by the ACPE to engender realistic planning.

First, the ACPE provides current and relevant information for college planning and decision-making to students and their families. The ACPE also hosts multiple websites which attracted 195,906 unique visits in FY 2021. Each website is designed to provide specific and timely college-going information to the public including financial aid literacy, FAFSA completion, and a web-based compilation of postsecondary education opportunities statewide.

Second, the ACPE supports knowledgeable professionals who assist first generation and low-income students to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education. Public school counselors and college access professionals are two groups who are leading these efforts. The ACPE both supports and leads activities including the College Goal

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<sup>3</sup> Arizona Board of Regents, Postsecondary Attainment Report FY 2021.

FAFSA Financial Literacy Initiative, the Arizona College Application Campaign, the FAFSA Finish Line Report Project, and the Arizona FAFSA Challenge. Each of these efforts is designed to add to the knowledge base, provide tools to professionals who guide low-income students and families in educational planning, and develop a college-going community in low-income serving high schools.

All strategies under Goal 2 are funded through grants, fees, and donations; no general funds are used to support these college access tools and programs. The following is a description of the work of the ACPE toward these goals.

## **2.1 College and Career Goal Arizona supports and develops a culture where every high school senior is encouraged and expected to apply for and participate in a postsecondary education experience**

College and Career Goal Arizona (C<sup>2</sup>GA) is a statewide initiative coordinated by the ACPE that promotes partnerships among high schools and postsecondary institutions statewide. The purpose is to implement strategies designed to help seniors and their families complete the two most critical applications for their future.

College and Career Goal Arizona has three goals:

1. every eligible high school senior completes at least one postsecondary education application, which includes, a 2-year, 4-year, certificate program, vocational, or military,
2. every eligible high school senior files, a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and
3. every high school senior attends a high school which provides a college-going community and culture.

This approach works because high schools across the state are stepping up to advise and guide seniors and their families through the challenging milieu of decisions and timelines related to college and financial aid applications. High schools are building a college-going community where staff led a cohort approach among peers supporting first-generation and low-income students as they take the steps to enroll in college or some form of postsecondary education.

### **2.1A The Arizona College Application Campaign (AzCAC)**

The Arizona College Application Campaign (AzCAC) is a statewide initiative with three main goals: (1) increase the number of low-income students who apply to at least one postsecondary education opportunity during their senior year in high school, (2) support and enhance existing high school efforts that encourage all students to have a postsecondary plan and take timely steps toward postsecondary education opportunities and success, and (3) contribute to a college-going community within and among the school staff, the student body and their families, and the community. The campaign is

inclusive of all sectors of public and private postsecondary education, with the objective of fostering a statewide effort that expands students' postsecondary education or training opportunities leading to a certificate, associate, or baccalaureate degree.

The first College Application Campaign began in 2005 in North Carolina as a pilot effort at a single high school. Since then, many other states have initiated College Application Campaigns to meet the needs of their respective states' goals to increase the percentage of first-generation and low-income students who pursue a postsecondary education. Arizona was encouraged to take part in the College Application Campaign initiative by Lumina Foundation and the American Council on Education.

Following a brief pilot by the three public universities in 2012, the ACPE was asked to assume leadership for the Campaign going forward. In 2013, the ACPE piloted AzCAC with eight partner high schools with a data collection component for ongoing program evaluation. The ACPE established an Advisory Committee for the initiative comprising of stakeholders across the state including representation from the Governor's Office, Arizona Board of Regents, Arizona Department of Education, public and private universities, community colleges, businesses, and college access professionals.

All agreed that the goal would be to increase the number of students statewide who submit applications for postsecondary education in the fall of their senior year. In addition, success would be measured by:

1. The number of student reported FIRST applications submitted and the number of total applications submitted to date as compared to previous years.
2. The number of students matriculating in the summer, fall, or spring semester/quarter following their participation in the campaign as compared to the number of students matriculating in previous years.

Because of the global pandemic and high school's transitioning to online instruction, the ACPE created the following website <https://collegegoal.az.gov/resources> that served as a centralized location to access the links and sites to colleges and universities throughout Arizona. With this online shift the College Application Campaign was suspended for the 2021 school year, since high schools were unable to host college applications on campus as they did in prior years. Despite having traditional events, many high schools hosted online workshops with their students which proved to be successful. During this time the ACPE also provided virtual resources to high schools throughout the state.

The ACPE continues to promote the College Application Campaign on the College and Career Goal Arizona website developed in June of 2014. The website received 16,967 unique visits from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

## **2.1B College Goal FAF\$A Completion Initiative**

Arizona's College Goal FAF\$A (CG FAF\$A) Initiative is a sponsorship and grant-funded statewide program that provides free information and professional assistance to Arizona students and families seeking student financial aid for postsecondary education experiences. The ACPE has planned and coordinated the initiative for the past 25 years. The mission of the CG FAF\$A Initiative is to increase the number of under-served and first-generation students entering postsecondary education.

The goals of the College Goal FAF\$A Initiative are to:

1. provide high school staff, site coordinators and volunteers with online resources and interactive training to host successful Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion workshops,
2. support high schools as they work with families to assist all high school seniors to complete a FAFSA on time,
3. support community partners and postsecondary institutions who help prospective, current or returning students in their community to complete the FAFSA on time, and
4. maintain online resources for students, families, and the public to access accurate and timely information regarding financial aid and financial aid processes.

All of these efforts are undertaken using no general funds. As the host of the initiative, the ACPE secures grants and sponsorships to fund the activities and provides the leadership to implement the campaign events. Long standing partnerships developed by the ACPE with the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (AASFAA), the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN), the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the Arizona School Counselors Association (AzSCA), and community partners have proven to be great assets in this work.

### **2.1.B1. Develop Material and Provide Assistance on Financial Aid Processes and Applications**

The College Goal FAF\$A Initiative undertaken by the ACPE, is designed to help fill the information gap for students of all ages and their families by providing year round information including important messages such as:

1. financial assistance is available to help pay for college costs,
2. the FAFSA is the first step in applying for financial assistance,
3. it is necessary to file the FAFSA early in order to be considered for all available aid, and

4. there are additional steps to take after filing the FAFSA.

When surveyed, high school students report in large percentages that they aspire to go to college and that they intend to file a FAFSA, yet their actions speak very differently. The FAFSA is the first critical step in applying for all types of financial assistance, yet the form and the application process are often overwhelming to students and families, especially for those whose parents did not attend college. It can be a challenge for students and their families to fully understand what they need to do and when. Many do not have adequate information about the availability of financial aid, the application process, nor the deadlines for filing the application.

The ACPE promotes financial literacy providing accurate and timely information related to financial aid on both the College and Career Goal Arizona (C<sup>2</sup>GA) and AZGrants websites. Guidance on how to complete the FAFSA is provided on the College Goal FAFSA website to help students and their families who could not attend an event. In 2012, the ACPE added a social media (Facebook) component to the financial literacy campaign. Social media is one of the best ways to reach high school seniors. At the end of FY 2021, the College Goal Arizona Facebook page had 1,332 followers and received 1,482 “likes.” In addition, a Twitter page was created which has 385 followers at the end of FY 2021.

### **2.1.B2. College Goal FAFSA (CG FAFSA) Community Workshops**

Each year, in-person FAFSA completion workshops are offered at various locations around the state in partnership with postsecondary institutions and the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (AASFAA). College Goal FAFSA workshops are supported by volunteer financial aid professionals and community members from Arizona’s colleges, universities, high schools, non-profit organizations, and members of the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN). Because of the global pandemic and high school’s transitioning to online instruction our community partners were unable to host the traditional in-person workshops. During this time, our community partners hosted virtual FAFSA workshops and offered one-on-one virtual FAFSA assistance to students and families. Additionally, our community partners hosted FAFSA Drive-In’s in various locations throughout the state to assist students and families with the FAFSA while remaining in compliance with COVID-19 protocols.

### **2.1.B3. College Goal FAFSA (CG FAFSA) High School Workshops**

Because of the global pandemic and high school’s transitioning to online instruction, the ACPE created the following website <https://collegegoal.az.gov/resources> that served as a centralized location to access the links and sites to colleges and universities throughout Arizona offering free FAFSA assistance to students and families. High schools also shifted to virtual workshops hosting online FAFSA workshops for students and families to participate. The ACPE provided several FAFSA training webinars to educators and college access professionals to assist with preparing virtual workshop volunteers. A total of 187 participants registered and participated in these trainings.

#### **2.1.B4. FAFSA Finish Line Project**

The ACPE was identified as the entity to lead the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Initiative in Arizona, inclusive of FAFSA Finish Line reports. Through this Federal initiative the U.S. Department of Education permits the ACPE to disclose limited information about individual students' FAFSA application status to authorized high school and district personnel, empowering high school personnel to provide help for a student to complete their FAFSA.

The ACPE is the State repository for all FAFSA's filed by Arizona residents. Through a data sharing agreement between the ACPE and the school or district, weekly updated reports describing the status of a high school senior's FAFSA application can be accessed by staff prepared to assist the student in completing the application.

Some states are increasing access to Pell grants for their students through the FAFSA Completion Initiative. The same is possible for Arizona. This would be a major contribution to the State's economy, further support the Governor's investment in education, and provide more educated citizens to bolster the available workforce.

By the end of FY 2021, 262 data sharing agreements had been completed. The data enabled staff to target their limited time and resources in assisting seniors complete a FAFSA. The ACPE and high schools partnering in the FAFSA Completion Initiative learned two important lessons: 1) that training of counselors/staff in reading and acting upon status reports is critical to success, and 2) that students should submit a FAFSA as early in their senior year as possible. The ACPE currently is working with more than 206 high schools, 47 districts, and 9 designated entities for this next round of FAFSA applications.

#### **2.1.B5. Arizona FAFSA Challenge**

The Arizona FAFSA Challenge is a statewide initiative designed to increase the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates among Arizona high school seniors. The goal is to develop a statewide college-going initiative that will result in an educated workforce to serve a growing Arizona economy. The current goal for the 2021-2022 school year is to achieve a 52% FAFSA completion rate. In order to contribute to the state goal, high schools are encouraged to increase their senior cohort FAFSA completion rate by 5% over the prior year. The State intends to gradually increase the goal to a 78% FAFSA completion rate by year 2030 in order to support the target of 60% of Arizonans in the workforce holding a certificate or degree.

In the 2020-2021 school year, the Arizona FAFSA Challenge set a 52% FAFSA completion goal for the state. Arizona ended up with a 43% FAFSA completion rate, which resulted in a 3% decrease from the previous year (2019-2020). This decrease was a national trend in FAFSA completion due to the negative impact that COVID-19 had on students adjusting to a virtual learning environment. For many students the virtual platform created barriers in their education and created a shift in students' postsecondary plans causing a national decline in FAFSA completion and college-going rates. Even with



these declining numbers, 105 Arizona high schools increased their FAFSA completion rate compared to the previous year by 5% or more. The Arizona FAFSA Challenge also awarded 9 high schools throughout Arizona for leading the state in FAFSA completion and an additional 20 high schools for their work in promoting FAFSA completion among their high school seniors.

The Arizona FAFSA Challenge and its FAFSA Coalition were awarded a FAFSA completion grant by the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) to increase FAFSA completion for the class of 2020 and 2021. The group created a statewide website AZFAFSA.org that allows students and families to schedule a virtual appointment with a FAFSA expert to assist them one-on-one with the application. From April 2021 – July 2021, over 800 students scheduled an appointment. In addition, this resource increased the state's FAFSA completion rate by 3% by the end of August 2021.

### **2.1.B6. GEAR UP: Five E's of Equity Project**

The ACPE participated in the Northern Arizona University, GEAR UP grant. As a GEAR UP partner, the ACPE began working with three Arizona high schools (Sierra Linda High School, Cholla High School, and Dysart High School) to provide and develop a strengthened financial aid knowledge base through carefully selected materials and training to educate their counselors, teachers, staff, and administrators. The ACPE staff supported these schools in planning FAFSA events that were timely, hands-on, and family friendly. In addition, high school students and their families learned about the FAFSA and multiple resources available to pay for postsecondary expenses. Year one of the grant ended August, 2020. Unfortunately due the ACPE's financial challenges the ACPE was not able to continue to be a GEAR UP partner in the next cycle of the grant.

## **2.2 Provide Current and Relevant Web- and Print-Based Information on College-Going and Financial Assistance for Families and Students**

### **2.2A The Arizona College and Career Guide (ACCG)**

The *Arizona College & Career Guide* (ACCG) lists all Arizona public and private postsecondary institutions including proprietary, vocational, and career schools. This document is a one-stop source for information on Arizona postsecondary institutions' accreditations, course offerings, length of study, costs to attend, financial aid programs available, and the institution's website. This publication is widely used by high school counselors, Workforce Connections personnel, DES, college access programs, and the information seeking public. The ACPE has compiled and disseminated this publication since 1975 in print and online.

In previous years, emphasis had been put on marketing and distributing the ACCG to Title I high schools. In addition to the Title I high schools, GEAR UP, Workforce Connections, Vocational Rehabilitation offices, Tribal Vocational/Education offices, and

Correctional Institutions also received the *Arizona College and Career Guide* free of charge to use with their students and clients.

Now, in keeping with today's communication trends, the *Arizona College and Career Guide* is only available as a digital publication and is no longer being offered as a printed hard copy. The online version can be found on the ACPE's website, [www.highered.az.gov](http://www.highered.az.gov), and had a total of 424 unique visits for FY 2021.

## **2.2B Highered.az.gov: Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education**

This website serves as a resource for links to information about educational agencies and institutions, financial aid, college savings programs, and a myriad of local and national resources for parents, students, and the public seeking sources of information regarding higher education. It is the portal through which the public can easily access the information in the ACCG, AMEPAC reports, Arizona grants, and College and Career Goal Arizona programs. Information regarding the ACPE and the AMEPAC public meetings are also located on this site. The website received 73,708 unique visits during FY 2021.

## **2.2C AZgrants.az.gov: One Secure Portal to Access Arizona Student Grants, Scholarships, Forgivable Loans, and Financial Aid Resources**

The AZGrants website is located at [www.AZgrants.az.gov](http://www.AZgrants.az.gov). This website is an easy to use, single secure portal, for students to access information. Since 2006, there have been 8 different grants and their awards supported by this portal. During FY 2021, the website received 64,882 unique visits.

The portal fulfills several critical needs:

1. accepts and stores ISIR data (approximately 550,000 received in 2020-2021 cycle);
2. provides a user-friendly application for grants, scholarships, and forgivable loans administered by the ACPE;
3. ensures security compliance with FERPA and Title IV regulations;
4. provides a communication mechanism and data interface with financial aid staff and academic personnel at more than 100 postsecondary institutions;
5. performs back office tasks such as awarding, disbursing of funds and monitoring students in repayment;
6. provides a secure portal to receive and disseminate reports;
7. provides real time data regarding student demographics, performance, success, and behavioral barriers to degree completion.

A recent and important function added to the [www.AZGrants.az.gov](http://www.AZGrants.az.gov) website has been the use of the secure portal to compile and disseminate FAFSA Finish Line reports to high schools. More information can be found in Section 1.8 and 2.1.B4 regarding the FAFSA Finish Line Project which is now part of College and Career Goal Arizona.

## **2.2D Pay4CollegeArizona**

Pay4CollegeArizona is located under the umbrella site, [www.collegegoal.az.gov](http://www.collegegoal.az.gov). Pay4CollegeArizona provides accurate and timely resources on how to financially prepare for college using current and relevant information on topics such as scholarships, using credit wisely, how to prevent identity theft, and much more. During FY 2021, this site received 4,958 unique visits.

## **2.2E College Goal FAFSA**

College Goal FAFSA is located under the umbrella site <https://collegegoal.az.gov>. College Goal FAFSA, provides accurate and timely information related to completing the FAFSA, as well as financial literacy information. This portal provides handouts, marketing materials, and FAFSA training webinars for College Goal FAFSA site coordinators hosting in-person workshops. Also, students and their families, who could not attend an in-person workshop, can find instructions on how to complete the FAFSA in addition to other financial literacy handouts, including steps to take after completing the FAFSA. During FY 2021, this site received 2,506 unique visits.

## **2.2F AZ529.gov: Help for Families Saving for College**

The Arizona Family College Savings Program website, [www.az529.gov](http://www.az529.gov), provided parents, grandparents and families with information regarding college savings plans established by IRS Code Section 529, which included information specific to the Arizona Family College Savings Program. This website provided help for middle class families as they prepare to bear the costs of college for themselves and/or their children. Here, parents and other family members can learn about tax-advantaged ways to save for a college education. The website received 17,580 unique visits between July 2020 and September 30, 2020. This website transitioned to the Office of the State Treasurer October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

## **2.2G FAFSAChallenge.az.gov**

The Arizona FAFSA Challenge enhanced its statewide FAFSA Completion dashboard by adding in additional graphs and data. The enhancements included the following: FAFSA completion metrics for all 15 Arizona counties, tracking the number of FAFSA's completed, submitted, the number needed to reach our state goal, additional metrics, and weekly FAFSA completion rate data that allows individual high schools to track their prior and current year FAFSA data and progress. During FY 2021, the FAFSA Challenge website received 22,769 unique visits.

## **2.2H Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center: Research and Policy Analysis Reports**

The Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC) website, <https://highered.az.gov/amepac>, currently showcases the policy analysis studies and current research reports commissioned by AMEPAC and the ACPE. These studies and reports can be downloaded from this site. AMEPAC research is discussed under Goal 3. During FY 2021, this site received 3,289 unique visits.

### **Goal 3: Provide a forum where all sectors of postsecondary education dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest**

The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE) provides a unique statewide forum where senior level representatives from universities, community colleges, independent colleges, and private training and career colleges assemble to identify mutual opportunities and problems in postsecondary education. In addition to the postsecondary membership, two superintendents of school districts, and a CEO of a charter school provide insight about transition into, preparation for, and awareness of postsecondary education opportunities from the K-12 perspective.

Issues arise from discussion among Commissioners, policy makers, and business leaders at the ACPE meetings and events that warrant further investigation and policy analysis. Issues that have been identified as important include the achievement gap for minority populations, low-income, and first generation individuals in accessing and succeeding in postsecondary education; low high school completion rates; barriers to student advancement among the segments of Arizona's higher education system toward a baccalaureate degree; and reduction or elimination of the financial barriers experienced by students and their families to postsecondary education.

Two strategies have been identified to meet Goal 3. The first is to raise awareness and develop a knowledge base for solutions through policy analysis and commissioned research studies. The second strategy is to establish, lead, or participate in collaborative action groups or task forces, informed by research, to plan strategies to develop opportunities or solve problems identified by the ACPE.

### **3.1 Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center**

The mission of the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC) is to stimulate through studies, statewide discussion, and debate improvement of Arizona minority students' early awareness, access and achievement throughout all sectors of education. AMEPAC is funded through donations from postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations committed to its mission. Since 1996, AMEPAC has addressed numerous issues affecting minority access to and achievement in higher education. Results of this policy analysis are published (print and web-based) research papers and the initiation of forums or task forces to consider pressing issues related to the mission. Research can be viewed at [www.highered.az.gov/amepac](http://www.highered.az.gov/amepac).

Since 2003 AMEPAC has developed the Arizona Minority Student Progress report. The report provides an overview of how Arizona students fare on a variety of academic indicators from P-12 through postsecondary education. The report also details trends in demographics and education which shape the context for the state of Arizona. The 2018 report can be found at <https://highered.az.gov/amepac-research-studies-and-reports> along with the 2019 Developmental Education in Arizona report.

For the next version of the report, AMEPAC decided to try something new and develop a series of online dashboards to present key data points. These dashboards would allow users to interact with the data, select data points relevant to them, and allow for greater access. A model dashboard has been developed by the research subcommittee. The goal is to develop and share additional dashboards.

### **3.2 Collaboration and Partnerships which Address Common Opportunities and Problems Across Postsecondary Education**

Collaboration and partnerships are a critical component of the work of the ACPE. Shared efforts allow the important agenda of postsecondary education access and success to move forward without duplication and with efficiency. At times the ACPE itself identifies issues or barriers for students that warrant investigation. For example, in April of 2014, the lack of student financial aid became such a topic that the ACPE formed a Student Financial Aid Task Force calling together key stakeholders. The group met and identified a mission of raising awareness of and support for solutions to financial barriers to postsecondary education access and attainment for low-income students.

All initiatives led by ACPE staff and Commissioners as described in Goals 2 and 3 rely on partnerships and collaboration both for funding and execution. These initiatives include the Arizona College Application Campaign, the College Goal FAFSA Completion Initiative, the Arizona FAFSA Challenge, the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center, the Developing Arizona's Human Capital Conference, and Pathways to Postsecondary Education Awards.

Each of these programs, resources, and college awareness publications are offered at no expense to the State, but rather are sponsored through grants, collaboration, or sales. For example, College Goal FAFSA benefits from in-kind assistance received from partners such as the public universities, community colleges, high schools, guidance counselors, Arizona Associate of Student Financial Aid Administrators, and Work Force Connections. These partnerships provided financial aid professionals and community members from Arizona's colleges, universities, high schools, non-profit organizations, and members of the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN) to help families complete the FAFSA.

In 2013, the ACPE accepted the leadership role for the Arizona College Application Campaign (AzCAC). In 2014, the ACPE staff took on the FAFSA Data Sharing Project. The ACPE also restructured College Goal Sunday into the College Goal FAFSA Completion Initiative with the intention of developing a successful collaboration between

the community, Arizona high schools, high school seniors and their families, and postsecondary education institutions across all sectors.

The goal of this collaboration is to increase the number of Arizona seniors who apply for, enroll, and succeed in their postsecondary education goals. Expansion of the College Goal FAFSA Community workshops rely on partnerships with the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and Arizona postsecondary institutions. These partnerships aid individuals of all ages to complete the FAFSA at locations across the state.

The Arizona FAFSA Challenge collaborated with the Arizona FAFSA Coalition to work on a FAFSA completion grant awarded by the National College Attainment Network. The purpose of the grant was to increase Arizona's FAFSA completion rate and expand FAFSA assistance to students statewide. The Arizona FAFSA Challenge Project Director worked with community and FAFSA Coalition partners to create the AZFAFSA.org website and recruit FAFSA experts to assist with virtual one-on-one FAFSA appointments. This collaborative effort and generous grant provided a 3% increase to the state's FAFSA completion rate. Over 800 students and families were assisted with the help and efforts of this statewide collaboration. Together, these collaborations hold the power to grow Arizona's supportive college-going communities.

### **Progress of ACPE 2017 Performance and Sunset Review**

The Office of the Auditor General initiated a performance audit and sunset review of the ACPE in October 2016. This audit was conducted as part of the sunset review process prescribed in Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §41-2951 et seq. and resulted in a report published in December of 2017.

In April 2021, the 36 month follow-up of the December report was completed. The implementation status of the 28 audit recommendations (including sub-parts of the recommendations) presented in the performance audit were as follows:

- 10 have been implemented;
- 1 has been implemented in a different manner;
- 4 are in the process of being implemented,
- 11 no longer applicable,
- 1 not yet applicable, and
- 1 has not been implemented.

This concludes the Auditor General's follow-up work on these recommendations unless otherwise directed by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

### **Conclusion**

This report reflects the FY 2021 outcomes of the strategic plan initiated by the ACPE Commissioners. It also outlines the limitations posed due to the budget reductions and financial challenges for achieving the goals and statutory responsibilities.

The goals identified in the strategic plan are (1) maximizing available student financial assistance for students and families; (2) providing support from knowledgeable professionals and accurate and timely information to help students and families enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education, and (3) providing a forum for all sectors of postsecondary education to dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest for the benefit of Arizonans.

The goal of maximizing available student financial resources has been severely impacted due to the ACPE reduction in financial aid dollars. FY 2010 student financial assistance dollars were \$6.8M, since then student financial aid has been reduced by \$4.3 million. The table below represents the student aid disbursed by the ACPE in FY 2014 through FY 2021.

### Historical Review of ACPE Student Aid Programs

Fiscal Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Aid Disbursed	\$ 3,521,142	\$ 2,484,619	\$ 2,483,125	\$ 2,488,151	\$ 2,612,217	\$ 2,731,125	\$ 2,536,864	\$ 2,569,765
% Decrease compared to FY 2008	-53%	-67%	-67%	-67%	-65%	-64%	-66%	-66%

The loss of grant dollars affects the lives of nearly 20,000 students annually who one decade before would have applied to the ACPE for grants/scholarships and received funding. Further evidence of the need for these funds is demonstrated by the ACPE closing out FY 2010 with a waiting list of an additional 8,799 students who applied for funds and received none.

Additionally, FY 2021 saw the transfer of the Arizona Family College Savings (529) from the ACPE to the Office of the State Treasure per Senate Bill 1528 in the Fifty-fourth Legislature Second Regular Session. This transfer added an additional challenge to the ACPE by representing a loss of administrative fees from the program.

Under Goal 2, the ACPE implements strategies to help students and their families enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education. By coordinating the College Goal FAFSA Completion Initiative, leading the Arizona College Application Campaign, and introducing to Arizona the value of the FAFSA Finish Line reports, the ACPE seeks to provide knowledgeable adult professionals at critical transition points to guide vulnerable prospective students through the transition into postsecondary education. In addition, the Arizona FAFSA Challenge is designed to increase the number of completed FAFSAs statewide and links this to an educated workforce. Likewise, the ACPE provides relevant and timely print and web-based information free of charge to Arizona families. Documents are supplied to schools, communities, and college access programs annually and 195,906 unique visits were made to ACPE informational websites in FY 2021. No general funds are used to support these programs; funds come from fees, grants, donations and sponsorships.

Finally, the forum provided by the ACPE promotes dialogue and identification of common issues among all sectors of higher education. The ACPE seeks venues to spawn dialogue, partnerships, and solutions to issues of mutual interest across sectors of postsecondary education. These goals are supported through policy analysis and research, collaborative action led by ACPE staff, and collaborative participation in college access initiatives which are offered by foundations, government, businesses, or non-profit entities with similar goals.

The ACPE identified a mission of *expanding access and increasing success in postsecondary education for Arizonans*. It is with focus and energy that the ACPE and staff endeavored to fulfill this mission and achieve these goals which assisted the state and Governor Ducey to move forward with priorities of equal access to education, growing the economy, elimination of the low-income and minority student achievement gap, and opportunity for all.

This final annual report from the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education describes the details of the challenges and opportunities within the ACPE's statutory authority and the ACPE's strategic plan. With the transition of the ACPE to the Arizona Board of Regents, the Commissioners and staff know the future of the ACPE's programs are in good hands and are honored to have provided assistance to students and families over the years.