

OUR HISTORY:

Five years ago, leaders from over 60 local organizations came together to form Arizona's first collective impact initiative dedicated to addressing the unique needs of children and youth living in Phoenix's urban core. With Valley of the Sun United Way as the backbone organization, Thriving Together launched in 2015 to build a sustainable cradle-to-career infrastructure for measurable and meaningful improvement in key areas ranging from early childhood to post-secondary outcomes. Under the stewardship of its initial leadership council comprised of 36 community and business leaders, Thriving Together established community-based teams to address urgent needs for students in early reading, middle school math, college readiness, and college enrollment. Following a collective impact framework adopted by a national initiative of over 70 communities, Thriving Together brought expertise in results-based facilitation, research, and data analytics to collaboratively develop, examine, and scale promising programs, practices, and strategies.

OUR WORK:

From the start, Thriving Together recognized that many organizations were already doing great work to improve the lives of children and youth across the valley. However, most of this work happened in isolation without close coordination and collaboration. Thriving Together filled this gap by providing the structure, space, and resources to regularly convene partners who had common goals. As such, our partners were able to follow a clear process for developing and evaluating community-based solutions through project charters, data plans, and impact reports that detailed the outcomes of each project, lessons learned, and next steps.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Over the past five years, Thriving Together has been able to provide community partners with the logistic, financial, and analytic support to launch over 30 Rapid Cycle Projects (RCPs) and evaluate their impact on over 5,000 students across 20 schools and college campuses. Through Valley of the Sun United Way, Thriving Together was able to build capacity in local organizations through professional development in continuous improvement, results-based facilitation, and collective impact. Through generous support from APS, Thriving Together was able to offer local schools and organizations nearly a dozen continuous improvement experts to further apply newly gained knowledge and skills. In partnership with ASU, Thriving Together modeled how to use data to develop community-based solutions and created the first educational data center for the Phoenix urban core. As a convener, Thriving Together further helped to create a council of superintendents to further improve collaboration and coordination among those mostly closely involved in the success of our students preK-12.



30+
Rapid Cycle
Projects



20+
Schools &
Campuses



5,000+
Children &
Youth

Thriving Together’s unprecedented efforts were fueled by our partners and their excitement to co-create solutions in places where the actual lived experiences were taking place including classrooms, family homes, community spaces, and college campuses. Our projects allowed partners to better understand early habits of family reading, quality after-school programs, informed choices for high school selection in middle school, rigorous middle school math coursework, effective college entrance exam preparation, in-depth college-going culture, efficient support for financial aid, and coordinated college enrollment events that can lead to higher persistence—to name just a few. Together with our partners, we were able to take each project and engage in critical dialogues that helped push each success and failure closer to systemic change. Without Valley of the Sun United as the backbone, Thriving Together would not have been able to create the space for these community solutions to be created, nurtured, and grown.



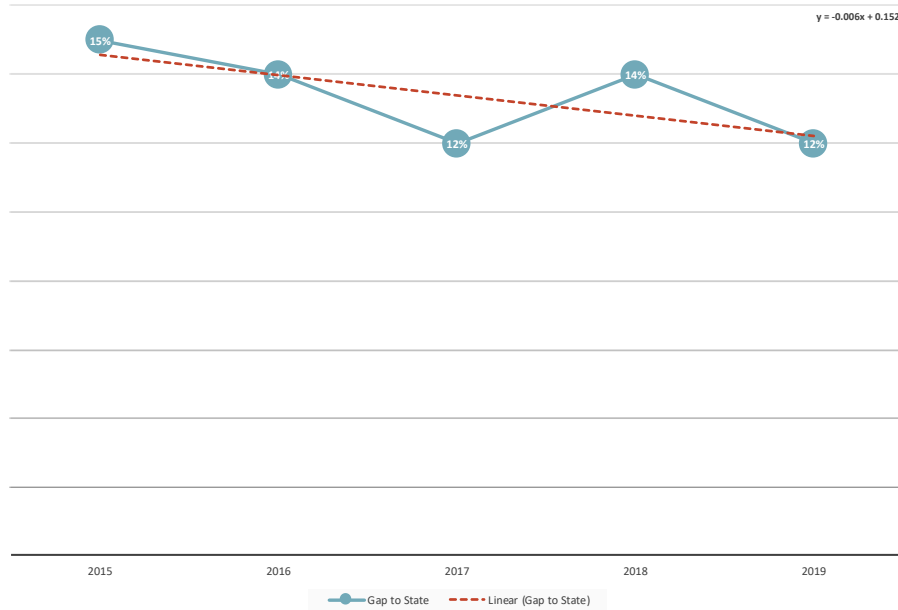
In addition, Thriving Together became a trailblazer for offering the community accessible education data for the Phoenix urban core, convening superintendents on a regular basis, and forming collaboration regions between high schools and their respective middle school partners. The work of Thriving Together was also recognized at the national level by StriveTogether, which confirmed its progression along StriveTogether’s theory of change (<https://www.strivetgether.org/>) among nearly 70 partnerships across the nation.



OUR MILESTONE PROGRESS:

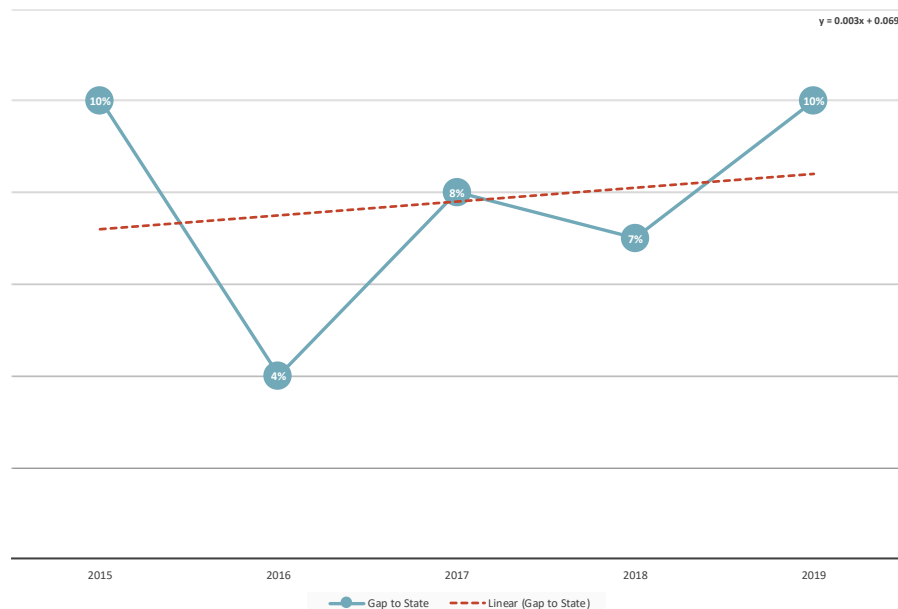
In the first year, the leadership council set the ambitious goal to eliminate the reading proficiency gap between the Phoenix urban core and the state by 2028. To this end, a mathematical model was developed based on historical performance data. However, the introduction of the AzMERIT in 2015 changed the test and its overall difficulty. While the reading proficiency gap to the state initially widened, Thriving Together and its partners remained committed to improving reading proficiency in the early grades. Five years later, results show school districts within the Thriving Together footprint have been able to reduce the gap with a clear downward trend. While this progress is laudable, efforts must be intensified to achieve gap closure by 2028.

THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY GAP TO STATE

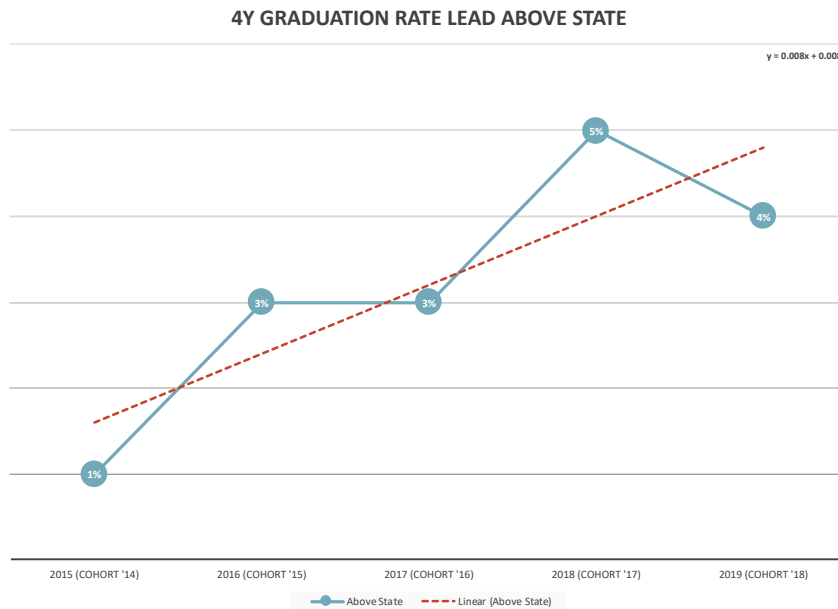


Similar efforts were underway in the area of eight grade math, which has experienced even greater disparity. Unfortunately, the districts' efforts were not reflected in the data that showed a slightly widening gap over time. As such, we must redouble our efforts to see a reversal of this trend. To this end, we have supported partners such as the Cartwright school district in better understanding the impact of introducing rigorous Algebra coursework during middle school. We recognize the cumulative nature of the gap and applaud all the hard work our partner districts have committed to providing high quality middle school math.

EIGHT GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY GAP TO STATE

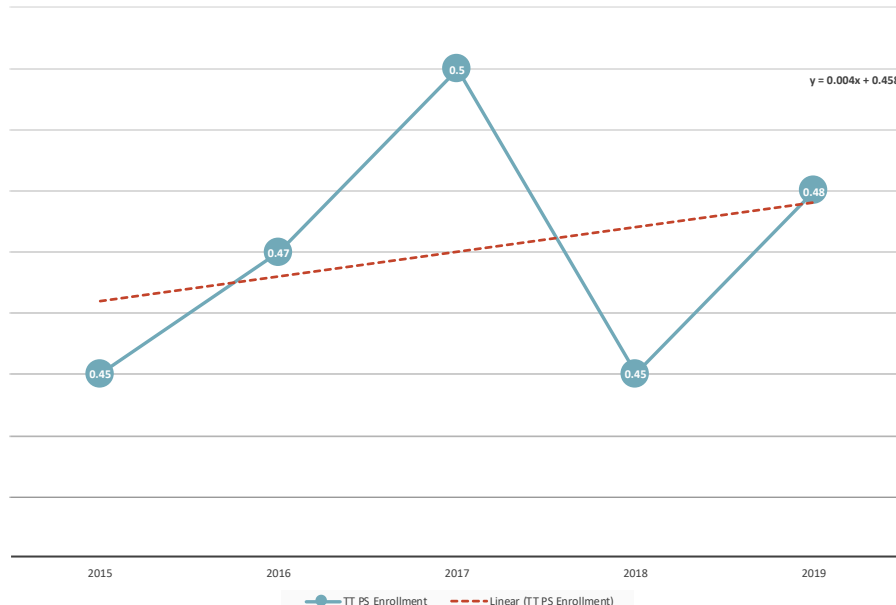


The leadership council further established a goal for high school graduation. With historical four-year graduation rates hovering around the state average, an ambitious goal of exceeding the state average by 4 percentage points was set for 2028. Due to the extraordinary efforts of our partners at the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU), we were able to meet and hold that goal after only four years. Unsurprisingly, most of our RCPs and collaborative efforts occurred in the high school space with PXU. This is a significant accomplishment, which occurred under the PXU leadership of Dr. Chad Geston. We are proud of the work and are looking forward to expanding these efforts.



The final milestone area of interest to the leadership council was post-secondary enrollment. While no goal in relation to the state was established, the expressed focus was to reach and maintain an above 50% post-secondary enrollment rate by 2028. Due to the extraordinary efforts of our partners at the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) and Maricopa County Community Colleges District (MCCCD), we were able to meet that goal after only three years. Despite a setback in enrollment during the fourth year, we are back on track with a clear upward trend. Post-secondary enrollment has been a key area of our work with partners including the longstanding and successful Maricopa Enrollment Day RCP. We would like to thank our partners, especially at PXU, Be a Leader, Phoenix College, South Mountain College, and Gateway College,

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT FALL AFTER GRADUATION



OUR FUTURE:

To determine the next phase of our work as a collective impact initiative, we are looking to our partners and the community. Despite the many successes, challenges remain. Thriving Together has a legacy of not shying away from thorny issues and hard truths. In that vein, we acknowledge that (a) the cradle-to-career network requires additional CATs in the preK and career readiness space; (b) equity gaps among various subgroups persist and must be addressed; (c) leading indicators must be updated across CATs and the data center; and (d) variable attendance has underscored the need to recompose and revitalize several CATs and councils. As a collective impact initiative, our work moves at the speed of trust. Through trust, we bring different partners together under common goals. Together with our partners, we improve and advance the questions asked, the data collected, and the scale of the impact. We help connect the dots through data, expertise, and lived experience.

Please help us understand what you see is needed for the next iteration of this work. Complete our survey <https://forms.gle/TGb15zyTKicRSLqN8> or contact Thriving Together's current director Melissa Boydston (mboydston@vsuw.org) or our data & research manager Dr. Alexander Kurz (alexander.kurz@asu.edu). We are eager to hear from you.