

POLICY POINTS

➤ POLICY POINTS BRINGS RELEVANT DATA TO TIMELY PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES IN ARIZONA

Is Arizona College Ready?

This report was commissioned by the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF) and conducted by David R. Garcia, Associate Professor, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University and graduate students Lee McIlroy, Haiying Dong and Emily Ackman from the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College.

Changing Expectations for High Schools

The topic of college readiness is central to the national conversation about the changing expectations for American high schools and measuring the effort will become a high-profile measure to gauge the academic performance of our public schools. This issue of *Policy Points* highlights a real-world indicator of how well Maricopa County high schools are preparing their graduates for postsecondary success.

The report provides postsecondary enrollment results for 67% of Maricopa County High School graduates for the Class of 2009 who enrolled in postsecondary institutions within and outside of Arizona. Individual high school level results for both district and charter schools are available online at ArizonaIndicators.org.

Overall Results

Historically, high schools have too often been perceived as an end-point rather than as a transition in the education pipeline. However, a number of national and state initiatives are challenging this perception. Federal initiatives such as Race to the Top and the Common Core Standards reflect the emerging prominence of college readiness as a national goal.

In Arizona, there is tremendous interest in how well our public high schools prepare students for college. In fact, the state has invested considerable energy to better align the education pipeline by strengthening the connection between high school and college. For example, Arizona lawmakers recently passed legislation allowing motivated high school students to move through high school coursework when ready rather than attend classes in the traditional semester format.

The momentum is building locally as well, with a number of efforts currently under way such as the introduction of district-wide ACT testing, niche high schools, and philanthropic support to improve coordination among schools, municipalities and universities to increase college entrance and graduation rates.

Unfortunately, despite ongoing and focused efforts to move the needle when it comes to college readiness in Arizona high schools, there has been little to no measurable improvement to date. This is especially disturbing, given that Arizona's K-12, community college and university funding has been cut in recent years and next fiscal year, providing for even more obstacles to improve Arizona's college-readiness rate.

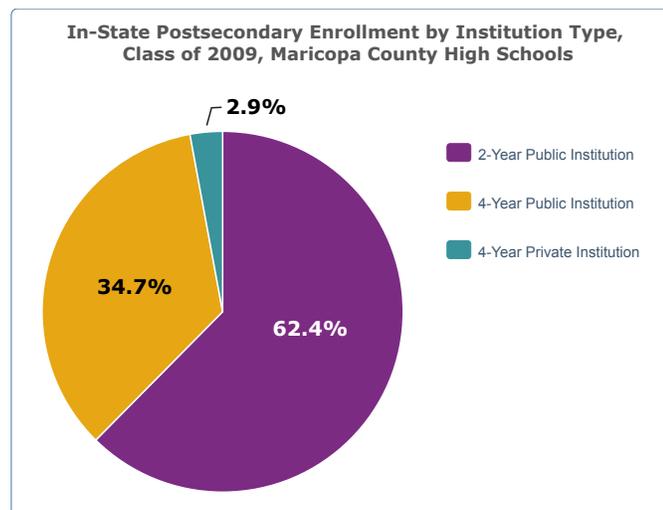


Figure 1: *In-State Postsecondary Enrollment by Institution Type, Class of 2009, Maricopa County High Schools.* Source: National Student Clearinghouse.



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Arizona Indicators is an online information resource and analysis tool that centralizes data about the state and its communities. Arizona Indicators presents interactive visualizations, clear data descriptions, and public opinion data in a broad range of content areas.

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Overall, 61% of the 2009 graduating class in Maricopa County enrolled in a postsecondary institution within Arizona in the fall 2009 semester or spring 2010 semester following high school graduation, with well over half of these students (62%) enrolling in a 2-year public institution and 35% attending one of Arizona's three state universities (see Figure 1).

How Well Are Maricopa County High Schools Preparing Graduates for College?

Overall, readiness rates have remained relatively constant over the past five years. For example, between 2005 and 2009, school-level readiness rates in English remain at or near 75% and approximately 50% of Maricopa County high school graduates were college ready in Mathematics. The exception is in 2008, when readiness rates in both subjects declined, due largely to a sharp increase in the number of students enrolling in non-college level classes in Maricopa County community colleges (see Figure 2).

How Is College Readiness Defined?

The report defines college readiness as the percentage of high school graduates, by school, who enter college-level English and Mathematics courses as freshman in an Arizona public university or in a Maricopa County Community College for degree-granting credit.

Postsecondary institutions categorize college level English courses as Freshman English or above. Courses designated as Pre-Freshman English and Other Lower Division English were not designated as college-level. College-level Mathematics courses include College Algebra or above, with courses designated as Pre-Intermediate Algebra, Intermediate Algebra and those designated as Other Lower Division Mathematics not considered as college-level.

The Future of College Readiness in Arizona

The emphasis on college readiness as a way to promote academic excellence will remain a focal point of education policy discussions well into the future and the demand for college readiness results in Arizona will remain equally strong. Today's efforts sometimes won't be felt for years, as high school students move through the new and improved pipeline. As Arizona moves toward the expectation that all students are prepared for college and career, the college readiness results will be a critical, real-world indicator to gauge student progress. Due to logistical constraints, however, this insightful research has been limited only to Maricopa County high schools. College readiness is a statewide issue and coordinated efforts are under way to make the results available for the benefit of all school districts and communities statewide. But so far, we are limited to data for the state's most populated county only.

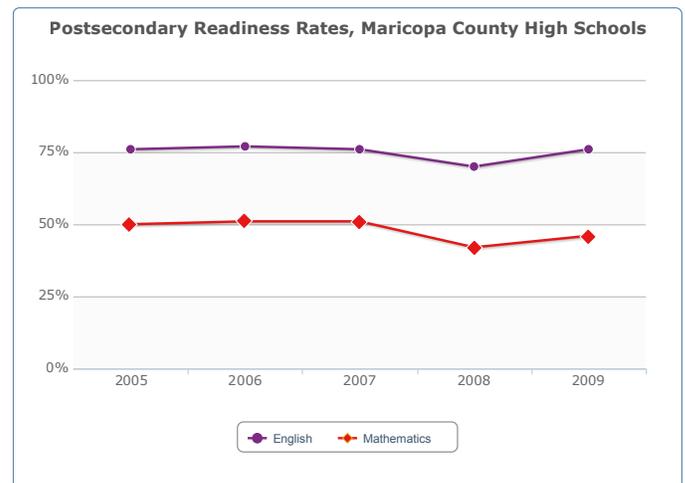


Figure 2: Postsecondary Readiness Rates, Maricopa County High Schools, Arizona Postsecondary Institutions only, Classes 2005-2009. Sources: ASU original research.

Policy Points

Progress on this important issue can be accelerated by:

- **Measuring What Matters** - The college readiness indicator captures the academic outcomes of high school graduates. It reflects the real-world application of knowledge much more directly than standardized tests because it provides evidence of how well students' have transferred their learning to college-level coursework.
- **Improving Arizona's Current Accountability System** - The college readiness indicator should be considered as an additional indicator in the state's school accountability system. It offers communities meaningful information about their local high schools and invites conversations based on real-world student outcomes that can drive educational change.
- **Using Results to Inform Arizona's Ongoing P-20 Efforts** - Arizona's current efforts to strengthen the connection between K-12 and Postsecondary education are not only important, they are critical if we intend to prepare our students for success beyond high school. The college readiness indicator should be central to Arizona's P-20 efforts so that future education policies are guided by the actual academic outcomes of high school graduates.

What Percentage of Students Are Included in the College Readiness Report?

The College Readiness report provides school-level results on the percentage of high school graduates from Maricopa County district and charter high schools that are college ready upon entering either the Maricopa County Community College system or one of Arizona’s three public universities the year following high school.

The College Readiness report has been expanded to capture Maricopa County high school graduates that enrolled in a postsecondary institution outside of Arizona. For the Class of 2009, 61% of high school graduates attended a postsecondary institution in Arizona and 6% attended out of state (see Figure 3).

Year	Percentage of Graduates	Number of High Schools
2005	57	106
2006	56	115
2007	59	119
2008	59	153
2009	67*	153

* Includes 6% of the graduating class that attended a postsecondary institution out of state.

Figure 3: Percentage of high school graduates entering postsecondary education in Arizona and out of state, and the number of Maricopa County high schools in analyses, Classes 2005–2009.

What is the Out-of-State Postsecondary Enrollment?

Out-of-state enrollment results are being released for the first time to provide the most comprehensive view of postsecondary enrollment to date. Approximately 6% of the Maricopa County High School graduates in the Class of 2009 enrolled in a postsecondary institution outside of Arizona with nearly three-quarters of students (71%) enrolling in a 4-year institution (see Figure 4).

The largest proportion of students from the Class of 2009 enrolled in institutions in California (20%), Utah (11%), Texas (7%), and Colorado (5%). One noteworthy finding overall is the percentage of students (56%) enrolling in full-time 4-year institutions classified with “selective” or “more selective” in admissions policies. More research is needed to assess the college readiness of students enrolled outside of Arizona.

Information about institutions outside of Arizona were derived using data from the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, which has provided a variety of useful and well-respected data about higher education institutions in the United States for nearly 40 years.

Carnegie bases its selectivity classifications in part, on first-year students’ test scores, which place “selective” institutions in roughly the middle two-thirds of baccalaureate institutions and “more selective” institutions in the top 20% of baccalaureate institutions, which generally include more academically competitive colleges and universities. These are bachelor’s degree granting institutions with at least 60% of their respective undergraduate student population enrolled full-time. Such results are important for local educators and communities to gauge the progress of their graduates after high school.

Underlying data for the college readiness calculations were provided by the Arizona Board of Regents and the Maricopa County Community College District office in accordance with state statute that stipulates reporting of academic performance of high school graduates (§A.R.S. 15-1822).

The number of graduates per high school was obtained from the Arizona Department of Education Four-year Graduation Rate reports. Out-of-state postsecondary enrollment data was obtained from the Arizona Department of Education and the National Student Clearinghouse.

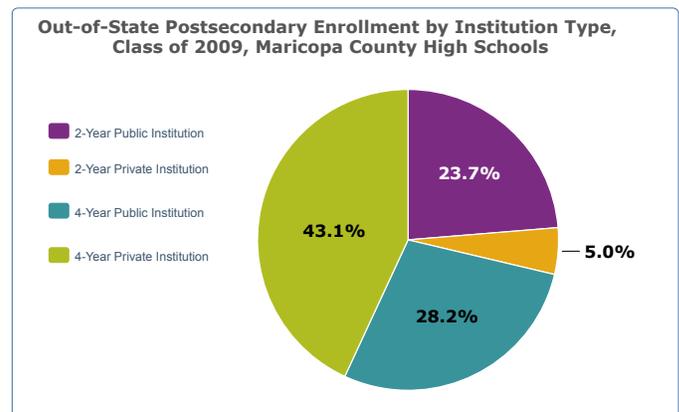


Figure 4: Out-of-State Postsecondary Enrollment by Institution Type, Class of 2009, Maricopa County High Schools. Sources: National Student Clearinghouse.